

## **Service Animals In Action**

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**Carol Christopherson**

**Carol Christopherson:** Good morning. This is Shadow. Shadow and Chili. (Indicating two dogs.) One says service dog, one says hearing dog. Service dog, hearing dog. You're going to learn about what a service animal is. That's a big, hot topic. What is a service animal?

How can I tell a service animal from a pet? Pets have no legal rights. Service animals do, and some others do, minimally. What are the basic laws apply to businesses, where the dogs may go and what the service animals do. We know what hearing dogs can do, right? And what some other dogs can do. Where can they go? Do therapy animals have any rights? We're going to talk about that, too. We're also going to talk about emotional service animals, so you will know the difference.

Even though we are Florida Service Dogs and we do training, we teach what the law says. I am not a lawyer but I will teach today what the law says, not the misconceptions and not everybody's perception. I am not coming from a program point of view, nor from an individual trainer's point of view. I teach what the service animal rights are about.

There are legal reasons related to denying you access. Denying access means stopping you at the door and saying you're not allowed in. Or after you're in a place already, they evict you because of your dog. That's, after the fact, and eviction and is still denying access.

To begin, what is a service animal? Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the governing law, Title III covers public access. Access to this hotel, to restaurants and wherever you may go throughout the day, your dog is allowed. The ADA says a service animal is any dog or miniature horse. Before March 15, 2011 it used to be any animal, but that's been narrowed down.

The service animal must have been individually trained to assist a person with a disability. That individual training means it's trained to do specific hearing dog work. It's trained for me, my sounds, my home, my life and my disability. If I give this dog to you, is it your hearing dog now? Legally? No, not legally because it has not been trained for you. Pretty easy to change it over for you needs? Well, you might have a screaming kid. I don't have kids. You might have a microwave, I don't have a microwave. You might have a phone. I don't have a phone. I live alone, I'm divorced, I don't have a phone. My dogs aren't allowed to answer my phone. They don't take messages very well either. You see what I mean? It has to be individually trained for your needs.

The ADA does not include those animals who are still in training. Dogs in training are not included under federal law. Even though this workshop is in Virginia and I'm from Florida Service Dogs, I can talk generically about state rules versus Federal law. However, you need to look up the rules for whatever state you're in. If you're traveling, you need to find out what the state statutes are in the state you're traveling to. This is only for the purpose of giving you more protection. Not to impose stricter guidelines. Whatever rules give you the greater protection apply. In Virginia the rules say we need papers but I don't need any papers. Federal law says I don't need papers.

Service animals under the ADA do not need to be licensed. They don't need to be licensed or certified by anyone, not by a state, nor a trainer nor the Feds and not by any program. If you come to Florida Service Dogs, Inc. and get a dog from us, it's going to be certified with our program certification. It's going to have our orange vest, whether it's a seizure dog, a mobility dog, a panic attack dog, whatever the dog is, we give it an orange vest. Orange is because I'm the president and founder and I have a hearing dog. That's how I created the orange for my program. Everybody thinks we do nothing but hearing dogs, because we have orange vests on our dogs. We do orange for all our dogs.

Actually, the colors legally mean nothing. You can do whatever color you want. You can have a pink vest if you want or have no vest at all. Any documentation of one's disability or the service animal's training cannot be required for allowing access. They can't ask you about certification but they do ask you. That's what happened to me here. "Do you have any papers?" Nope, not required by federal law. Then the person asking said that we copped an attitude. Not true. I just told her what the language said and that was it. She didn't like it. She stared and said, "What?" That happens all the time. Those of you with a service animal probably already know that. People just do not know the language of the law that protects us.

From the dogs point of view, now, although we can be creatures of leisure at times, we're not handicapped dogs. Although at times it appears we ignore you, we're not deaf dogs. Someone asks, "Is that one of those deaf dogs?" Gosh, I hope not. I'm the deaf one. My dog needs to hear to alert me. Last but not least, we may not always see things eye to eye, but we're not blind dogs.

People call service animals all kinds of things. A working dog, a companion dog, a mobility dog, a signal dog. It doesn't matter the term we use for their job; it's a service animal. We individualize them by using the term "hearing dog." Some people say hearing-ear dog, kind of like seeing-eye dog.

