Your Dog Ain’t So Special

Imagine that?
Dog trainers finding common ground

Where we’re headed

• Discussion
• A tale of two organizations
• A model for innovation
Finish this sentence

• The only thing two dog trainers can agree on is . . .
  . . . that the third dog trainer is doing something wrong.
  – Usually they can’t agree on what that something is
  – Population dependent

Balkanization
Institutional cultures

Barriers to innovation
Is it just us?

- Divisiveness not unique to dog trainers
- Human trait
  - Increasingly common & intense
  - Impact of modern culture
- Aggravating factors

So many ways. So many factors.

- Objectives
- Tradition
- Philosophy
- Culture (macro and organizational)
- Resources
- Available dogs
- Consequences (results)
A tale of two organizations

- Seattle PD K9 Unit
  - Progressive trainer(s)
    - Tim Tieken & me
    - Crossover
  - Existing staff considered “handlers”
  - Conservative professional culture

- Guide Dogs for the Blind
  - Progressive trainer
    - Michele Pouliot
    - Crossover
  - Existing staff considered trainers
  - Pragmatic professional culture

Resistance to change

- Seattle PD K9 Unit
  - High cost of failure
    - Perceived risk
  - Comfort zone
    - Steeped in old ways
  - Broad shift in philosophy and procedures
  - One dog and out

- Guide Dogs for the Blind
  - High cost of failure
    - Perceived risk
  - Comfort zone
    - Steeped in old ways
  - Less broad shift in philosophy and procedures
  - Long tenure
Implementing change

- Seattle PD K9 Unit
- 1 testbed dog
- Two new handlers
  - By policy senior handlers were not retained
- Offered R+ option
- 16 weeks to finished on-street product
  - Methods developed on the fly
- Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Non-mission-critical dogs were testbeds
- Experienced trainers tested small repertoire
- Opportunity to explore techniques
- Outcome-based timeline

Results

- Seattle PD K9 Unit
  - High initial success
    - 75% shorter transition
  - Skill gap
  - On again, off again progress – 16 years
  - 85-90% of goal
- Guide Dogs for the Blind
  - Gradual phase-in
    - Sub-skills to full skills
    - Key staff to all staff
  - Geographic & tenure
  - Steady progress – 14 years
  - 90% of goal
The J-curve of change

Who is affected?
When?

Original Staff Baseline
Leaders’ Baseline
Natural decline
Perception Gap
Recovery & Improvement

Five steps to greatness

• Cultivate curious open-mindedness
• Foster true discipline
• First who then what*
• Harness the Flywheel Effect*
  – Hard at first then easier
• Apply the Hedgehog Concept*
  – Passion, Best-at, Low-hanging-fruit

"Good to Great"—Jim Collins, PhD—Harper Press—2001
Kaizen

- Continual pursuit of improvement
- Initial assessment
  - If you don’t measure, you don’t know
- Ongoing experimentation
  - Pushing, not shattering, envelopes
- Ongoing assessment

Wrapping up

- Embrace the duality
- Anticipate the J-curve
- Cultivate curious open-mindedness
- Pick the right people
- Flywheels and hedgehogs rule
- Always seek improvement