



Melissa Verplank: The Collected Blogs

Originally published at www.melissaverplank.com/blog

Created for Learn2GroomDogs.com Copyright 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the prior written permission from Learn2GroomDogs.com, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

For more information on Learn2GroomDogs.com and the video archive of grooming lessons available, visit www.learn2groomdogs.com

Getting into the Grooming Groove

Are you highly productive at your grooming table? Are you whizzing through 6-8 pets with ease – or more? Are you able to work smoothly? Are you able to work without interruptions? Are you confident with your trimming skills? Do you have a constant working method you apply to most of your grooming jobs – every time?

In our business – time transfers to money and/or time to spend perusing other activities besides grooming pets. Ideally, most small to medium sized pets should take 45-60 minutes to complete – from start to finish – bath, dry and finish trim. If you are not hitting these numbers, you probably are not 'in the grooming groove.'

If you are not hitting these targets, it's time to analyze the problem areas. Over 50% of the time, the time wasted is in the bathing and drying process. On a simple trim, like a one length all-over style that you do every 6 weeks, the breakdown looks something like this:

- Pre bath prep: 5 minutes or less (overall observation, trim nails, clean ears)
- Bath: 5-10 minutes (double shampoo plus skin conditioning treatment)
- Towel Dry: 1-3 minutes
- High Velocity Dry: 5-10 minutes
- Finish Trim: 20-30 minutes

Grab that timer. Watch that clock – a BIG clock that is easy to see at ALL times. Time yourself. Identify areas where you could improve your productivity. No one can improve anything unless they know a starting point.

Make a game out of it. Use the provided time line as a basic guide. This guide will help you set up your time targets in each area. Break it down. Time yourself. With each procedure – try to consistently improve your best time while maintaining safety and quality. Build in a sense of urgency in what you do with every pet.



Don't stop. Try as hard as you can to minimize interruptions. Interruptions are energy busters. Sometimes it's difficult to get back into the flow of things. There is no better feeling than getting into the 'grooming groove.' Your days will fly by effortlessly.

Groomers and stylists that in the grooming groove, get great satisfaction out of their work days. Even the simplest trims look great. Groomers and pets are injury free. Clients are thrilled with the work. Happy clients translate into repeat customers. Repeat appointments equal a full grooming book for upcoming months and a successful salon, regardless of its size.

A Unique SOS for Grooming Help



This is an amazing TRUE story that took place a few weeks ago with one of my companies. It's uncanny how all the pieces of this puzzle fell together. In the end, it was tremendously rewarding to see someone apply a lesson so well.

I currently oversee five different companies in the pet industry. I don't have a lot of extra time to spend in the social media world. However, I'm lucky to have a team of people around me that are able to spend a bit of time there. They give me a heads-up when they feel there is something worthy of my attention. On this particular day, there was a very loud SOS cry for help from Facebook.

Lea Ann is a newer groomer from Kentucky. She just had a client purchase a 7 month-old, cream, Miniature Poodle show puppy — and she wanted her to groom it! Her first show was in three weeks. Yikes! Although her basics grooming skills were strong, this presented a challenge outside of her comfort zone. She turned to her friends on Facebook for help.

One of those friends is Lisa Van Sweden my illustrator for Notes from the Grooming Table and Theory of Five. Whenever Lisa sees a tough question — or a plea for help — she privately contacts me to see if I can help. Lea Ann had no idea Lisa was connected to me, the Paragon School of Pet Grooming or Learn2GroomDogs.com — all she knew, “was Lisa was well-connected.”

Now this is where it gets weird.

A few weeks earlier we had been in Florida filming for Learn2GroomDogs. One of the Training Partners we filmed was Irina (Pina) Pinkusevich. Pina did a grooming demonstration on a 7 month-old, cream, Miniature Poodle show puppy! Uncanny!

Not two hours prior to receiving this SOS, I had reviewed the rough edit of this video. We were getting ready to put it up as a 'Sneak Peek' in the next few weeks on Learn2GroomDogs, giving people a small taste of what they could look forward to in the Full Length video. The Full Length video would not be available for another four weeks.

I knew this lesson was almost custom-made for Lea Ann! However, if we stayed on track with our release schedule — she would miss her window of opportunity to make the first dog show with her client's puppy. To complicate a few things, we were missing about four or five minutes of footage in the rough edit. (That's why I review every video one or two times before it goes up on L2GD!) The footage that was missing was really critical; how to band off the top knot and create "the bubble."

The next thing that was standing in our way was that Marc and I were headed off for a ski vacation with fellow top stylists, Teri DiMarino and Kathy Rose. Still, I knew I had to get this footage to Lea Ann ASAP. As we're driving to the airport, waiting for flights and touching down in Salt Lake City Utah, I was in touch with my office, our editor, and Lisa who was the link to Lea Ann. We needed to find the missing footage, finish out the edit a few weeks early and quietly posted on the L2GD website. The only people that were going to be able to find it in the tangle of over 200 videos, were people that had the inside scoop — namely Lea Ann.

Luckily, she found the video. It looks like it was exactly what she needed. The before/after photos arrived while we were skiing. I was so proud of her work. Teri and Kathy were impressed too. It was amazing to see how easily somebody could grasp the information on their computer screen by watching a streaming video lesson on-line and apply it to a real live dog. She nailed it. Sure, there's some tweaking that can be done. Even the best stylists in the country are never 100% happy with their work.

