

10 COMMON MISTAKES

NEW DOG TRAINERS
MAKE WITH THEIR
BUSINESSES



INES MCNEIL
THE MODERN DOG TRAINER BLOG

10 Common Mistakes New Dog Trainers Make

By Ines McNeil, Founder of The Modern Dog Trainer Blog & Podcast

Table of Contents

Note from the Author

- 1. They don't take the dog's full behavior history up front.**
- 2. They don't manage their time well.**
- 3. They let demanding clients get the best of them.**
- 4. They make policies reactively – not proactively.**
- 5. They don't price themselves appropriately.**
- 6. They don't sell the right services to make consistent monthly income.**
- 7. They're constantly chasing new clients instead of serving the ones they already have.**
- 8. They despise marketing.**
- 9. They invest in the wrong kind of marketing.**
- 10. They don't have processes in place to make their business run smoothly.**

What's next?

Note from the Author

If you're like me, you've spent months, if not years, learning the ins and outs of being a great dog trainer, but when it comes to the business side of things, your confidence plummets. I've put together this eBook in hopes of bringing awareness to a few mistakes I made – and see others make – when starting out.

Hopefully, you can use this eBook to stop yourself from making the same mistakes I made.

Thankfully, I've long since overcome these challenges and was able to successfully launch my dog training business not just once, but twice because of a move across the country. Now, I'm turning around and helping my peers start up successful businesses of their own so that they can get out there and help their communities.

If you find yourself looking for more information, keep an eye open on your inbox! I'll be going over how to know if you're ready to start your business and what it takes to be a successful dog trainer next.



MISTAKE #1

They don't take the dog's full behavior history up front.

Let's face it. As a dog trainer, you'll be coming across lots of different kinds of people and their personalities. Googling their names can help, but you never really know who they are until you begin working with them.

I've come across some very interesting personalities in my time as a dog trainer. There are still several clients I look back on and shake my head wondering what they were thinking.



Client intake forms can give you a false sense of security. Taken at face value, you're likely to assume that the information is correct, thorough, and truthful. Unfortunately, this can be far from reality.

New dog trainers must understand that not all clients are truthful or thorough about their dog's history. New clients may accidentally forget about a dog's single bite history several years ago or consciously leave it out because they believe it to be irrelevant to their training goals.

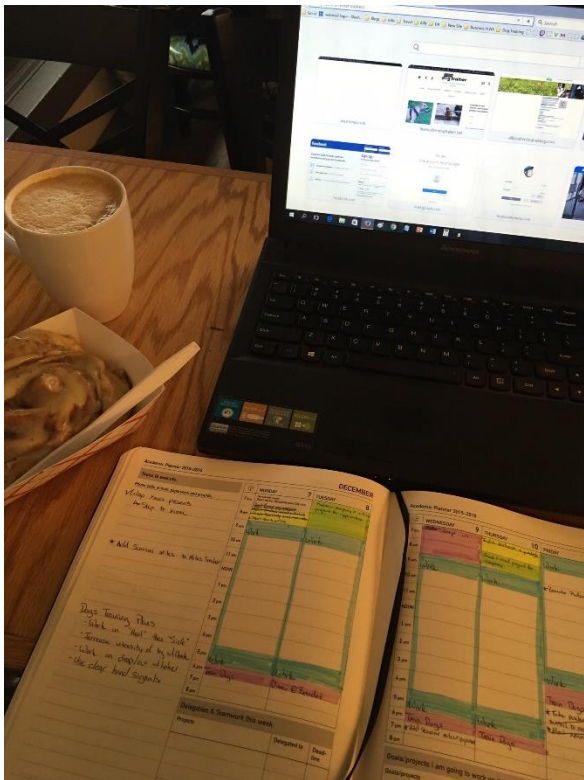
You should always follow up with questions over the phone or in person to dive deeper into the dog's history so that you are fully aware of what you're up against and what could negatively impact your results.

Additionally, if a new client says they've worked with many trainers before and no one has been able to fix their dog. Don't immediately assume that it was the other trainers that failed in one way or another, but rather take that as a red flag. Often this can be a sign that the client doesn't follow through with training plans or simply expects a magic wand to fix their issues.

MISTAKE #2

They don't manage their time well.

When you're starting out, it's so easy to get side tracked with all the different things you have to do. You have a website to make, logo to get designed, contracts to write up, taxes to worry about, and so much more. Without getting organized, you're likely to spend your time on tasks that won't make a big difference in the long run because they are more fun to do or you understand how to complete them.