How can anybody tell what's a real service dog? (Shows pictures of diverse dogs.) Which one is the service dog? You don't know, do you? How do you tell?

We don't all look disabled. People tell me all the time, "You don't look deaf. Why do you need an interpreter, you don't look deaf." What does deaf look like? What do we look

like? I don't LOOK like anybody but me. They mean I don't sound deaf, I don't speak like I'm deaf. I wasn't born and raised deaf. I was born with a cleft palate, without the hairlip and had a lot of ear, nose and throat trouble growing up as a child. I had the ability to learn lip reading as a child and growing up. There was a kid in the day care whose siblings were deaf. One of the kids was teaching the others, us, to lip read. I was already lip reading at 3 and 4, 5.

My connection to being deaf had nothing to do with my lip reading. I wasn't born and raised deaf, so I'm not culturally Deaf. I'm not the "real deaf," as someone told me the other day. I'm medically deaf. The ABR says there's nothing there. Unless people see a walker, a cane, glasses, implants or hearing aids, people assume we're not disabled. I don't have any of those things visible. The brain doesn't work, so nothing goes in. In one ear and out the other.

My ability to sign developed when as a kid I had friends who were deaf. When I lost my hearing from head injuries in the military, totally unrelated, I already had the skills developed to do what I do now.

Assuming something is the biggest mistake we make. Some animals wear things. You see all kinds of different stuff on animals. We have leather harnesses and all kinds of stuff but That stuff doesn't make them legal. What does? The individual training and the behavior of the dog which is under control makes a legal service dog.

Some wear the stuff, some do not. What if you don't have arms? Are you going to require me to dress my dog every day? I'm laughing, but I knew someone who had no arms. She did everything with her feet. Try dressing your dog with your feet. It's not easy. But everybody's disability is different.

Some people carry papers from a program. I have all kinds of material that says I'm a program trainer. (Points to shirt) My shirt says I'm a trainer. So I'm a trainer, right? It says so right here. Well, I had that embroidered. You can do the same thing. Do you understand the point? You can find a Kinkos or an embroidery shop. You can have business cards printed. I created my own logo years ago at UNF, University Of North Florida. I designed the logo years ago. We redid it with real paws. I did it in '96, when I started the program.

The point is anybody can make this stuff up. The documentation can be made up. That doesn't mean it's legit. I created that logo before I was a trainer. Just remember that nothing is required by federal or state law. No documentation. Yes, that's kind of unfortunate but if documentation were required, it would take us much longer to get a service dog from a program. It might cost lots more money, too. Congress created the ADA with the broadest extent of coverage for people with disabilities to include service animals.

People have to ask questions because they cannot always see a disability by looking at the person. What questions can you be asked? We're on our third version from the Department of Justice. This third version is very clear what people can and can't ask you.

The private entity that has a business serving the public is what is covered under Title III of the ADA. The mom and pop entities who have a restaurant or a hotel is also included under that.

These businesses can ask two questions. The first question a business may ask you is, "Is the animal a service animal required because of a disability?" Is it required because of a disability? Yes. I don't look disabled. They can ask this questions if a disability is not apparent. If you read the language, they can't ask it unless the disability is NOT apparent.

Heart problems, back problems, diabetes, seizures, PTSD, panic attack, emotional psych, hearing loss are all hidden disabilities. We recommend that a business entity just ask if it's a pet. They can disallow pets. Service animals are not pets. A pet can be trained but once it has been trained to do tasks for a person with a disability, then it becomes a what? A service animal.

The distinction between "pet" and "service animal" only matters when you go into a public business. Call it whatever you want until you get to where you need access. If it's trained to do a task for your disability and is under control, the business entity cannot ask us to prove it. We don't carry our papers. Some do. Some don't. I have lots of papers, but if I stand up there and say yes, here's my documentation, and then you come along with your self-trained dog with no certification, how is that going to work? Or maybe you lost your papers or forgot them. Nevertheless, the service animal is trained to do a job for you.