Once we got back from skiing, I contacted Lea Ann privately via Facebook. That's when I learned the next unique piece of the puzzle. She writes this;

"I've been a groomer for almost four years now. I was an actual student of Courtney Ramstack. I feel so lucky to have studied with her initially. She was tough, but I felt like I walked away from her grooming academy with the best foundation possible. It was a four week course featuring 40+ hours of classroom and hands on instruction. I LOVE watching her videos as well. It feels like I'm coming home."

Now I'm totally blown away. She's "One of Courtney's girls!" I should have known when I saw the work. Courtney is one of my all-time favorite people. We go back a long way. We all met when PetsMart used the Paragon School for corporate training in the late '90s and early 2000s. In fact, two of my trainers and Courtney all competed at the same time around the country in grooming shows. They became great friends and earned the nickname "The Blonde Squad". Over the years we've all maintained our contact and our friendship. She's even been up to my home and ridden our Friesian horses. Having Courtney as one of our Training Partners for L2GD has been a treat. Not only is she an amazing person with a huge

heart, she's a fabulous teacher!! Lea Ann was fortunate to have trained under her initially — she got good solid basics and it shows!!

Lea Ann is even taken it one step further and contacted Pina where she got a very warm welcome. She also has been able to reconnect with her initial trainer, Courtney. Were excited to see where Lea Ann is going to take this grooming. Hopefully she's made some contacts that will open the doors of opportunity even much wider for future as a talented pet stylist.

It's such a small world. It's amazing that a simple request for help on Facebook can yield the type of results that Lea Ann experienced. Whether you believe in Six Degrees of Separation or The Secret, this entire story has a unique feel to it — a warm fuzzy feeling that reminds all of us why we are in the service business. I love the pet industry and I love being able to help both people and pets through education.



www.learn2groomdogs.com



Valentine's Day

WOW Factor

I'm so proud of my team at Whiskers Resort & Pet Spa. We opened the luxury pet resort in the fall of 2007. We've managed to bi-pass the worst of our current economy. Instead, we continue to grow. Why? This team goes out of their way constantly, doing things like this.

Day Care was our slowest area of growth at the resort – until recently. In the past few months, we have been experiencing up to a 50% growth rate over last year's sales. How are we doing that? By creating the WOW factor.

We don't do it every day, but occasionally, the Whiskers team ramps up for a day like today. Valentine's Day – on a ho-hum Tuesday. How were they going to make that day 'exciting?' They opted to toss a Day Care Valentine's Day party – a party for the dogs. The dogs all got special attention and yummy treats. That's not that unusual for this team to a great party for our canine guests. But with this party, the team opted to highlight the owners too.

As John Jantsch says in his book, *The Referral Engine*, "People don't get emotional and passionate about ordinary products, a satisfactory result, or a fair price. They talk about things that surprise them or make them feel great about themselves – and, in effect, remove the feeling of risk they might have about doing business with that firm.... If the market place isn't talking about you, there's a reason. The reason is that you're boring."

We have used this concept with great success over the past few years at Whiskers. We want folks to TALK about us when they leave. This is one of those marketing tasks that was downright FUN to do. Not only were the clients delighted – the staff had a blast preparing the 100 roses for our guests AND passing them out! Whiskers had the largest day in Day Care they had ever had – Over 70 dogs took part in the party! Talk about creating the WOW factor.

So my challenge to you is:

What are you doing to encourage referrals with your business? What are people saying around the dinner table, the cocktail party, at the gym or the water cooler at work? Are they talking about YOUR business in an energetic, positive way? If they aren't, how can you change that?

If you want to learn more about some of our marketing tactics or how we create enthusiasm within our teams, make sure you catch my lectures at the Atlanta Pet Fair coming up the first weekend of March.



www.learn2groomdogs.com



The Passing of a Starlet...

When we lose one of our 'special clients', it's always hard. It's like we lost one of our own pets. Pandey was one of those 'special clients.' On second thought, no, Pandey wasn't just 'special,' she was a gorgeous star.

Our love affair started in 2000 when Pandey's owner brought her to the Paragon School for the first time. She was a striking black and white Shih Tzu, dripping a cloak of fur that literally drug on the ground. She was stunning. We were even more thrilled when we quickly learned; her mother knew how to brush!

Pandey quickly grabbed the attention of all the staff and students at the school. In order to keep her luxurious coat in top shape, her owner brought her in for weekly and bi-weekly brush-outs and baths. Through the years, Pandey taught hundreds of students what a well-kept Shih Tzu should look like. But Pandey's ability to help people learn didn't just stop at Paragon.

Her owner, Chris Vandyke is an incredibly generous woman. Whenever we called with a special request – she always was willing to bring Pandey over. When I was working on larger projects like writing Notes from the Grooming Table and Theory of Five, Pandey was always available as a model. When we were filming our first video training lessons, Pandey was there. When we needed a special dog while filming on the set of Learn2GroomDogs.com, Pandey was there.

Pandey was getting older. Chris has requested something that would be easier for her to keep up for Pandey yet still look stylish. We had a film shoot scheduled that weekend with Learn2GroomDogs.com. We had the perfect slot for Pandey on camera. Again, she helped groomers learn to be the best.

It was an honor to have Lisa Leady do one of her last grooms. Lisa created a haircut that would be easier to maintain while still giving the illusion of a full coat. She looked amazing.

