

How to get your dog past a co-op board

by Teri Karush Rogers | 7/06/10 - 7:36 AM



Just because a co-op says it's "dog friendly" doesn't mean it will welcome yours.

Many buildings have weight restrictions (25 pounds is common) and some approve dogs on a case by case basis, which may include an interview.

"It's usually the old co-ops on Central Park West, Fifth Avenue, and Park Avenue that want to interview the dogs," says Manhattan certified dog trainer Elena Gretch. "They want to completely control the environment they've created."

Gretch, who owns the upmarket urban pet-services purveyor [It's a Dog's Life](#), has been prepping dogs for their co-op board interviews for about two years.

When taking on a new client, she first taps into her real estate broker network to divine the pet peeves of the target building. Then she spends about 6 sessions

(\$175/hour) administering an individualized canine cram course on co-op etiquette.

"Most boards want to know if the dog is friendly. Can they pet it and hold it? Does it bark? And then there's the general temperament issue, such as whether the dog has a history of biting," says Gretch.

Here are the basics:

1. **Avoid the interview altogether**

Gretch encourages clients to get their dogs certified with the [American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen Program](#), and present evidence to the co-op board early in the board approval process—hopefully avoiding the need for a meet-and-greet.

"It shows that dogs have passed their basic good manners' test, and that they're a canine good citizen that will be an asset to the building," she explains. "The dogs know how to sit, greet people, stay, come and how to be gently approached and handled."

Gretch says it takes her about six weeks and \$800 worth of private lessons to certify a typical six-month-old puppy. (For a complete list of local certified trainers, [click here](#).) Dogs can also prep for the test in group classes like those offered by Andrea Arden (\$350 for six sessions).

Real estate broker [Gordon Roberts](#) suggests preparing a mini-board package for your dog included as a back section to your purchase application.

It sounds a lot like a nursery school application.

“Shareholders usually want to be assured that your dog is well-behaved, relatively unobtrusive, and won’t urinate in the elevator,” says Roberts. “They also want to know you’re a responsible, caring owner.

Items to include: a description of the breed; an “about me” page with your dog’s photo, personality, measurements and pedigree; letters of recommendation from the dog walker, groomer and a current neighbor; and a description of your dog’s daily routine.

Um, and what should a letter of recommendation say?

“They should talk about how well-behaved the dog is—things like ‘great in the elevator with children and other dogs’ and ‘never hear the dog’ if it’s a direct neighbor,” says real estate broker [Deanna Kory](#).

2. The doorbell test

“The biggest worry about dogs in buildings isn’t the possibility of being bitten. It’s the worry about barking,” says Gretch.

During an interview, to test a dog’s propensity to vocalize, boards often have someone ring the doorbell or knock on the door.

“Truthfully, this behavior takes the most time to overcome,” says Gretch. “Often we will teach the dog to go immediately to its bed or a little piece of blanket that owners bring along to the interview.”

3. Secret weapon: Interview zen

Gretch says her secret weapon is teaching dogs to sit or lie down on a small, familiar piece of blanket for the entire duration of the board interview.

“The fact that the dog can sit quietly through an interview is a testament that the dog is not going to be a burden to the community,” says Gretch, who espouses training over tranquilizers. “Even if the dog barks a little during the doorbell test, this will matter more.”

4. Bias against big dogs

In picky buildings, dogs over 25 pounds tend to be the biggest targets of dogsdiscrimination, says Gretch.

“The boards that don’t want dogs at all discriminate against the largest dogs,” she says. “They judge them more harshly.”

With large dogs, “we go above and beyond with people skills,” says Gretch. “We want them not to be fearful and not to jump on anyone, and we teach them all kinds of fun tricks like ‘Say hi, Skip,’ and he’ll wave his paws.”

Grooming also becomes more important for big dogs.

“It’s not so much about being fluffed for a showing as looking well kept and clean—and not smelling like a dog, which is especially an issue with larger dogs,” she says.