

Dog ownership is a full-time commitment

By John Spinola

Let me just start off by saying I have been around dogs as far back as I can remember. It started with Rootbeer (Irish setter mix), then Cotton (American Eskimo/Samoyed), and next was Smokey (Akita/German Shepherd). They were family dogs. Dogs I grew up with.

As an adult I had Henry (Akita/Bloodhound), next was Astro (Malamute/wolf content) and now Stanley (Great Pyrenees mix). So I am no stranger to dogs. And if you notice I tend to like the larger breeds. I'll also say that all of the above came from dog pounds or shelters.



Stanley

In digging into the business side of dogs I saw that there was a lot of information about what kind of dog is best for certain personalities and what to do *after* you get a dog. One thing I noticed was that there is a lack of what to consider before you get a dog.

Here are some tips:

- Do you have the time for a dog? Seriously, do you have

10 to 15 years to commit to something? Ten to 15 years of every day. No days off. The dog is going to take priority. Do you have time in the morning, afternoon, evening and on your days off? Do you have time to walk the dog? Do you have time to play with the dog? New dogs take a lot of time. A lot. They need constant reassurance and companionship. They need exercise and input. They are pack animals. They need to be included. Now granted it does get easier as they get older, but at first it is all time consuming. They take time and you have to put in good time if you want a good one.

- Do you want a puppy or a dog that is a little older that might have some training? Consider that with puppies you have to teach them everything. With a dog that is older they might already have some skills like house training, commands like sit and stay.

Do you have space for a dog? Do you have a yard? Fenced? Do you live in an apartment, house, etc? If renting, does your landlord allow dogs? Are you able to walk the dog from your front door or do you need to go somewhere? A dog is going to take up some space within your space.

- Dog hair. Dogs are dirty hairy creatures. Are you ready for that? House, clothes, floor, all infected with dog hair.
- Are you equipped to transport your dog? Car or truck? If car, are you ready to have it covered in dog hair? If you have a truck, are you going to get a camper shell or a leash system for the dog? If you ride a bike, bus or walk does that choice work with what the dog needs?
- Not to be a downer, but are you ready to say goodbye to one of the best friends you have ever had? If you get a dog, there is going to be a day that you are going to have to decide on "the big sleep". That's not easy, but it is the most loving thing you can offer your friend at the end.
- Have you ever thought about traveling with a dog? Do you

like to travel or vacation? Are you going to take the dog or leave the dog? A lot of hotels allow dogs for a fee. Do you have someone who will dog sit the dog while you are away? If not, do you have money to kennel the dog?

- Do you have money for the continued cost of a dog? Most everyone I know has said the same thing with his or her first dog. "Well they don't cost much." No, not upfront. But after you purchase your dog – hopefully from a shelter or rescue – there are collars, leashes, vet visits, food, treats, license, grooming, brushes, bed, toys, runner, kennel, dog house, maybe medication if they need it and in my case dog walking service.

There are also unseens that happen. Henry met a porcupine once. One person I know mentioned the dogs was only \$X but the fence for the yard was \$1,200.

I just want to mention that dogs (or in the case of any animal) take time, money, and commitment. A good animal just doesn't happen. It is something that is nurtured over a long period. If you have had dogs, you know that there is a point when they go from being "a dog" to "the dog". If you pull it off, the reward is worth the payment many times over.

John Spinola owns Poundawg Enterprises – Dog Walking based on the South Shore.