That's why the Department of Justice created the language this way. If the disability is not apparent and it is not apparent what the animal does for the person with the disability, then the business entity may ask the other question. What does the animal do for you? Under the ADA, businesses have a legal right to ask you that. What has it been trained to do for you?

Just because tell you tell them what the dog does doesn't give away your reason. My dog alerts me when the doorbell rings. That doesn't reveal I'm deaf because I have brain damage and head injuries. Saying what the service animal does for you is the way the business distinguishes a pet from a service animal. It's a legitimate way. They can't ask you to prove it. We don't want you to have a seizure to be able to show them that the dog works for you, right?

The federal government is exempt from the ADA because they have their own language from the Rehabilitation Act. There are federal laws and state laws. Lots of laws. The federal laws are the foremost ones. In Florida I fought in 2003, '04 and '05 to get some

language changed. One person can make a difference, yes, you can. Go to your state legislators, city councilmen, tell them the problems you're having. Start yakking at them.

We all know about the federal ADA but not all the public may know it. The Rehabilitation Act covers federal entities, not public entities. I had to fight the Post Office using the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 501. When you have a public access problem with the Post Office, it's not the ADA but Rehabilitation Act section 504 unless its employment issue then it's the section 501. If it's a contract station then its likely not federal property and under the state laws and 504. Federal property is the V.A., the White House, the Capitol in D.C., the national parks, etc. If they receive federal funds, such as some schools, hospitals, transportation's programs, it's considered federal property and covered by the public access section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Housing situations are under a different law called the Fair Housing Act but may over lap into other state and federal laws depending if they receive federal funds. If I'm at my mom's home, she doesn't have to make it accessible. She doesn't need to do anything. Doesn't need to put in ramps. She doesn't have to allow me. It's her private home. If she has two duplexes or places of four or more units together, apartments and condos, that would be a different situation. Nursing homes and other long term housing units may also be covered under the Fair Housing Act.

Emergency shelters that become long-term emergency shelters after a disaster, such as happened after Katrina, are covered by the ADA as well as the Fair Housing Act.

The Fair Housing Act is very liberal. It allows any animal. It doesn't specify. It says a reasonable modification of their policies and practices. That's the reasonable accommodation you're asking for in a housing situation. And it could be the emotional support animal. You still have to have a disability. I'm depressed is covered if it's a medical condition. I don't feel good may or may not be covered depending upon the reason I don't feel good. We're all laughing, but mental disabilities are allowed under the Fair Housing Act the same as physical disabilities. They can take service dogs as well as emotional support animals inside their home. It doesn't have to be trained to do anything, but there has to be a connection between the disability and the animals presence.

You live in an apartment, you're deaf and your dog that answers the door. It's not trained to do that, but it does it naturally. That's allowed under the Fair Housing Act.

That dog can live in the home with you but when you go outside, it has to be trained to go in public. For public access, the dog has to have individual training. Public housing, not necessarily. So the emotional support animal is considered a service animal under that law (Fair Housing Act) That's where we have problems because people assume, oh, I have an ESA, emotional support animal. I can take it anywhere. No you can't. If it's

trained to touch you and stop you from having a panic attack, that's a trained response then its allowed as a service animal. We don't think so, but it is.

The Air Carriers Access Act covers you inside an airplane. However, your animal has to have a "connection." You're depressed and the animal makes you feel good, okay. It doesn't have to be trained but it has to be under control. You walk into the air terminal and the animal must be in a carrier. It is your pet. When you board the plane, the animal now comes under the Air Carriers Access Act. Now the pet is a service animal. You can take the dog out and put it on your lap and do whatever you want to with it. But when you get off the plane, guess what? You lose those service animal rights. Outside the airplane cabin, it's again a pet. Back into a carrier, back in a shopping cart, however you carried it into the plane. It's lost it's rights.

Landlords have the right to ask for connection proof also. Basically they have a legal right to know that you qualify for that accommodation.

Even though in your home and in the cabin of an airplane, an emotional support animal is allowed, the owner has to provide proof of need for an ESA from the doctor. Nevertheless, people generally think they can ask for documents for any animal. If you have a trained hearing dog or a service dog, you don't need proof.

