

## **Apparent Conflict of Interest**

Australian Terrier Breed Column  
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As a state employee of Virginia, we are required to take a class on Conflict of Interest every 6 months. In the class I have learned that while a true intent may not be present in my actions, if it appears that I have a conflict of interest (where I have something to gain by my actions) it can cause mistrust among the people of Virginia, whom I work for. I did not think about this in my private life until, years ago, I wrote an article for the Gazette where I highlighted the wins of a particular dog. My intent was to praise his accomplishments as an Aussie as none had gone BIS for quite a while (deservedly, many more have since then!). I had no vested interest in him personally – he wasn't my breeding, nor did I have plans to use him in the future. However, the timing of the article made it look like I was promoting him for a win at Westminster. This was my "apparent conflict of interest". It looked like I was singling out one dog over all others I represent as the author of this column.

I was recently accused of having only received a "slap on the wrist" for my mistake. Not quite correct. Although I wasn't publically called out for it, I had a stern conversation with our president about how the members of the board of directors (BOD) felt about it. I offered to resign my position as ATCA columnist but was asked to reconsider, as they were sure that I wouldn't make the same mistake again. I also received several pointed emails from members. Ah, the mistrust they felt and they let me know about! Believe me, I have learned that lesson, but it doesn't mean I won't make other mistakes in the future. I will deal with inevitable missteps when they happen and learn from them as well.

There are many places in the dogshow world where apparent conflict of interest can occur. Someone is on the judges selection committee that hires a judge that they then show to. Someone mentors a new judge and then shows to them at a later date. Someone shows his/her dog to a breeder judge, who is a breeder of the sire (or close relative) of the dog. A dog is showcased in this column or in the club's newsletter just before the National Specialty or other major show. The BOD passes a resolution that inadvertently favors one or more of those serving on the board. I am sure there are other actions that can appear to be a conflict of interest that I am missing. While the intent in these actions may be innocent, the appearance of a conflict of interest is there. This breeds mistrust among the members of the group represented (ATCA in my case).

My take-home-message of this article is this: If you hold a position where you represent a group of people, you have to think about how your actions appear. If it looks like you are gaining or could gain from an action, whether you really do or not, it is a Conflict of Interest. Think hard before you do it!

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