Pandey passed away not long after our filming session. Watching her on camera, you'd never know she was 14 years old. She was a beautiful bright spot for her family and everyone that met her. She helped hundreds of students learn how to brush, bath, condition, trim, and tie up topknots on a dog that not only had a glorious coat – but had a matching personality as well.

As you thumb through any of my books or watch any of our videos, you'll see Pandey. Anytime you see a full coated black and white Shih Tzu, that's her – still helping young groomers be the best they can be.

She was always a star. Her star still burns bright in our memory. We miss you Pandey.



Shedding Season

This is the time of year that the fur really seems to fly. For those of us that live in areas where we experienced a climate change — the annual springtime shed represents lots of extra dollars in our pockets. For me, working on a dog that's in the middle of a big-

time shed is one of my favorite jobs to do. I know — I know, you think I'm nuts! It's super messy. That's why I like it so much. You can take a dog that is dirty and nasty looking and in no time, turn it into something gorgeous. With the right tools, the right products and a little bit of elbow grease, you can make a HUGE difference in the way a pet looks and feels in just a few hours.

A powerful high velocity dryer is my tool of choice for those magical canine makeovers. But how many of you cross over into the equestrian world? I do. Have you ever taken your high velocity dryer down to the barn? No? Where have you been?? You've gotta try it!

Of our 6 horses, there isn't one that doesn't enjoy being blown out with a high velocity dryer. Many of our horsey friends have seen us work with this tool around our own crew. They have been amazed at the results. Almost all of them have asked if they could try it on their horses. They're in awe of how well their horses have accepted the process when introduced correctly. (Just like a young puppy — low and slow)

If you are horse owner like me, I encourage you to check out my YouTube video about de-shedding a horse with a high velocity dryer. The birds will love you for it!



How to Hold & Run Scissors Correctly

Does your scissor work look like crushed velvet? Do you enjoy the process of hand scissoring the coat of a pet? Can you get plush finish in a short amount of time? Or do you whittle away the coat way S-L-O-W-L-Y? Flawless hand-scissoring is almost becoming a lost art.

If you're hand-scissoring skills could use some help – here are a few tips.

Simply improving how you HOLD the shears can have a huge impact on your end product. Master these few tips, and you are on your way to a velvet finish on the Poodle coat!

As you work your shears, only your thumb should move. Open and close the shear blade while the rest of your hand remains motionless. The scissor should stay balanced in your hand, at right angles to your index finger. Keep it steady and flush with the plane on which you are working; there is no bouncing with smooth-bladed shears. With thinning shears, you will have a small bounce to clear the trimmed coat before you close the blades for another cut.

Once you gain full control and balance of the shears, it's time to consider how this motion works with the rest of your body. The fluidity of proper scissoring stems from your body – the placement of your feet, the bend in your knees, the flexibility of your waist and the position of your arm and shoulder. Your entire body becomes a machine that effortlessly runs the shears.

There are methods you can learn to produce a smooth, satin finish – a perfect scissor finish. However, one of the keys to mastering the art of hand-scissoring is perfect practice. And I mean hours of PERFECT practice!

Holding your shears and moving your shears over the dog properly is just a start to perfecting your scissoring skills. Notes From the Grooming Table and Learn2GroomDogs.com both have some great lessons on how to scissor correctly. (Colin Taylor and yours truly both have video lessons on correct scissoring) Plus, at both of these locations, you'll find exercises to improve your scissor technique too.

How to Improve Clipper Technique

For maximum freedom of movement and improved efficiency, hold the clipper like a large pencil, between the thumb and fingers. “Palming” the clipper makes for clumsy, awkward clipper handling. It also puts the pet at risk for cuts, nicks and irritation. Concentrate on positioning yourself so that the clipper is pulled toward you for the majority of your work. There are rare times when holding the clippers in your palm will improve dexterity, but this applies to very few moves.

To create the least amount of stress on your fingers and wrist, grasp the clipper at the “balance point” so the weight is equally distributed between each end. Hold the clipper in the correct position, and then rotate it between your thumb and fingers. This positioning keeps your wrist firm but flexible, yet allows for almost unlimited wrist movement. This hold offers access to the most difficult corners of the pet with minimum effort. Concentrate on minimizing your wrist action.

Allow the weight of the clippers to do the work. Your hand and wrist are simply its guide. As you move from the top of the pet to make downward strokes, simulate the same amount of pressure that gravity provided on the top.

Your hand and wrist will act as a shock absorber while clipping. As you clip, you’ll be leveling out the bumps and dents. This will allow you to obtain a satin-smooth finish.

No matter what blade you use, it is important to maintain a consistent degree of “tip” to the blade. This is also known as “keeping the blade up on its cutting edge.” Imagine a pencil being held right under the blade as you guide it over the body. The closer the pencil is to the teeth, the higher the tip angle; the farther back you keep the imaginary pencil towards the heel of the blade, the lesser the degree of tip. Generally speaking, the closer the blade cuts, the higher you need to tip the blade for it to be effective.



Take Advantage of Continuing Education Opportunities

Continuing education is a must for the successful pet groomer/stylist. Some continuing education opportunities are almost effortless. Other opportunities will take a vested interests in, time, money AND effort.

Trade journals abound. Many are available in the print version. Currently, many are offered in digital versions too.

With the onset of the internet – there are plenty of ways to research breeds and grooming techniques. Google, Facebook, grooming forums, YouTube and websites will lead you down an endless quest of knowledge. www.Learn2GroomDogs is a great example of very talented stylists sharing their knowledge. Word of Warning: The internet is a fabulous research tool but use good judgment. Be aware of the caliber of the information you are receiving. Anyone can post on the internet – regardless of their true qualifications.