I am deaf, I can walk into an air terminal with an animal trained to alert me to sounds. I don't need any paperwork. If you walk up with your emotional support dog, you have to prove its connection to you. Proof is not about your disability or its severity, just that you need an animal as an accommodation for your disability.

Let's go on to the state laws. Florida's state language covers in-training, which Federal law doesn't. Most states cover in-training to an some extent. In-training is the category that states can actually regulate something about service animals. I have an issue with that and here's why.

Years ago Florida's state language used to require a service animal to have documentation from a recognized school for the purpose of etc. The language required animals in-training to provide proof as well as a trained animal. Yet, we all know Federal law overrides. So, with my Florida documentation, I come to Virginia. Or I come to Virginia without any documentation. The hotel says we need papers. No, Federal law overrides that states no documentation is required.

If your state law has requirements for in-training, guess what the person training the animal is going to learn to do? Say the dog in training is already trained. Hmm ...you can't make me prove it. I'm going to quit saying my animal is in training. My animal is trained to help me. How do you know the difference? You really don't unfortunately. That's what bothers me.

So instead of telling people my animal is still in training and I'm covered under state law but not covered under Federal law, I just stop saying my dog is in training. My dog is trained to help me. End of discussion.

The dog is perfect, a wonderful team. Straight A student. The next day? Oops, you may have a problem. The animal's behavior changes. Good days. Bad days. Remember, certification is really only as good as when you take the test. You have to maintain your training and that's hard to do.

Reviewing a bit, Title I is for employment. When you go to work, unless you work at the Post Office or for some other federal agency, then it's different. Title I is very similar to Section 501 of the Federal rule which says they have to provide a reasonable accommodation at work. Usually the accommodation is provided by the employer, such as a special work spot, or a special desk or light, a ramp. and so on.

We have to inform the employment place that you will be bringing the dog to work. They must allow access unless they can show it's a direct threat or undue burden to their business. They don't provide the dog. The animal is like a walker or a hearing aid, personal devices. A service animal is a personal device, too. The employer's reasonable accommodation for a service animal is to allow access. Heck, our dogs are trained to open doors, so they don't even need to do that. All they need to do is provide access.

Title II, covers accommodations at state and local government and city council meetings and at the state capitol. Title II covers any city park, the police department, some city hospitals, where ever the state is doing business. If you call the police to help you gets accommodation under your service animal rights, most of the police officer will say it's a civil matter. They're right but there's also a state statute and I want the non-complying person arrested. The police will usually say, they can't arrest them. Basically their attitude is deal with it on your own. Go somewhere else.

That's changing though. At a bowling alley the police officer asked if Shadow (points to dog at her feet) is a service dog? He had on a red harness rather than his orange vest. We also had a different harness on the dog. My client who has cerebral palsy and her team had been visiting the bowling ally for three months. Then one day, the manager said, "You can't bring him in here. He doesn't have his vest on." You know by looking that it's a service dog and the kid is disabled. I had to call the police. They tried to stop us three times in a row, even after teaching. You often get to the point where you're teaching them about what the laws says and they're still telling you, "I don't think so." I don't care what they say. These are our rights. And the workers, The bad part for the workers is they're following their employer's rules. They follow the rules and fight later. They do what they're told to do so they won't lose their job. So at this bowling ally, They're fighting for their rights. For the first time since I've been advocating for service animals, a police officer showed up. He knew the ADA. He knew our state statute and that not allowing access for the service animal was a crime. He said, "Well, we'll arrest them if they don't allow you." We didn't have to go to the arrest, thank God. So access is

getting easier. better. I'm hoping someday we won't have to do any convincing. We'll just walk in or roll right in with our service animals or without.

Title III is all about public access. Service animals in training are usually well mannered, groomed, and trained. They still should be. They should have some crate training and manners around food. They should be good with kids and everybody else, right? That's the biggest key, controlling the dog.

Remember when I told you what happens with people with the trained versus the dog in training? Trained, not in training. If there's going to be a problem, I'm not going to tell you it's in training. I have a vest that says training and I have a vest that says trained. If I go somewhere where I need to have access, I put the service dog vest on. I have a dog that's goofy and silly and acts up, I'm going to put the in training vest on so they know he's in training still. Is it legal or not? I don't take dogs out that don't belong out.

