



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Canine Master on Pet Life Radio - Episode #6 Introduction to Service Dogs and the Faking of Service Dogs

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Hi. I'm Chris Onthank, your host for the Canine Master Radio show. This week we're going to talk about the service dog industry and to try to better understand the process of how you get a dog to become a service dog. What is the role these dogs play in the lives of those who depend on them? You know, another hot topic in today's news is the faking of service dogs. I can't tell you how many times I go around and I see people saying, "Well, I have a service dog." And I just can't believe it because I know that the people are basically just putting vests on the dog. So we're going to talk about that. And you know, who does it hurt when you pass off your pet as a service dog when it really isn't a service dog? What is a service dog? A service dog is trained to do a specific task, a task for a person that he or she cannot do because of a disability.

Are people taking advantage of the lack of regulations in the industry in order to get their dogs easily get onto airplanes and into restaurants and to go around with them? What are your feelings about this? What does it mean for the industry, for those who depend on service dogs for their basic independence when people are faking their own dog? What does that do to them? We're also going to be having a guest later in the show, Gina Kaiser, a client, a previous client of mine that became one of my trainers for about 10 years and now works training service dogs with Paws With A Cause and she's going to educate us about service dogs, the process, the people they serve, and we're going to talk a little bit about the fakers out there. We have a lot to cover.

A service dog is a type of assistance dog specifically trained to help people who have a disability. A service dog is a dog trained to do a specific task for a person. That's basically your definition. So if you're not falling underneath that definition, you don't have a service dog. The number one objective of a person seeking a service dog, it's what? It's being able to be independent. Independence is so important and there's people that need service dogs for visual difficulties, hearing impairments, PTSD, which is post traumatic stress disorder, seizure, diabetes, autism.

There's a bunch of things out there that people have disabilities that may benefit from a service dog. You know, these dogs can be trained to help in many different ways such as

alerting people for help, alerting prior to a seizure. The dog starts to nudge you when he can smell that the seizure's coming. Alerting to the changes in your glucose levels. It's amazing what dogs can do. Dogs also can open up the doors, the refrigerators, the drawers, turn off light switches, turn on light switches, pick up items, you know, assist with mobility to help them, I've seen dogs pull people with wheelchairs, and also to mitigate the challenges of post traumatic stress disorder.

If a person from the military is having a nightmare, a dog can wake them up from that nightmare and help comfort them, but it's not comfort. It would have to be performing a specific task. Remember. They also assist the hearing impaired, those with autism, and just so many more things. The service dog must be trained to perform a specific task and I'm going to keep on saying that today because that's what it is. A service dog performs a specific task.

You know, therapy and emotional support dogs are not considered service dogs. So many people, I see, you'd say, "Oh, is this a service dog?" "Oh, yes sir. I need this dog for emotional support. I have anxiety issues." You know, that's not a service dog. If there is a difference between a working and a therapy and a service dog, is there a difference? Yes there is. You know, just because I have a therapy dog, it's not a service dog. If I have a working dog, it's not a therapy dog and it's not a service dog. Those are different things. Any dogs serving as a specific purpose that requires specialized training is considered a professional working dog.

A US service dog is a dog that has been certified to do specific things such as search and rescue. These kinds of dogs, yes, they can go on airplanes. Yes, they can go in restaurants. Police dogs are US service dogs, but a dog that is an emotional support dog or dog because you have anxiety or a therapy dog, these are dogs that cannot go in restaurants. They cannot go in airplanes and are not considered service dogs. A livestock dog, a dog that does herding, not a service dog. A sled dog who transports people and goods, they're not a service dog as well. Guard dogs protecting your property are not.

Now, a US service dog could also be a detection dog. So that dog may be able to go into hospitals, but they can't go into surgeon's rooms. They can't go into where operations are done, but they can go into restaurants. Military dogs again, police dogs. Yes, US service dogs are able to go around, but again, the general population is not going to get access to these types of dogs unless they have a disability.