Trade shows are held across the country. As professionals, you can step through the doors and be immersed in all the latest products, tools, educational classes. Plus, many have grooming competitions.



This is where you can get up-close to watch top stylist groom their way to wins and placements. If you have access to high-speed Internet, many of these shows now stream live as the event takes place. Even if you can't attend the show you can still see the grooming competitions!

Many award-winning pet stylists host small private clinics, offer personal coaching, and/or have educational DVDs. This form of training will show you the finer points of grooming. You also have easy access to webinars and streaming dog grooming videos taught by award-winning stylists with a few simple clicks of a mouse.

Voluntary certification testing puts your grooming to the test. Currently, there are three organizations in the United States. All of them have educational programs. Each organization offers written examinations combined with rigorous practical skills testing. The common goal of each certification programs is to assess your grooming skills plus your overall knowledge of the pet grooming profession. The three organizations are –

- National Dog Groomers Association of America
- International Professional Pet Groomers Association
- International Society of Canine Cosmetologists

Attending dog shows is another fabulous way to gather great information. Watching dog shows allows you to firmly etched in your mind of what a good specimen of any breed should be. The better you understand what a good specimen looks like, the better you're going to be able to work on your pet clients.

My Personal Pet Peeve: Lack of Professionalism

If you want to be treated as a true professional, you need to walk-the-walk and talked-the-talk.

Years ago when I was still at my grooming table every day, I was out to upgrade the image of a pet groomer. My clients were amazed when I greeted them in a skirt. My hair was done. My make-up was in place. (OK – by the end of the day it wasn't quite as fresh as when I started out) My nails were always done professionally. (...and it hid the problems that come along with trimming toenails a tad too short!) I found lipstick that was a stain, giving my lips a hint of color instead of magnet that attracted dog hair. When I met a client for the first time – my introduction was a warm greeting, a big smile and a handshake.

I constantly looked at ways to be a more knowledgeable groomer. With a bit of effort, it didn't take long before I honestly turned the corner from a basic groomer to a pet stylist. I made a very positive impression on my clients. I sweated the details – and it paid off ten-fold.

Sweating the details translates into all areas of your salon or mobile unit too. It will be influenced by; what your clients see, what your clients hear and what your clients smell.

In most professional services, you are not really selling expertise, your expertise is assumed. Generally, your prospect cannot intelligently evaluate your expertise anyway. Instead you are selling a relationship – a professional relationship. Your perspective may not know at first if you are competent at your craft.

But they do know if their phone calls are answered promptly and politely. They can sense instantly how a salon looks. Does it look crisp and clean? Does it smell bright and fresh? They know if their pet is treated with compassion. And they certainly know if they are being treated respectfully.

Your clients have four options;

- Use your service
- Use a competitor service
- Do it themselves
- Not do it at all

Give yourself the edge. Sweat the details. Take the time, and effort, to present yourself as a true professional. Make sure your personal presentation is well pulled together. Gain the skills you need to communicate effectively with your clients. Enhance your grooming techniques so you can give them the best job possible in the least amount of time. Always remember to keep the safety of both you and the pet foremost in your mind.

Why Am I On The Payroll?

Have you ever asked yourself just why you are on the payroll?

Have you ever thought about it? Come on – really thought about it?

When we hire someone in one of my companies, we want to see results in exchange for a paycheck. Every job will be different. If you are a groomer, how many dogs can you groom with quality and safety foremost in your mind?

If you are a receptionist, how many appointments can you book error free? How are you helping the salon grow the client list or maintain a steady pace? If you are a groomer's assistant, how many dogs can you help your team produce?

And with all of these tasks, are you doing it with a positive attitude?

The roll of a business is not to give you a 'job'. The role of any business is to provide a product or service to a customer. If they do it well – you'll get a paycheck. Enterprising owners don't go into business to break even or worst yet – lose money. They open businesses for many reasons. One of the biggest reasons — to chase the American dream. To make a profit doing what they love doing. Working with pets.

So what is your role in the pet care service business? Think about the results you need to accomplish in your job. How many pets do you need to groom to be deemed productive – and profitable – in order to be valued by your supervisor? When a prospective client calls, are you able to book the appointment? Are pets going out the door injury free? Are the trims done correctly and with quality? Are clients smiling when they pick up their pets? Are they rebooking their next appointment in six weeks or less?

Most businesses have goals and quotas. This is the way performance is measured in the work place. Are you reaching your quotas easily? Are you doing the tasks you have been assigned without being reminded? Are you meeting and/or exceeding your goals/ quotas? Everyone that gathers a paycheck at the end of the week has responsibility to help the company in a productive and positive way.

Are you living up to the expectations of your employer? Are you truly earning the paycheck you want every week by being the most productive you can be? Stop and think about it. What can you do to improve the results that drop down to the bottom line, ensuring you HAVE a job every week? That you stay on the payroll.





Are You Prepared for a Fire in Your Salon?

Fire safety isn't something any of us should procrastinate on. Many of us ignore taking the basic steps we need to protect ourselves. I've always known professional grooming salons can be prone to fire. Until I experienced my own fire, I didn't know how much you could do to prevent one. And even for those of us that have taken every precaution to prevent fire, unfortunate scenarios can still unfold.

In 2008, my husband and I got a first-hand education in fire. We lost our entire 10 stall barn. It burned to the ground while I was home – and I never knew it was on fire!

