
Life Lessons Learned Along the Way: Learning to Forget but Still Remembering

We continue our series of personal, impactful stories that have shaped how we practice law.

By Richard M. Mitchell, Esq., CPCU

I have had rescue dogs for as long as I can remember. They are amazing animals that come with life experience. This means they generally have some baggage. Some of these experiences can hold them back. If they can't move past them, it can stop them in place.

Odie is one of the best dogs I have ever had. He has had a great life, but it wasn't always that way. It could have been far more difficult. As a pup, he had a rough start. He was removed from a very bad situation caused by some very bad people. I remember the first time I met him at his foster mom's house. I knew a little bit about his history, and truthfully, I was somewhat apprehensive about this dog.

First my wife went in the house and he was so excited. Then my son and daughter entered. Immediately, he was theirs. The big test was Penny, who was already our girl. They hit it off immediately. Then it was my turn. His disposition promptly changed when he saw me. He grew completely quiet. He was very uncertain about me and what I was going to do. His foster mom gave me a piece of cheese. "Give him this," she said, "then he will know you are his friend. He likes cheese." Yes, as the next many years proved, he definitely likes cheese. Once I gave it to him, he turned back to the dog he was two minutes earlier. Clearly, however, something about me reminded him of his past, which we both had to overcome.

By the way, he and Penny became a bonded pair. For years, they acted like a long married couple. They knew each other's moves before they made them. I was greatly concerned about Odie when Penny passed away a couple of years ago. Thankfully, he has Poppy. He seems to think she is his granddog. He tries

to teach her and sometimes she listens.

Odie has had a tremendous life, which we have shared. He has traveled to parts of this great country that many humans will never see. He has been in lakes, rivers and mountains, and I know his life has been fantastic. He moved past some bad experiences to have far better ones. Even now, however, I occasionally see in him a glimmer of memory. He will see or feel something that appears to remind him of some long ago event. He remembers it, but does not carry it.

So what can you learn about the practice of law from a dog? Apparently quite a bit. In our business, and our everyday lives, things happen that make our paths difficult. Sometimes we cling too long to events that are significant, but from which we must move on. It is important to remember those events and the lessons they teach us. It is equally important to use them in making our lives, and practices, stronger as we continue to grow. Otherwise, they may stop us in place.