Don't make the mistake of procrastinating on important tasks simply because you don't know how to complete them or you aren't sure where to start. Make a schedule. Get a (paper) planner. Break things down step by step like you would for a client. Focus on tasks that will really move the needle when it comes to getting your business up and running like building your website, reaching out to local vet clinics, purchasing insurance, and filling for an LLC.

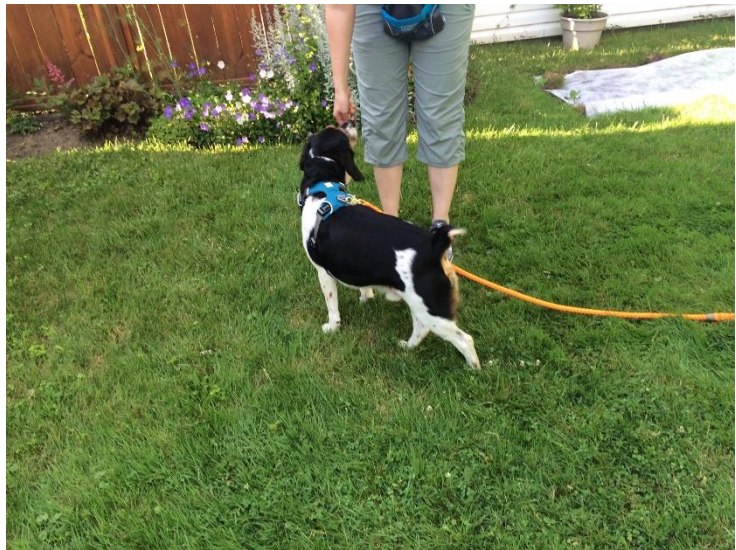
Failing to make progress on the important aspects of a business will delay your launch date and the day you can quit your day-job! Additionally, you'll want to block off "relaxation" time on your schedule - trust me, you'll need it!

MISTAKE #3

They let demanding clients get the best of them.

We all want to do what is best for our clients, but sometimes clients take advantage of our passion and emotional investment in their dogs. Some clients will have the inclination to text or call you day and night. I don't see enough dog trainers establish a communication policy for their clients.

You should lay out the rules and expectations for clients to communicate with you in-between lessons so that you can always refer to the policy if things get out of hand. Establishing early on when and how you can be contacted or when you'll return phone calls



will prevent upset clients and will protect your sanity. When you're running your own business, it's easy to let business tasks run into your personal time, but that is a slippery slope and can lead to burn out.

Clarity up front will lead to more successful relationships with your clients. You'll be in charge of how your time is spent and you will be less likely to feel overwhelmed. Clients will appreciate the guidance and professionalism.

MISTAKE #4

They make policies reactively – not proactively.

Continuing the topic of better client management. Time and again I see dog trainers venting on Facebook about challenging clients. Not that it is always the trainer's fault, but many times policies could have been in place to protect their sanity, business, and income. All too often, we react to client's behavior and create new policies because of them.



But what if you could have prevented those problems to begin with? What if you had already had a policy in place? Running a business is challenging enough. Don't let clients give you the run around. Don't just be kind to dogs, be kind to

yourself, too! Set yourself and your business up to be successful. The happier you are while running your business the better you'll be able to serve your clients and their dogs and the longer you'll be able to stay in business.

Create policies around how you'll accept payment, where/when/how lessons will happen, who should be present at lessons, rules for cancellations or reschedules before you begin taking in new clients.

MISTAKE #5

They don't price themselves appropriately.

Looking back, I can't even comprehend how cheaply I sold my services when I first started. I did myself a huge disservice. It was because of my lack of understanding my competition, the amount of time I invested into the



business outside of lessons, and general lack of confidence as a new dog trainer even though I had already been training dogs for over five years by then.

Even when you're starting out, you have to have confidence in your skills and services. You've spent months, or even years, working on your dog training skills and your clients should pay for your experience. You know more than they do and you *are* the expert in their eyes – price yourself accordingly!

Additionally, you should account for the hours of communication and travel outside of the actual lessons. That time and energy spent should be accounted for. This time is too easy to forget about but is just as valuable as the time you spend in the lessons speaking directly with clients.