So anyway, I see people come to me all the time. They say, "You know, Chris, I want to get my dogs on the airplane. I don't want to stick them down below in a crate. I want to bring my dog with me to the restaurant. It gets separation anxiety. I want to bring my dog into all the stores and food stores, grocery stores, you know, and I'm going to go get my dog become a therapy dog. I'm going to go get them certified in therapy work."

Problem is, is that legally, that dog is really not allowed to go into restaurants. He's not allowed to go into every store that doesn't allow dogs. If your dog does not perform a specific task, people, that's the deal. So a therapy dog is just trained to provide comfort and affection and entertain people in nursing homes and hospitals and prisons and schools.

They also get into retirement homes as well. Therapy dogs are great and they definitely perform a service, but they're not a service dog.

So what we're going to talk about now is service dogs are protected under the 1990, there's a code of federal regulation for Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA, and this grants specific rights and prohibits discrimination related to service dogs. This legislation provides access to service animals working with their humans in any area where the public is permitted. This includes malls and restaurants, theaters, hotels, amusement parks and trains, buses and planes. Anywhere a disabled person goes, their service companion may follow.

The animals aren't required to even wear special collars. And I think this is where we get into problems. They don't have to have a vest on. They don't even have to have a harness or a certification certificate. The ADA makes it unlawful to require proof of a disability or identification of a service dog. So if your dog is coming with you and somebody comes up to you and goes, "Hey, you can't bring your dog in here." And you can say, "Well, this is my service dog." They're not allowed to ask you, "Well, can I see your papers?" They're not allowed to ask you what your disability is. By law, all they can say is, "Is your dog required because of a disability?"

It's really specific to the questions that they can ask you. "Is the dog required because of a disability?" And you can say yes or no. "Yes it is." And then the person in the store or the restaurant can say, "What task or service has the dog been trained to do?" Now, that may give you a little bit of insight, you know. "Well my dog, his task, he's been trained to nudge me when the seizure's coming on." Something like that.

But you can't ask a lot of questions. A dog owners answer to these two questions must be taken at face value. There's no proof that's needed. If a service dog is out of control and exhibits behavior, like it's getting aggressive and starts to threaten people, and people and the customers are getting upset, the law allows the business to ask the owner to remove the dog from the premises. That's it. As long as they still try to provide their service, for example, with, you know, they have takeout, you know, "Here, listen, I'm sorry your dog is becoming misbehaved in the restaurant, why don't we get you some food to go?" They can do that. Otherwise, a business can risk accusations of discrimination as well as charges, fines, and even lawsuits.

Okay. Let's say we see two Labrador retrievers that are lying side by side each other and one has over 600 hours of training for specific tasks and he wears a service vest and legitimately he has earned it. And then there's a Labrador sitting right next to him or lying down next to them who is also is a nice lab, lying down there nice and quietly. And this person has gone online and purchased a vest with fake numbers saying this is a service dog. So what's the difference?

In the public, there's really no difference. In the world of tasks that can be performed, this is the only difference. The only difference is what can the dogs truly do? How have they been trained? So if I'm sitting here looking at two labs and they both have vests on, in the public eye, there's really no difference between these two dogs.

So here lies the problem. Since no certification is required and the businesses are really limited to the kind of questions that they can ask, many people are taking advantage of this. Because there's a loophole in the ADA in claiming that their dogs are service dogs when they're not. Many people are saying, "This is a service dog" when it's really not. I mean, this is amazing to me. How can people get away with this? But they are and it's just so wrong.

Fake service dogs have become such a problem. And you know what they're doing, they're giving some real service dogs a bad name because these dogs aren't trained like real service dogs. These dogs are giving service dogs a bad name and I see this over and over and over again. People are bringing their dogs in. They're not well behaved. Maybe they defecate in the restaurant, maybe they become aggressive when the waiter bends over them.

Maybe they become aggressive towards children. And people are saying, "Well that was a service dog. Maybe we shouldn't allow service dogs at all." And you know, the problem is is that this can really affect the people that really need them. The people that really need to gain access to environments, restaurants, and on airplanes, is your dog can really mess these people's lives up and really make a real difference between people who really need service dogs and people that really don't.