I would like to share some of the things that we learned. It doesn't matter what you lose, the impact of fire is devastating regardless of whether there's loss of life or not.

Read your insurance policy. (Really read it!) If you have questions, make sure to you ask your agent. Don't blindly accept what they tell you is adequate for your situation. Stop and think. Think about what it would cost you to replace the facility. Think about the value of the contents inside the structure too. Does your policy carry a rider for loss of revenue if you cannot work?

Keep a list in a separate location of all the items that are in your salon. One of the simplest ways to maintain current record of what is in your salon (or any structure) is walk through with a video camera and record the entire room. Open up closets and cabinets as you go through the space. You don't have to spend a lot of time doing this video or DVD. They can be paused at any point for clarity.

Make sure you have enough fire extinguishers available. You must also make sure that they are rated for the type of fire that would be typical in your situation.

Make sure that all electrical outlets are working properly. That your breaker box is not being overloaded. Grooming salons typically pull a lot of power due to all the electrical equipment in a facility.

Keep all the vents and any electrical equipment free of dog hair. This would include many of the typical things you find in grooming salons; furnaces, hot water heaters, pet dryers and clothes dryers — anything with a motor or that involves heat.

Minimize the use of extension cords.

Utilize a professional electrician to maintain or upgrade your electrical system if you are not qualified to do it yourself.

Unplug dryers and extension cords at the end of the day.



Purchase the best fire detection alarms you possibly can. The old cliché, you get what you pay for is very true when it comes to fire alarms. If at all possible, have your salon professionally monitored and hardwired directly into the fire department.

Luckily in our barn fire, all of our beloved Friesian horses were safe. They had been turned out for the day when fire struck Trying to absorb what happens within the hours, days or weeks after a fire is challenging. The workload is daunting as you try to sort through the entire situation and rebuild. The recovery from a fire does not take weeks, it takes months.

Do everything in your power to protect yourself from actual property destruction. Don't underestimate the value of insurance. Make sure to have the proper insurance coverage for your situation. Fire is overwhelming. Not having the means to rebuild can be even more devastating. Be prepared.



www.learn2groomdogs.com

Focus on Key Areas to Excel in Your Job

Focus on Key Areas to Excel in Your Job As a professional pet groomer, our job is to know how to groom all breeds of dogs (and cats for some). What needs to be done to make a purebred look like it's supposed to look. How can we make mixed breeds (designer dogs) cute. What's the best way to remove shedding coat from a full coated dog. Being versatile is our job.

Guess what? Every groomer has a few types of jobs and coat types they really like to work with. What's your favorite?

For me, I loved grooming the drop coated breeds in adorable fluffy trims. I loved to hand scissor. And there was nothing more gratifying than turning a big, furry, shedding mass of dirty hair into a snug-able, huggable pet.

Most of my co-workers happily let me tackle these jobs when they appeared on the books. These grooming jobs were not their favorites. They were hard for them. They took a long time to do. They never felt like they were 'done' with them. They never looked smooth and finished. Or they just cringed at the amount of work required.

For me, I knew I was going to have a great day when I saw multiple drop coated breeds on my roster along with a little mixed breed groomed like a Bichon. The icing on the cake would be tossing a Sheltie into the grooming mix along with something where tufts of coat were falling out. I was highly proficient with these dogs. I could make them look stunning in no time. I knew how to work with my equipment to get the best results in the shortest amount of time. I simply loved working with these types of coats because they were easy for me.



Where they always easy? Heck no! I'm a self-taught groomer. Learning is a lot of work. Mastering skills takes dedication and focus. There were hundreds of breeds to learn. There are hundreds of techniques to figure out. There are hundreds of products to try. I opted to focus on mastering a few techniques that would allow me to soar through my days.

Mastering a cute, fluffy trim on a drop coated breed was more out of necessity than anything else. We simply had a lot of those types on dogs in our client files. Plus, my first contest dog was a little black and white Shih Tzu. In order to do well in the ring, I needed to figure out how to get a plush finish on a drop coat. Not a small feat to conquer. I got good at this trim – really good – and fast.

With every drop coated dog in my client file, I was able to perfect my skills. What shampoo got the fur the cleanest? Which pair of shears worked the best on each coat type? How should I hold the shear to minimize marking the coat? When was it time to pull out the blenders? And which pair of blenders

should I use? I analyzed every step. Dissected every move. Stood back and reviewed the overall appeal. Was it balanced? Was it even? Would hair fall out of place when combed or if the dog shook?

I was super critical of my work. As I learned more – discovered new things – I become even more critical. I was brutally honest with myself. I didn't let up on myself until I was winning consistently with my little Shih Tzu.

Once I mastered one coat type, I moved to the next. As a bonus, through the process, I became an accomplished all breed stylist. There isn't a breed I would not tackle. However, I focused on just a few techniques I could really master. Breeds or techniques I used a lot. Those are the breeds or types of trims that I loved to see hit my roster. I simply adored grooming them because they become so easy for me.

To improve your workday, concentrate on a few key areas in your job to really excel at. It may take some focused work at first but once you master the technique, haircut, breed, or personality type, you'll automatically draw that type of client to your daily roster. You'll enjoy your work day. The time will fly by with ease. At end of the day, you'll be rewarded with a gratifying and highly productive workday.