MISTAKE #6

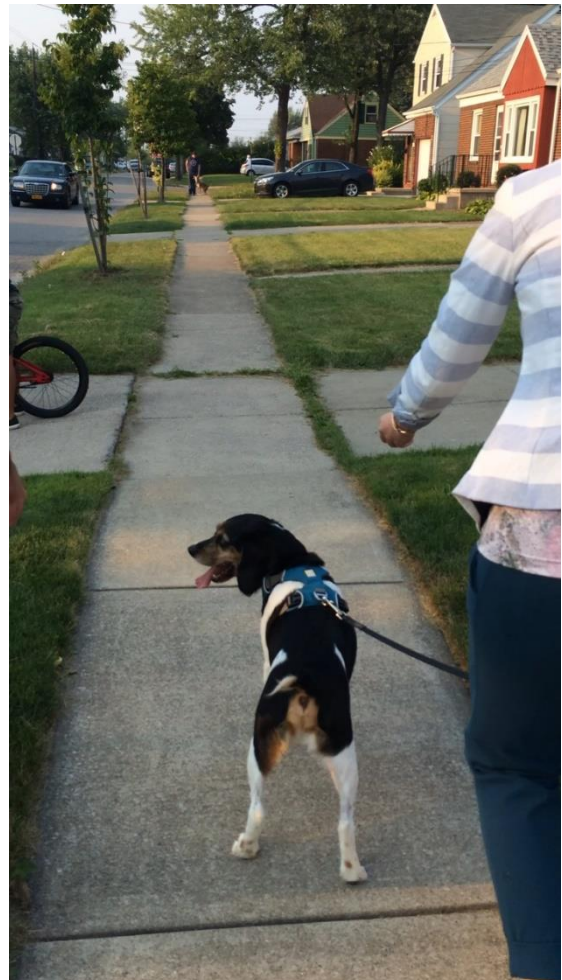
They don't sell the right services to make consistent monthly income.

Income can become seasonal as holidays and vacations affect your clients' ability and availability to train their dogs. Additionally, the worst situation dog trainers put themselves in is always having to get new clients in the door to make a living. That is the hardest sale to make!

Fortunately, there are some steps you can take to make income more continuous and steady throughout the year as a dog trainer. Get creative with the kinds of services you offer. Other than private lessons or group classes, what services could help clients meet their goals more quickly or maintain the training they've already spent lots of time and energy working on?

Some examples include:

- Day training is when the trainer comes to the house during the day to work with the dog one-on-one without the owner. Many clients are grateful to have you come in and help them with training because their lives are already so hectic.



- Apartment complexes are always looking for a way to offer competitive benefits. Consider partnering up with a local complex by teaching weekly classes for their residents only. Explain to the management that better-trained dogs and a sense of community will increase their value and create a more peaceful living environment for their residents.
- Recurring refresher classes can help clients that have trouble continuing the training long term. Offer a monthly or bi-weekly class for previous class graduates to pop in for a class with a monthly subscription.

And those are just a few examples of services that can help you gain consistent income throughout the year and support your clients on an ongoing basis – it's a win-win situation!

MISTAKE #7

They're constantly chasing new clients instead of serving the ones they already have.

This is a bad cycle that I fell into when I first started out. I would work with clients for the number of lessons they purchased and then lost touch with them. In my mind, I had taught them what they needed to learn and I was on to the next family that needed my help. The truth is that clients want to keep in touch with you whether they tell you or not.

You've taught clients how to love training their dogs so the least you can do is provide some services that can help them maintain their accomplishments. And for those that would rather handoff the training to someone else, take the lead and satisfy your clients' needs. As a service-based business, we're in this to make our client's lives easier and happier – find some creative ways you can help them and their dogs or they'll resort to other options.

The easiest way to increase your income is to find some ways you can offer ongoing support to the clients you already have. After all, it is much easier to sell services to someone who has already worked with you than to someone that's never even heard of you.

If you're worried about income being seasonal depending on holidays or puppy seasons, rethink your services to help fill in the gaps. The right service offerings will help you keep a steadier income throughout the year.

MISTAKE #8

They despise marketing.

You probably have a good reason to be cautious with how you market. We've all had bad experiences with marketing and therefore it can make us hesitant to do it ourselves. Additionally, it's not typically in a dog trainer's



nature to shamelessly self-promote their awesome-ness. We're a humble bunch and we should be because of what we do. We have to be sensitive to those the four-legged customers we serve. However, if you want to quit your day-job to run a successful dog training business one day, you have to learn how to market correctly and attract the right clients to your business.

What you want to remember when you're marketing is that there are people out there that want and need your services and it's your job to make sure they are able to find you in time. That's what good marketing is all about. You shouldn't fear or avoid it.