What can we do about this? The law needs to be revised as far as I'm concerned. It needs to reflect the support of the specific ADA criteria for certification of service dogs. In other words, we need to figure out how we can differentiate between the fakers and the real ones. So several states, such as Florida, are now making it a crime to have a fake service dog punishable by fines and even jail time. I love this.

Who does the certification really matter to? Well, it only really matters to the person with a disability wanting to do the best they can with the situation that they have. To assist them and maintain their independence and that's what really matters. You know, it costs between \$20,000 to \$50,000 to raise and train a service dog. It takes many, many, many hours with highly trained trainers, professionals, to work with these dogs to get them ready to go out into the environment and to be a dependable service dog.

So, all the service dogs must be house trained and they must know basic obedience commands, but they are also required... There are ten basic specialty commands they are taught. I don't know, like nudging you if the phone rings if you're deaf or jumping on you if there's a smoke detector and waking you up. There's 10 different things that they need to know. After this, the dogs are taught to do specific things, but it's amazing the amount of training. It takes upwards of like 600 hours of training to accomplish this.

So when looking for a legitimate service for someone with a disability... You know, I have a son who is deaf and I have also been working recently with a woman who is deaf, working with the dog to become a service dog. And it's amazing. It's taken me almost a year on and off to work with these dogs. And I see the service that this dog does for this woman. I look at my son and I say, "Boy, wouldn't it be great if my son could have a dog nudge him if there was a fire in the house because smoke alarms are not going to be heard by a child." My son doesn't hear the phone ring. My son doesn't see a car coming from behind him when he's riding a bike or he's walking down the street.

This is the kind of situation where a service dog would be very, very helpful. You know, what I would recommend is that you go to find a certified trainer and they need to be assistance dogs trainers and they need to be associated with the ADI in some way. You can go to www.assistedogsinternational.org and that should get you where you need to be. The trainers there are credentialed through the Yin Yang and they go through rigorous training themselves to learn how to train the dogs for the service industry. So I recommend doing that.

You know, organizations such as Paws with a Cause, they receive donations to help defray the cost of these dogs. And a lot of times these dogs don't even cost the owner anything. They're actually given to the person with the disability, which I think is amazing. So we have more resources for you online on our website, caninemaster.com. You can take a look at that.

I'd now like to introduce you to Gina Kaiser, as I said, a long time friend of mine who worked with me for years and a trainer who now works with Paws with a Cause and she's joining us today. Welcome Gina.

Chris: How are you? It's Chris.

Gina: Good. Chris, how are you?

Chris: I'm doing great. How's it down there in Florida? Nice and warm.

Gina: Oh, my God, the weather is gorgeous.

Chris: You're so lucky.

Gina: Our fall is below 80s. It's gorgeous here.

Chris: Yeah. Well, you know Gina, today on the show we're talking about service dogs, and I'm really happy to have you on the show and I really want you to tell me a little bit about Paws with a Cause and what you're doing there with them.

Gina: Well, Paws with a Cause is a nonprofit organization that provides service dogs to those with disabilities to assist them with their activities of daily living and foster their independence. They're completely nonprofit.

Chris: It's nonprofit. I was talking about this a little earlier. So basically the dogs don't cost anything to the beneficiary, is that correct?

Gina: That is correct.

Chris: Wow, that's amazing. So what's the general value of a dog that... You know, the amount of training. How many hours does a dog go through when you're-

Gina: You know, it varies. It depends. It depends on the tasks the dogs need to do. We don't

cookie cutter train the dogs. They're trained specifically for the tasks that are needed. So we custom train the dog. So it depends on how many tasks the dog needs to do. If I have a very highly disabled client that doesn't have to do more tasks, than another dog where maybe the client has good upper body function. So it just depends. The hours of training just depends on what tasks, how many tasks needs to be done, how fast the dog learns, that kind of stuff.

Chris: Are we talking hundreds of hours? Thousand hours?

Gina: I would say hundreds.

Chris: Wow, that's amazing. When do you start these dogs? You start them as little puppies or do you get them older or...?