A service animal in action can give comfort after a seizure or PTSD, during and after. The language actually states "calming" people with PTSD. That word is what confuses some people. Emotional support animals calm us all the time, don't they? However, calming a person during an attack is a trained act. In the Department of Justice language, "calming" is a task.

When a service dog "protects" a person during a seizure, it doesn't mean my dog is going to protect me from you. Protecting means minimal protection. For example, if you and I are walking down the street and I have a hearing dog and you don't, and someone wants to attach us, you're going to get it before me. Minimal protection is just that. The fact that you have an animal creates a minimum protection.

Remember Federal law overrides state law. If the language in the state rules doesn't happen to cover sight issues or certain types of disabilities, a person with any disability, mental or physical, is covered. Disability is severe impairment of one or more of life's major functions. And a service animal is trained to do a task the person with a disability can't do. It doesn't matter that your state checked the little box that said dogs provided for PTSD are not allowed. It doesn't matter. Federal law overrides.

We train alert and response type dogs. The alert can be lots of things. A hearing dog alert we know about. The dog works during and after the event. Hearing dog hears something, he alerts and goes and gets you. Well, we can also talk about the alerts ahead of time. You heard of medical alert. There are medical alerts such as for a seizure, panic, diabetic crisis. The alert dogs in the case of medical conditions and seizures know ahead of time. The person's smells and body chemistry changes. A lot of dogs do that but we don't always know that they're doing that. Sometimes in training, the dog is doing some kind of crazy repetitive barking or jumping in circles or attacking the person. They're doing all kinds of weird stuff but us humans don't realize what they're doing until six or seven months after placement. Then, we hear, "Oh, so and so says my

dog is doing this, when I do this." Once we start recognizing that the dog is reacting to changing body odors, we start training them. Some programs are training dogs to alert people about foods the disabled person may be allergic to. Dogs' noses are a thousands times more sensitive than ours.

The cadaver dogs and the snow avalanche dogs are smelling the body. Before a person has a seizure, some different odors develops. The dog smells the changes in the body. This happens also for a stroke or a heart attack. You know what a panic attack is like, I'm sure. You get sweats and you get nervous. Your dog knows that before you do.

People say their dog knows when they're sick. That's natural. But in some programs, dogs are actually trained to alert by a scent. Response dogs are what we create. That's pretty much what hearing dogs are trained to do, response-type work. Hear the sounds and respond by alerting us. With our hearing loss, we get stressed and lonely and anxious at times and our dogs are there for that, too. We have our inner ear balance problems and get dizzy. We teach dogs got help people walk, get people off the floor, keep people be calm.

As trainers, our job is to determine whether the dog is going to be dependable or not during any medical incident. Especially in hearing dog work, we want to make sure that the dog isn't going to be aroused by the sounds and attack. If a dog hears, "Ding, ding, ding" and reacts, "I'm going to kill it," that's not good. A lot of terriers have that reaction and not just terriers.

We typically laugh at the crazy dogs. All dogs have their breed characteristics. We have to train them but we like to pick the dogs that don't have typical breed characteristics, except for a lab that doesn't retrieve. We like the dogs that retrieve. Hound dogs don't naturally retrieve. They sniff and they're nose. But if they're too nose, when the sounds go off, they're going to keep nosing around. The shepherd's typical behavior is to be loyal and protective. But not overly protective if the person who is disabled needs a stranger's help. That doesn't mean we can't train them. My first dog was a German Shepherd and he was awesome.

Aussies and Border Collies naturally nip and talk, and talk a lot. When they do their natural behaviors, that causes a lot of problems. You need to learn some canine behavior first. You need to understand why the dog is attacking or running away.

Some dogs have the natural ability to use their nose and to understand body language also. They detect our ever so slight body language. Dogs are very visual. They're naturally very reactive.