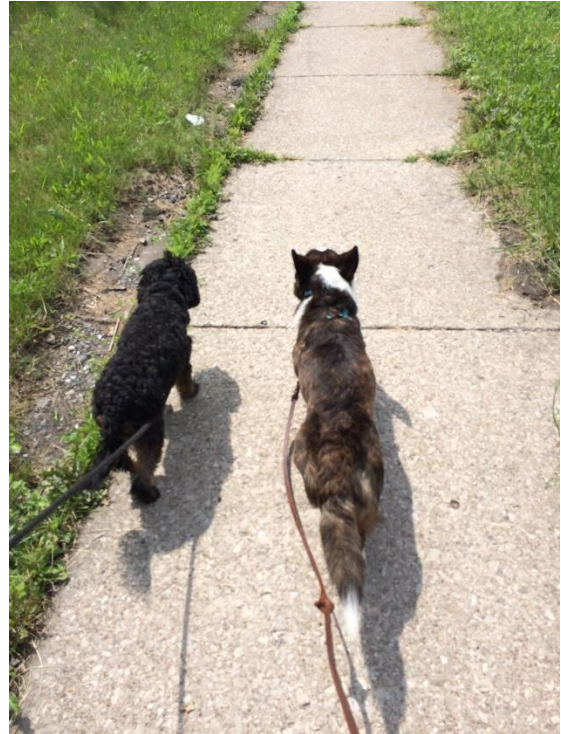
Learning how to market correctly online and offline will be one of the most important parts of starting your business and having it be successful for years to come. Learn where your ideal clients are, what they're struggling with, and educate them about what you can do to relieve some of their stress!

MISTAKE #9

They invest in the wrong kind of marketing.

When you are just starting out, it is tempting to take shortcuts to get more clients. There are endless ways to get the word out, but some can be costly with little to no return on investment if you aren't careful.

You'll be bombarded by calls from social media agencies and Yelp advertising reps, but don't succumb to the temptation to give away a bit of cash for their dreamy promises like I did initially.



There are a lot of companies out there that claim that they can get you more “likes” or “followers” for a certain cost. Some companies that approach you can seem truly legitimate and some may even be listed in the “Better Business Bureau” directory. However, their fees can add up very quickly. Ultimately, social media is about building relationships with people in your area. Spend some time getting to know how to target your shares to specific, local areas for the best results.

Just like with social media, many companies will gladly take your money in exchange for email newsletter creation. Again, taking the time to learn about free alternatives is a great way to save money. It is actually extremely simple with free services like MailChimp.

Local news sites often reach out to new businesses with “special” or “exclusive” ad space availabilities. Whether advertising in a newspaper or on local news sites, this old-school method of advertising is unlikely to lead to new clients. Spend advertising budget wisely by advertising in places where people are already looking for services like those you offer – Google!

Google AdWords is a great place to find new customers because you pay for advertising spots where people are already looking for businesses like yours!

MISTAKE #10

They don't have processes in place to make their business run smoothly.

Failing to have processes in place for your business can result in messages or forms getting lost, appointments getting forgotten, and unhappy clients. I'm lucky in that I've never missed a lesson, but I have definitely had those terrifying "oh, I have a lesson tonight" moments. There are so many little details to remember when working with and managing clients that it's important to set up some processes to prevent mistakes as much as possible.



Life gets busy and messy. You need a system that's better than a bunch of Post It notes on your desk or fridge. Tools can often help automate processes and keep you on time and on track. Check

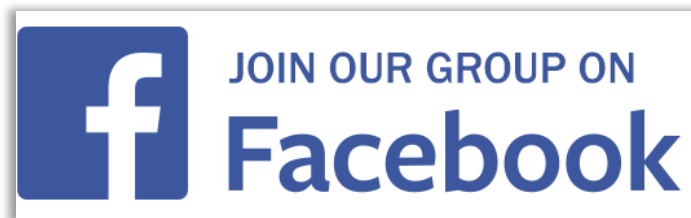
out automation tools like 17Hats and Zapier that can get things done without an added thought from you.

Congratulations! You're well on your way to avoiding these common mistakes as you get your business up and running!

What's next?

Wishing you had a helping hand to get your business set up correctly? Someone to tell you how to get intimidating tasks done or what to stop wasting your time on?

You're in for a treat! Keep an eye out on your inbox for more details or send me an email at themoderndogtrainer@gmail.com if you're too intrigued to wait...



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