Gina: Well, at eight weeks old, they go to their puppy raisers and those puppy raisers just socialize them, bringing them everywhere, exposing them to all kinds of places, people, sights, sounds and plus all the normal puppy stuff, house breaking and all that stuff. And then they come into headquarters at about 18 months old where they have their formal training. There are three phrases, the Paws has three phases of training, and they go through those phases till they finish.

Chris: So when you get the dogs at 18 months, are you testing these dogs? I mean obviously some dogs aren't allowed into the system, I would assume.

Gina: Well, this is how it works. These dogs are temperament tested first. So no donor dollars are used at all for their testing to temperament test them. Once they pass their temperament test up at headquarters, they make sure the dog has the qualities we want. We want the qualities that they're confident. They're not vicious in any way. They have a strong willingness to learn. They have a very strong work ethic because we need a dog that is going to keep trying at the task.

You know, for instance, I had a client, she spilled everything out of her pocketbook and the dog had to retrieve like 25 objects. You know, the dog can't retrieve five and say, okay, that's enough. You know, so we need a strong work ethic, a real good willingness to learn and a real confident dog. Those are the traits we look for.

So all that's done at headquarters and then when they come in headquarters in Michigan at 18 months, I'm a field rep, I do the needs assessment, which tells us how to place the dog and what kind of dog we need, what tasks the dog needs to do. If I can walk you through that, what we do is I did this long interview. It's videotaped. In that interview, I see what the person needs, what tasks they need to do.

During that interview, I want to know about their lifestyle, where they go, what they do. Is there any specific places they go the dog needs to be trained for? You know, like they're going to rock concerts. I mean one puppy raiser brought her dog to a bowling alley on a boat. We want to make sure the dog will fit the lifestyle of the person. Also, during that interview, I have them command my demo dog on camera and I have to see how they handle my dog, how they praise my dog.

I'll have them handle the dog in general and what their demeanor is with the dog. All is videotaped and goes back to headquarters. Once it's back at headquarters, I'm basically the eyes and ears of the trainer here for that part of it. And then the next step would be they, the applicant has been screened and is the kind of applicant that's needed. And then they get fundraising in place to get the dog. Then they start looking for the proper dog to fit this client.

Once that's done, then they start training. And then once the dog is fully trained for all the tasks, they make a certification video, which was sent to me and I fly up and get the dog. I bring it back and I place the dog with the client and teach the client how to use the dog. And if there are tasks that the client needs that haven't been taught, I train the dog then to do those tasks with the client.

Chris: Wow. Do you ever find that there's not a right match? Like, even though the dog is doing specific needs, the dog just doesn't bond with that person?

Gina: To tell you the truth, I've never had a not bonding problem because there are things that we have to do in training when the dog is placed and I haven't had a dog not bond, but I have had a dog that's not quite the right match for the client. That happens occasionally. So we have to find a different dog. It doesn't happen, I don't think very often. There is really a lot of integrity at Paws with a Cause and they really do a lot of good information gathering and the videotaping and watching the client and they really do a good job at matching.

Chris: Oh, that's great. That's great. Do you ever have somebody who just really isn't into dogs that much and maybe it's their first dog?

Gina: I haven't had that. I have had people where it's their first dog, but a lot of these clients we have either have had the traumatic accident that has caused it or well some of them since birth, but they've had dogs around them and then they are seeking out. These clients are seeking out a service dog. So they're-

Chris: Oh, yeah. I can't imagine that. I mean by the time it must just give them so much more independence. I mean they must be thrilled, I would think most of them.

Gina: It's amazing. I got to tell you, I had a client with quadriplegia and she had a health care worker come in in the morning, get her out of bed, shower her, give her her meal and left. And she was with that. That dog was her help for the rest of the day. And then at night, the healthcare worker would come back, get her fed, put her in her bed, and that was it. She was with the dog all night and the dog tended to her needs.

Chris: Wow.

Gina: She wouldn't be able to live alone otherwise. She lived alone.

Chris: You know, what does it cost Paws with a Cause - what does it cost them per dog approximately?

Gina: Well, Paws with a Cause, it's about \$30,000.