Happy Trimming! – Melissa

Maintain a Steady Pace

Speed is the key to being a successful pet groomer. Have you watched a highly proficient pet stylist at work? They don't race around with their heads cut off. They don't whip from one task to the next with lightning speed. They are not frazzled. They are not stressed. They blow through 10, 12, even 14 dogs with ease.

They are home to meet their kids coming off the bus from school. They are headed to the gym after work. They enjoy their own dogs when not grooming client's pets. They have the time AND energy to have a life when they step away from the grooming table. Do you?

When I observe these successful groomers, I've noticed important traits they all share. They work with a steady pace. They have a rhythm to their tasks. Their tempo doesn't change. They follow the same order as they work on each pet. Their tools are laid out in an orderly fashion, sharp and within arm's reach. They are not distracted by ringing phones, tales from their fellow team members, nor the personality of

the pet they are working on. They are focused and efficient as they work around the pet. There is no wasted effort. No wasted motion.

There are methods to each grooming job. Following a particular order with each type of groom will assistance you with getting through the tasks the quickest. There will be five main types of jobs you do every day – day in – day out at any grooming shop.



1. Short haircuts, six weeks or more

2. Short haircuts, six weeks or less

3. Guard comb trims

4. Bladed body with fuller legs and/or furnishings/pattern trims

5. Bath and brush type pets

Generally speaking, the faster you can get a dog to the tub, the faster the trim will go. Dogs with six weeks or less coat growth can normally go straight to the tub. With today's products, shampoos, conditioners, and high velocity dryers, much of the pre-work can be eliminated. Dematting or pre-trimming is a waste of time with six weeks or less trims.

When it comes to haircuts or finishing a bath and brush dog – pay attention to the order you work. Develop an order – the same order every time for each of the five grooming jobs. If you struggle with remembering the order, write it down and post it at your grooming station. Time yourself on each task.

Work on improving your speed with small components within each job. Don't jump around. Always follow the order.

Watch top stylists at work. Watch their videos. Sit ringside at grooming competitions and watch the leading stylist compete. With consistent repetition, you'll increase your speed in no time. You'll have more time to spend enjoying your free time doing what you want to do. The stress and frustration will be highly minimized. And the best part – you'll make more money, in less time, in the process!

Don't hurry or rush around frantically to get the job done. Maintaining easy pace and work steadily. Remember the fable of the tortoise and the hare? Highly productive people work a certain rhythm that allows them to flow through enormous amounts of work without becoming stressed or anxious.



www.learn2groomdogs.com

To Earn More, Learn More

How to groom a dog has never been easier with Learn2GroomDogs.com To stay on top of the grooming game, professionals need to keep learning. That's been my motto for years. It's always worked for me. Educational opportunities were limited 20-30 years ago. Fortunately, opportunities abound today for motivated groomers.

Books: More and more grooming titles are available every day. They are being written by a wide range of authors. There are grooming guides available as well and business operation manuals.

Many include stunning images to help the reader comprehend the subject matter. Some are even available via a tablet or Kindle.

Schools: What is the primary function of a school? To give their students a head start in their careers. Most schools can take months or even years off the learning process. Professional grooming schools are cropping up everywhere.

One of the best ways to learn grooming is with hands-on training. Some training centers even offer home-study options too. Either way, schools offer a structured learning environment. Programs range widely in cost, quality, course length and grooming styles.

Videos: With methods in place to honor and identify top groomers, we are seeing many of these respected stylists share their knowledge through training videos. Top professionals are creating video lessons aimed at the beginners to advanced stylists. Many lessons are on DVDs, on-line through websites or in streaming video libraries.

Internet Searches: The internet has become an indispensable tool for the groomer looking to get ahead in their career. Never seen a Portuguese Podengo? Most professional groomers haven't – including me! A quick search via an Internet search engine will lead you down a path of enlightenment.

The Learn2GroomDogs.com Facebook page is a great resource for photos.

You can find breed clubs, breeders, breed history, breed standards and fabulous photos of even the most obscure breed of dog or cat. Even if you've never seen – or groomed a particular breed before, you can rapidly educate yourself. You'll have the confidence – and knowledge – to talk with any owner about 'their breed.'

Need a refresher on what a breed looks like? Jump onto the computer and do a search of Google Images. You'll be amazed at what you can pull up. If you are looking for high quality pets, add a show title such as; 'AKC Champion ' By doing this, you can filter through many of the images.

As with any internet search, you are going to find good with the bad. The more general knowledge you have about pets and grooming, the better you will be able to sort through the wealth (and garbage) typically found out on the internet.

Webinars: We are starting to see this form of learning pop up in our industry. Webinars have been around for years yet the grooming industry has been slow to embrace their power. Many technically savvy groomers are starting to share their knowledge in webinars. Some webinars are free; others charge a nominal fee to participate.

Facebook, Blogs & Online Forums: With the use of social media outlets, anyone can chat with anyone from anywhere; across the nation or around the globe. No one is worried anymore about 'the competition.' If you have a question, post it. If you have a fun story to share, post it.

If you need to vent (professionally please!), post it. Never before has it ever been so easy, and economical to share ideas, grooming tips and knowledge. No one should feel isolated or alone anymore. The outlets to reach out to fellow professionals are simply remarkable via the World Wide Web.

Seminars: You'll find seminars every grooming trade show around the country. You will also find privately held seminars too. You'll find these private seminars hosted by; distributors, product manufactures, grooming schools, grooming salons or even the professional themselves. These seminars area a great place to get your questions answered about any aspect of the grooming profession.

