



NEWSLETTER #2

In this newsletter, we will be focusing on a question brought to us by one of our inquisitive followers, Mickayla Fee. Thank you, Mickayla for being a part of our followers and providing us with your feedback and question.

Mckayla's Question:

"In the 'Owner Trainer' section you wrote "service dogs take a min of 2 years to train before they can be declared a fully trained service dog". Who 'declares' that, as there is no governing body, official registration, etc. for service dogs in the U.S.? Can you elaborate on this point please?"

The Answer:

As I am currently in the final stages of completing my SDT certification, what I have learned is that the "2" year mark is essentially the golden rule. Although there is no governing body, most programs, even ADI accredited, will not release a dog as fully trained until the age of 2. There are some programs though that will release once foundations are complete. Technically, at 6 months of age a dog could meet the ADA's definition of a service animal but, we all know that this would most likely not suffice for many reasons. Some programs are also known to place puppies with 'raisers' until 6-12 months of age, in which they will be re-temperament tested to see if they are still a candidate or prospect for service work. This is because testing puppies between the ages of 6-8 weeks cannot predict traits that develop during the later periods of puppy development, which will be mentioned below.

Training duration for service dogs can vary depending on several factors like:

- Specific tasks they are being trained for
- The individual dog's temperament and learning ability
- Training methods used and the breed of choice

While it typically takes around 2 years to fully train a service dog, it's important to note that training is an ongoing process throughout the dog's lifetime.

One of the reasons for this extended training period is indeed related to the mental stages and maturity that dogs go through. Just like humans, dogs go through different developmental stages that impact their ability to learn and perform tasks. Early training focuses on basic obedience and socialization, followed by more advanced tasks as the dog matures.

Additionally, service dogs undergo specialized training to perform specific tasks to assist their handlers. This can involve tasks such as retrieving objects, opening doors, alerting to medical conditions, or providing support for mobility. Each task requires extensive practice and reinforcement to ensure the dog can perform reliably in various environments and situations and perform it safely. In some cases, especially with larger breed dogs being used for mobility, it can take up to 26 months to fully complete their training. This is because most dogs used in service work are medium to large, and their growth plates don't solidify until the ages of 18-24 months. Once they are cleared by a vet, then the targeted training can continue especially if weight bearing tasks are what's needed. Breeds do come to consideration here. Smaller breeds do tend to essentially mature faster than larger dogs.

The lengthy training period for service dogs ensures they receive proper training for those targeted tasks they will need to perform for their handler, allowing them to be highly effective and reliable when at work.

During their training period, dogs go through various developmental stages that can impact their learning and behavior. Here are some common stages:

1. **Early Socialization:** This stage occurs from birth to around 12 weeks of age. It is crucial for puppies to be exposed to a variety of people, animals, sounds, and environments during this time. Proper socialization helps them develop confidence, adaptability, and positive behavior.
2. **Fear Imprint Period:** This stage typically occurs between 8 to 10 weeks of age. During this time, puppies may become more sensitive to frightening or traumatic experiences. It's important to provide positive and safe interactions to prevent the development of fear-based behaviors. At this timeframe, puppies begin to be susceptible to fear-learning. A puppy will appear to recover quickly, but permanent avoidance may become apparent later in life. If not well socialized and exposed by the end of this period, novel stimuli are likely to induce fear.
3. **Pre-Adolescence/Juvenile Period:** This stage begins at around 3 months and lasts until sexual maturity, usually around 6-9 months. Dogs during this period often exhibit increased energy levels, curiosity, and a tendency to explore their environment. They may also show signs of testing boundaries and challenging authority. Those that decide to keep their dogs intact may also experience further challenges. In some cases, territorial behaviors can emerge.
4. **Adolescent Period:** This stage usually occurs around 6-18 months of age, depending on the breed. Dogs may experience a surge in hormones and display behaviors like increased independence, occasional disobedience, and testing limits. Consistent training and reinforcement during this stage are crucial for shaping appropriate behavior.
5. **Mature Stage:** Full maturity is typically reached between 1-3 years, depending on the breed. Dogs have generally settled into their adult temperament by this time, but they can continue to learn new skills and behaviors throughout their lives.

Understanding these developmental stages helps trainers and handlers tailor their training methods and expectations to the specific needs of the dog at different points in their growth. This is why I guess we should have said, the rule of thumb is it CAN take up to 2 years to train. Because as mentioned at the beginning, essentially, if the dog is potty trained and can perform at least one task to help mitigate a handler's disability it meets the ADA's definition of a service animal.

But most puppies don't get their final set of shots until 5-6 months of age. My program mentions this often how per the ADA, this can essentially be done but is truly not encouraged for the reasons given above.

We want to emphasize that your feedback, questions, and suggestions are vital to us. We highly encourage you to reach out to us with any inquiries or concerns you may have. Whether you want to seek clarification on a specific topic or propose ideas for future newsletters, your input matters greatly to us.

Our goal is to create a space where we can engage in meaningful conversations and provide you with the content you're eager to read. So, don't hesitate to contact us through the provided channels, whether it's through email, social media, or any other means you find convenient.

Additionally, if there's a particular subject you'd like us to cover in an upcoming newsletter, please let us know! We value your interests and strive to deliver content that resonates with you.

Once again, we appreciate your support and enthusiasm. Stay tuned for our upcoming articles, which we hope will inform, entertain, and inspire you.

Warm regards,

The Pup-Cessories Crafts Team