Chris: \$30,000.

Gina: Yeah.

Chris: Well, that's amazing. And then you get these people, this is something we were talking about earlier, who fake that they have a service dog.

Gina: Oh, it's a real pet peeve of mine.

Chris: You know, and this is really driving me nuts. You know, recently I heard about the airlines are now only allowing so many service dogs per flight. So if you have a legitimate service dog, and then somebody who's cheating them, they may not be able to get on the flight.

Gina: Actually, I believe it's so many dogs. They don't specify service dogs because of course, you can bring a dog in a carrier on a plane. So it doesn't-

Chris: Oh, yeah.

Gina: You know, the little dog can fit under the seat. So I believe they only allow so many dogs per flight. And if you fake... You know, you have a service dog and they let the dog on, they can't get on the flight. It might be-

Chris: Yeah, it's amazing.

Gina: You know, it might be so many service dogs per flight. I'm not sure about that.

Chris: Well, maybe you're right. I may have gotten that wrong. Yeah.

Gina: You know, I don't know. I just know that there are so many dogs per flight, and you might be right about that. I know there's so many dogs and if they take up those spaces, you know.

Chris: You know, when I used to fly with my US service dog Sadie, they would always put me where there was leg room so that the dog could lie down because they didn't want the dogs up on the chair. So they would-

Gina: Oh, no, no. Because the dogs cannot be on the seat. They have to be on the floor.

Chris: That's right. So the thing that I was saying was that there's only so many of those bunk, sort of those where there is space in front of you where the dog can lie down.

Gina: Well, maybe since you've had Sadie, maybe things have changed. Because I know now, I mean I've flown with service dogs a lot when I take them back and forth from headquarters, and they have to go under a seat and my 75 pound lab could curl up in a seat and we were in the middle seat of three with three people, three seats taken. So they don't have to have a bulkhead. They can sit anywhere in the plane.

Chris: Oh, that's great.

Gina: They are trained to do that. The only law I know of is if there is an empty seat on the plane somewhere, it should be put next to me. So the dog has more room.

Chris: Oh, that's great.

Gina: But if there's no other extra seats. The service dog must be under the seat.

Chris: Wow. That's-

Gina: It can really fit. 70 pound dog. He fit under there.

Chris: That's amazing. Well, I only flew a few times with Sadie and they always put me in the bulkhead right there. So I'd lie her down on the ground.

Gina: Yeah, they try to. They try to, but they can't always. These dogs are trained to sit anywhere in the plane and fly.

Chris: So you do see these people faking their service dogs. Doesn't that infuriate you, Gina? I mean-

Gina: Yeah. It does and I've started confronting people. I'll just go up to them and say when I know it's not a service dog. It's like a Papillon and the person isn't... You know, obviously can hear because they speak to me. I say hello to them and I know they can hear. So it's not a hearing alerting dog and they have no disability I can see, and I'll say, "Oh, you have a service dog. Who is your certifying organization?" Most of the time they'll... I'll say, "I'm a field rep within the service dog organization. Who certifies your dog?" And they're like, "Uh, uh, uh, uh, uh." Of course, everybody's petting the dog and the dog's not behaving nicely. That is the huge giveaway. I'll say, "Oh, how often-"

Chris: Is everybody's petting the dog.

Gina: Right, and the dog's not behaving well, pulling on the leash. That's my bigger cue than whether the person... Because there are disabilities that are not evident or obvious. The big thing is the dog is not behaving well. I'll say, "Oh, how often do you have to recertify your dog?" "Oh, uh, Oh, uh, I don't know." Because Paws with a Cause, our dogs must recertify every two years and to make sure they're working well and they're working well in public and working well with the client. They can't ever answer those questions.

Chris: Is that an ADA?

Gina: ADI.

Chris: Is that an ADA requirement or is that just Pause with the Cause requirement?

Gina: That's just Pause with the Cause. Our certifying-

Chris: So what is the ADA requirement? Isn't that where we find the problems? Is that's where the lax-

Gina: No. Not necessarily. The American with Disability Act, I don't know what they're... I think they just test about how the accessibility of disabled people and things like that.