Private Coaching & Clinics: Need a tutor? Need a coach? One of the best ways to perfect a skill or a trim style is with personal, hands-on assistance. Many of the top stylists are available to help you privately or in a smaller group setting. Many are well rounded in many aspects of the grooming industry. Others will specialize in trim styles, grooming techniques, sales and marketing or business operations. Many will travel great distances to set up coaching sessions.

Find a business professional you admire. Contact them and ask if they offer private lessons. Many do or they host small clinics where you can all share the cost of the session.

Trade Shows: Going to a grooming show is still one of the most refreshing ways to learn. Most trade shows have a wide variety of vendors there too so you can speak directly to the sales representative about a product or service they offer. Sit ringside at a grooming competition.

You'll be blown away at the style and trim quality being found with high level pet stylist. Trade show promoters are always seeking out a wide variety of speakers and topics to present at their shows. Can't get to a show? Some of the larger shows and grooming competitions are now available via streaming video on the internet.

I remember being in Croatia on a sailboat a few years back. I was able to watch the World Team Grooming Competition right from my laptop as the competition took place in Belgium. Very exciting!

Certification Programs: We are seeing more and more certification program become available whether it is for dog grooming, cat grooming, pet first aid or business management. At this point, most programs are voluntary but all are worth their weight in gold. Some of the programs can be completed in a day or a weekend. Others will take months, or even years of study and testing before successfully completing the full program. A few of the programs even have Apps set up for your technical device

Education, skill enhancement and effective communication are the keys to a successful career. Never underestimate their importance. One of the greatest inspirations in any career is continued growth. Learning is the key to everlasting success. With learning trends today, it's never been easier! Never stop learning.

When looking at learning opportunities, I always encourage you to research the quality of the material, the program or the lesson. You will only increase your knowledge if the information being shared or taught is from a true professional. A professional that has years of expertise and a resume to back it up!



www.learn2groomdogs.com

Your most valuable asset is YOU

Look in the mirror and say "I am my most valuable asset."

Tell yourself this every day! You are the most important thing about your life and your business. Despite the fact that you may think it is your car, or your favorite thinners, or even your bank account, it is YOU that is the most important part of the success equation. Without you driving the car, or using the thinners or using the money, those things are worthless.

And the part that makes you unique is your mind. Your ability to think and reason before taking action is a precious gift. And throughout life, we need to improve our thinking. The ability to improve our quality of thinking makes it easier to solve problems. Our ability to think positively lets us see opportunity around us. Negative thinking shuts doors to success.

I recently saw a report on ABC News about how our new dependency on using search engines even GPS makes us dumber? WOW! In the 'good old days' you used a map and directions you wrote down to get from Point A to Point B. You may have stopped when you were lost to ask for directions. Then you had to remember those directions. But now you just program a device that tells you to turn left or right. You actually lose problem solving skills as a result.

Just think of how many people struggle to figure out math problems when they don't have a calculator.

People used to memorize phones numbers, addresses, and birthdays. Now they are stored away as reminders in our cell phones. Sure it makes things easier, but it turns our mind to mush in the process. I have read that the brain has an unlimited ability to memorize facts. So why turn that ability off?



You need to invest regularly in self-improvement and professional development. You can open your mind to knowledge by attending a seminar at a tradeshow. Or you can exchange information in online forums and places like Facebook. You can open up a copy of the AKC Complete Dog Book and memorize facts about your favorite breed. You have to exercise your brain the same as any other part of your body.

Dedicate yourself to lifelong learning. Why stop now? I continue to learn from the top professionals around me. There are always new products and new standards to talk about. Many groomers are inventing their own products. And almost all of them are happy to share their knowledge with you.

With positive thinking and lifelong learning, you can continue to find new ways to be a value to your customers. You can jump years ahead of your competition by developing new skills that are in demand. By valuing yourself as your biggest asset, you can catapult your career and life to higher levels.

Occupational Athletes

That's what my chiropractor is calling our profession of pet grooming. All those years of bending, lifting, hoisting, twisting, and reaching certainly takes a toll on the body!

And let's not even talk about the repetitive motion stuff! Or where our hearing levels are at – what did you say? Have you ever thought about what our lungs look like? Yuck!

Yes! We definitely fit the bill of 'occupational athletes'. We know many of our Learn2GroomDogs.com Training Partners have been afflicted with injuries or conditions that have really made their careers painful. And that includes me.

I was recently in such terrible pain that I could not move my arm. It came on suddenly, but was – and still is – the result of years of repetitive motion and strain. I am currently in therapy for this. It has made it difficult to do anything at all let alone grooming. I was even unable to use the computer for quite some time

Pain killers, ice packs, splints and physical therapy for me!

It took many years to happen. When it did, I was unable to work. Most groomers are independent business owners who cannot be sidelined for a long time. If I still depended on using a scissors and clipper every day, along with the other physical requirements that grooming demands, I would be out of work. It has only been very recent that I am able to really feel comfortable during my daily routine.

Sometimes you are quickly inflicted, like with a bite or scratch – other times it takes years of abuse before you feel the effects. The conditions come on slowly as a minor ache or pain. Before you know it, you are totally sidelined from your career. New groomers entering the field will have the same conditions and ailments that many industry veterans are struggling with right now.

