

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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No judging approval system is perfect, so there will always be complaints. There were some legitimate complaints about the previous approval system, but we have never had so many complaints in such a short time as we have had regarding the current system. This led us to question the extent of the discontent among our members. To find out, we put together a brief survey which included the complaints we had heard as well as the claim that the new system would advance the best judges. Here are the results of that survey expressed in percentages:

1. Are you in favor of the new judging approval system?  
yes 13%    no 80%    no response 7%
2. Have you applied for additional breeds under the current system?  
yes 20%    no 79%    no response 1%
3. If you have, were you approved for all of the breeds for which you applied?  
yes 31%    no 58%    no response 10%
4. If you were denied for some breeds, were you given a reason which would help you prepare a more successful application in the future?  
yes 11%    no 82%    no response 7%
5. Were you invited to apply for more than 14 breeds?  
yes 2%    no 71%    no response 27%
6. Are you planning to apply for additional breeds under the current system?  
yes 52%    no 36%    no response 12%
7. Do you think the current system is clear and objective?  
yes 7%    no 84%    no response 9%
8. Do you think the current system advances the best judges?  
yes 7%    no 82%    no response 11%
9. Do you think the current system is vague and subjective?

- yes 79%    no 15%    no response 7%
10. Do you believe the current system fosters favoritism?  
yes 82%    no 11%    no response 8%
11. Would you prefer to return to the previous component system or one like it?  
yes 76%    no 17%    no response 7%
12. Do you think the ADSJ should seek to change the current system?  
yes 84%    no 9%    no response 7%
13. Are you a delegate? 8%

It is interesting that among our delegate member respondents, an even higher percentage of them, disapproved of the new system; believed the system was not clear and objective; did not think it advances the best judges; thought the system is vague and subjective; fosters favoritism; would prefer the previous system and thought the ADSJ should seek to change the current system.

I'm sorry to say it, but I told you so. "The Judges Review Committee, without an objective standard for guidance, will appear, like the judging czar of bygone days, to make rather subjective allocations of breeds based on hearsay, political connections and personal relationships. It is a step backwards. It smacks of whom you know rather than what you know." (*The Voice*, President's Message, Vol. 20 No 2)

The fundamental flaws of this system are becoming plainly evident to everyone except those very few whose advancement the system was created to serve. The lack of a clear set of requirements, a lack of objective evaluation standards and a lack of feedback has combined to bring us the worst judging approval process in memory. The previous system, while flawed, was far superior to this abomination. It is no wonder that representatives of the judging community were barred from participating in the development of the current system. If they had participated, the current system would never have seen the light of day.

In any other field, profession, occupation, trade, or other endeavor which requires some form of license, certification or other sort of approval prior to practicing in that field, there exists a clearly delineated set of requirements. Any aspirant knows at the outset what courses, tests, practicums, internships, apprenticeships, etc., must be successfully completed to achieve permission to practice. A candidate who successfully completes such a program, regardless of their personal friendships, family relations or political connections, is rewarded for their successful completion of the program with the approval to practice. As the need for practitioners is met and then surpassed, the standards are raised, so that the entire body of practitioners is gradually improved. Under the previous system, while we were still in the early stages of moving toward such a model, at least we were headed in that direction. Progress was of the “two steps forward, one step back” variety yet overall we were making progress. Part of the rhetoric of those pushing to divert us from the pursuit of that model was to denigrate those requirements as “checking boxes”. Of course any requirements may be cast as a series of prerequisites that must be satisfied or checked-off if you will, but that in itself does not diminish the relevance of the experiences embodied in the requirements as preparation for the intended practice. Nonetheless, such rhetoric certainly had an appeal to those who are not very comfortable with requirements that necessitate an investment of individual study, personal effort or time.

The current system does seem to abandon the previous model completely. Rather than a transparent system of clearly defined steps to reach approval, including objective standards of evaluation, the current system embraces a Star Chamber model in which an anointed few decide the fate of the applicant in an apparently arbitrary manner. Not only does the Committee hold back some candidates without offering reasons or suggestions for improvement, they invite a very

few (i.e. 2%) to move ahead at double the authorized maximum rate for other candidates. All of this is done without reference to any publicly established standards. With such a clandestine approach the door is certainly open to favoritism, or worse.

When we asked at an AKC/ADSJ Liaison Committee meeting if invitees would be held to the same interview requirements as other applicants, the VP of Events told the ADSJ representatives that those invited would be expected to master the same material and pass the same oral interview as anyone else. Giving him the benefit of the doubt, he was either misled by one of his many superiors or he was a bit naive. I have been told by a trusted and knowledgeable source that, in at least one instance, this has not been the case. I have been told that an invited person has been given a pass when they actually failed a required part of the interview on a number of breeds. Are you surprised at this? You shouldn't be. Under the present system this is to be expected. After all, as the rationale goes, there are some wonderful dog people who are just not good at memorizing or expressing their knowledge. They may not be capable of writing, or verbally describing a good dog, but they have been around and they know dogs. The Committee knows these superior dog people and knows they will be, or already are, the best judges, and therefore they should be advanced. For the rest of you, just keep working hard, keep the faith, and trust The Committee.

Now if the Committee does not know how wonderful you are, you need to get busy. Some have been advised to start calling members of the Committee to tell them why you should be invited to apply for a group. Also, enlist your friends, especially handlers you have put up, to put in a good word for you with the Committee. If you can get a rep to do this for you all the better (although, to their credit, the reps do not seem to favor this system). Soliciting assignments is okay, so why not soliciting an

invitation to apply for a group? It looks like a great shortcut to advancement since the Committee, once committed to your candidacy, may be loathe to turn you down. Such a reversal might mean they made a mistake by extending the invitation. So the very same group that will pass on you, will have a vested interest in your successfully negotiating the approval process, once you have been invited. They may even change the rules on the fly, if you run into difficulty with, say, knowing the DQs of the breeds for which you are applying.

The above bit of sarcasm is intended to illustrate some of the many problems, suspicions and rumors that flow from a closed, subjective process of awarding additional breed judging approvals. Please don't take what I have had to say here as a criticism of the people on the Committee. I have no doubt the members of the Committee were honored to be appointed and accepted in the spirit of helping to advance the sport. I am sure they have spent countless hours reading submitted material and attempting to make the right decision in each case. The people on the Committee are not to be faulted, except perhaps, for accepting the Committee assignment in the first place. The fault is in the system itself. No matter how good, knowledgeable, and well-intentioned the members of an oligarchy may be, the fault in such a system is that these members may one day be replaced by others who do not share their virtues. It is not a satisfactory alternative to a transparent approval system of relevant, objective standards and requirements in which everyone can see that each person has an equal opportunity to advance.

If it is not now abundantly clear to everyone that this approval process is profoundly flawed, it will be soon enough. The major problems now are ego and leadership. Will those at the AKC have so much ego invested in the new approval process as to ignore the demoralizing consequences of such a flawed system? Will they be able to admit that this new approval process is

a mistake, at best a failed experiment? Will the leadership of the AKC facilitate a reasonable solution? With the middle management positions related to judging recently vacated, it will certainly take initiative by top AKC management and/or the AKC Board to step in and call for a rethinking of this process before the discontent turns to anger.

It is hard to imagine what it would take to radicalize such a compliant group as dog show judges, but this new approval process just might do it. \*