

# 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



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## **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**





## 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

## **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**