One of the most important things is taking care of your body now. You might not have time to go to a gym and work out, but you can do shoulder rolls between grooms. And when you consider that grooming is a real contact sport, it wouldn't hurt to stretch yourself, just like an athlete. Wrist rolls are easy to do and so is self-massage of wrist, arms, elbows and shoulders. Self-massage the base of your skull can increase blood flow to the brain and is very relaxing, too.

Or maybe you treat yourself to a real massage every now and then. It works wonders! If you have had a great week, treat your team to some chair massages right in the salon. Maybe you can find a local masseuse who has some dogs that need grooming.

And you must really ask yourself, "Am I in good shape right now?" Many people need to lose weight, eat right and maintain a healthy lifestyle. This will help us for years AFTER we retire from the business. Pain and healing become harder to deal with when we get older. Prevention can go a long way in extending your career as a groomer and your entire lifetime, too.



Marketing Your Salon in a Fun & Colorful Manner

A well-made, brightly colored bow or bandanna is one of your best marketing tools. The eye is naturally attracted to bright colors. No matter how beautiful the grooming, a pet will attract attention faster if it is sporting a bright color.

Applying bows or bandannas as a finishing touch on a fabulous groom is a sure way to generate interest. Interest, that is, in you, the person who got that animal looking so fine in the first place.

The number one sales tool for any business is referrals from word of mouth advertising!

I learned this when I was very young, with our family's first dog. When we traveled, we'd send our Golden Retriever to a local kennel. Upon picking her up, she'd always be freshly bathed and wearing a simple piece of felt fabric attached to her collar in the form of a bow. The color would change with the seasons, but this simple bow was there every time.

In our small community, everyone walked their dogs. As we stopped and chatted, people always noticed the felt bow. That was the opening we needed to share the name of the kennel and how wonderful their services were. If that basic little bow was not there, the kennel name would never have been mentioned and a marketing opportunity missed.

I carried this lesson over into my grooming business. No dog ever stepped out of my salon or mobile van without a bright finishing touch. (Unless a client requested No Bows. But that didn't happen very often.) The bows were always subtle and very tastefully made.

Successful people know paying attention to minor details is critical. Bows and finishing touches are part of the entire service package.

Colorful bows add a great finishing touch. Making attractive bows does require some finesse. It takes a bit of time to learn. But once you figure out a method that works well for you, you will be limited only by your own creative spirit and time.

Many professional groomers and stylists use down time to create bows. They use this time the same way that many people use knitting or crocheting to relax. However, if basic bow tying just isn't for you, there are many companies that specialize in wonderful, ready-to-use bows. I encourage you to use them!

There are thousands of ways to market your services as a professional pet groomer. The number one rule of any marketing campaign is to capture potential clients' attention in a fun and tasteful way.

Choosing to accessorize a freshly groomed dog with a bow or bandana is a highly successful marketing opportunity. Adding a spark of color to a pet can be the perfect way to get owners talking about your pet service business.

Speed & Efficiency: Clocks are Your Score Keepers

My husband Marc and I just did a private salon lesson on one of our recent road trips. We asked the salon owner what she wanted us to focus on during our time there so we could be better prepared. The request was simple. Speed.

Most of her staff struggled to get even the simplest trims done in under an hour. Bath. Blow dry. Haircut. Even a basic #7F all trim on a smaller drop coated breed was daunting to some of them.

We walked in and saw a well-organized salon. It was bright. It was clean. The layout allowed for efficiency. The equipment was all top-notch. Hmmm, we wondered. Why was turning a small to mid-sized dog such a challenge for them?

Then it hit us. There were hardly any clocks visible. We only spotted one clock in the main room. A smaller digital wall clock set on military time. The owner of the salon was career military gal who is now retired. I understand why she opted for that style of time keeper. (And thank you Lori for your service to your country!) I'm just not so sure that style of time keeping is the right for a staff of non-military groomers. Plus, when I was across the room, I could barely read it clearly. The clock was just too small!

If you want to be a successful groomer that can pay their bills while bringing customers back again and again – you need to embrace time. Watch the time. Track the time. Race against the time. Everything we do with professional pet grooming involves time. You need to be highly aware of every hour, minute and second. Ideally, a professional groomer should be able to turn a small to medium size simple trim in an hour or less. That includes the bath, the dry, and the trim.

The first thing we suggested to this team was; GET CLOCKS! Nothing fancy, they just needed to be large enough to be easily seen across the room. The simpler, the better. Every room in the salon needed one hung on the wall. By having a clock in every room, it makes it easy for the groomers to track their own time with just a quick glance. But clocks aren't enough. Every person working on the pets needs to have a watch on too.

For those individuals that are really looking to increase their speed, having a timer at their stations can be really beneficial. Before you can start timing yourself, it's helpful to know what your starting point is.

Break the groom down into sections. Bathing. Drying. Clipping the body. Trimming the feet. Rounding the feet. Scissoring the legs. Styling the head. If you don't know how long it takes you to do each one of these items, you'll never be able to improve upon your 'best time.'

And it's far easier to break it down into segments than to look at the dog as a whole. After all, who doesn't want the opportunity to win at even one or two smaller segments than to get frustrated when they don't hit the time goal with the overall trim?

Once you know how long it takes you to do each segment — now you can set goals and objectives to beat your 'best time.' Push yourself. Make a game out of it. The clock will be your score-keeper. Each time you gain even a few seconds, you've won a mini victory! But you'll never be able to do that unless you can easily watch the clock. Even with the clock watching, always remember, speed and efficiency can never come at the sacrifice of quality or safety.



www.learn2groomdogs.com