Chris: Oh, I see.

Gina: The ADI, is the Assistance Dog International. They have certain criteria that they... And that's who Paws with a Cause is affiliated. I shouldn't say affiliated with, but they followed their guidelines.

Chris: With the ADI, is there a certain... You know, you have to certify your dog every so often? Recertify or...?

Gina: You know, I don't know. I don't know. I'd have to defer to Paws for that information. I just know that Paws, as a field rep, I have to recertify dogs every two years. Trainers have to recertify every three.

Chris: So why does the ADI or the ADA, I guess, not require you to walk around with a certificate that tells you you have a certified service dog?

Gina: Well, I am provided that by Paws. Both my dogs, my demo dogs and all my client dogs have an ID. They have an ID with the law behind it. So my dogs have that. When I fly, I have to show it just like I show an ID to get on a plane. So my dogs carry that with them in their capes. But there is no governmental certifying requirement but there's a law, the actual law, which the ADI doesn't have any right to make laws. Only the government can do that. There is no law saying we have to...

Chris: So how do we get this law passed? How do we get these fake service dogs-

Gina: I guess through lawmakers. I guess through lawmakers, you'd have to... It would have to be through governmental agencies.

Chris: I'd love to find a way of-

Gina: I know Florida, at least, Florida has passed the law down here where it's against the law to pass your dog off as a fake service dog.

Chris: Right, right.

Gina: So Florida has passed that.

Chris: I just think that there must be a way to fix this issue because it's becoming a... Everywhere I go, everywhere I go I'd see it.

Gina: It's terrible. It's terrible.

Chris: Yeah.

Gina: It's really terrible. I see it all the time. And the biggest mistake people make, I think... Well it's not the biggest mistake, but it's one of the mistakes they make. They think emotional support dogs, yes, these are service dogs and they're not. That's just not a service dog they have.

Chris: I know, right. They have to perform a task.

Gina: Exactly.

Chris: I ran across a lady at a trade show recently and dogs weren't allowed into the trade show. And she said, "Well, this is my emotional support dog." I said, "Well, what task does it provide?" And she goes, "Well, it makes me feel better and I need her next to me because I have anxiety issues." Well, that's not a service dog.

Gina: No. Because to be a service dog, what does the dog do to mitigate those anxiety issues? You know, for instance, if you had a PTSD dog for instance, okay? And that veteran or a person with a PTSD, if they have bad nightmares and the dog's task is when the person thrashes in bed, the dog jumps on the bed and wakes the person and distracts the thing. Or an anxiety issue would be if someone gets anxious in a crowd and gives the dog a command and the dog gets into someplace open. Those are tasks, not just because your dog is next to you to feel good.

Chris: Okay. So you could have an emotional support dog. It could be a service dog if it did a task.

Gina: It has to do a task.

Chris: Got it.

Gina: I'm not sure what the ADI requirements are. I know our dogs have to do several tasks, not just one.

Chris: Right. Wow. Well, Gina, there's so much to this issue and-

Gina: Oh, I know.

Chris: I really appreciate you coming on the show today.

Gina: Well, thanks for having me. It's always good to talk to you.

Chris: Yeah. Thanks for letting us know what a real service dog is and, and I hope you're doing well and stay nice and warm down there as we freeze our rear ends up here.

Gina: It is nice out here. I can't lie. Come visit.

Chris: Okay. Gina, big hug to you.

Gina: Sending big hugs back to you, Chris. Thanks a lot.

Chris: Bye-bye.

Okay, well that was great to have Gina Kaiser on the show today, you know? That's it for today and I really hope you found our show pretty interesting. You know, we'd love to know your comments. Please. I know this is a very heated issue, and have you joined the conversation, you can always email me at chris@caninemaster.com, and be sure to visit our website, caninemaster.com. C-A-N-I-N-E master.com. So send me your videos and photos so I can see what's going on with your dog and I'll help you master that solution. Bye for now and see you next time on Canine Master Radio where I will continue to help you master the relationship with your dog.