We had a service animal, little Chip. He worked the opposite of what we normally teach. Normally hearing dogs are trained to hear the sound, come get us and take us to the sound. However, we had a girl with hearing issues along with a cognitive impairment who needed a service dog. When she did hear the sound, she didn't know where it came

from or what it was. She didn't know that ding, ding was a phone. Her dog, Chip, was trained to bring the cell phone to her when it rang.

As for cat, the Fair Housing act is very liberal. Cats have been accepted as hearing cats. Do I train cats? No. But it doesn't mean that someone else can't use one. What if you're allergic to dogs? What if you're afraid of dogs? There are other animals that you can use. It's whatever you want to use and whatever is a reasonable accommodation.

Hearing dogs alert to all kinds of noises and sounds, as long as they're repeatable. If it's just an alternate sound here and there, the dog won't alert you. They alert to lots of things, the timers, the buzzers, doorbell, phone, most of we think of sounds in the home. There are also a lot of sounds out in the public that we don't expect or know about. We have to train the dog to alert for those sounds, too.

In the beginning we tell your dog to "leave it." Leave it alone, don't sniff this. Don't get this off the ground. Later on in the advanced training, we're going to say "Pay attention" to your dog. Dog thinks, "Well, I thought you told me to leave it." No, not now. The dog knows what to do and knows to leave things alone. Now outside walking down the street, you're going to rely on what he's telling you. There might be somebody coming behind you to bash you in the head. There might be the sound you can't hear above you that something is going to fall on you. Or a door is going to open or some other hazard. So pay attention to the dog.

Our natural alerters, the natural nosy dogs are going to be easier to train. You don't want the dog sleeping when the fire alarm goes off. Also, if you get lazy when your dog alerts you and you tell the dog to leave you alone, you're going to lose some of the trained alertness.

The size, shape, make and model of the dog doesn't matter. Hearing dogs can be big dogs, little dogs, whatever your preference is. If they use rescue dogs, or whatever, we use whatever their preference is and whatever works the best for the situation. Some people need help to balance so they need a larger dog. Mobility dog target items on the floor. They pick things up, retrieve things and bring things to you. They open doors and turn on lights. If you're have a bad vertigo day, you may not be able to see well. The dogs can still work with that and help you do things.

We talked about medical alert. Medical alert is basically like a universal term. It can be for anything. I'm having a bad day and I need somebody to come help me. Alert. I'm having the vertigo or I'm having some problem and I need help. A medical alert dog is trained to alert another person. They can also be trained to use phones, special canine phones and just regular phones. We tend to get away from the regular old-fashioned phones because when the dog takes the receiver off, it's like turning the lights on or off. Phoning someone is more complex than that. We have to be careful when we train for which behavior. Sometimes we get one behavior, which can mess up the next training. We have to make sure everything fits together when we do the training.

**Audience Member:** Are psychiatric service dogs, service dogs. You're shaking your head, No. .

**Carol Christopherson:** If the dog is trained to do a job for the disability, it doesn't matter whether it's mental or physical under the ADA, the federal law, it's covered. Therapy animals have no legal rights. They have to have permission. I don't care who is certified. If they're not trained for a person's disability, they have no legal rights. The service animal must be trained.

We talked about Fair Housing Act. So what's a real service animal? How can you tell? You can't. Ask questions. Is it required because of a disability? And what task is it trained to do? It is a crime to deny or interfere or kill a service animal in Florida.

**Audience Member:** The ADA is not a criminal statute. It's a civil statute. You can't send somebody to jail for violating the ADA.

**Carol Christopherson:** Yes, you can, if it's not a direct threat or causes undue burden or hardship or is fundamentally altering. Most places aren't going to be able to prove that complying is a burden or a hardship. A letter carrier who is deaf can have a service dog, even though dogs bite carriers all the time.

"Fundamentally altering" means if you had a service elephant and you walked into a restaurant, they don't have to change the doors. That would be a burden, fundamentally altering the restaurant. You can't take your dog on a Ferris wheel because there's no strapping for it.

The only reason to deny in Florida is because of the direct threat. The place you want access to has to determine "direct threat." Is the dog barking to do a job? Is it out of control? Aggressive behavior is never acceptable. That doesn't mean it won't happen.

Other's fears and allergies are not valid legal reasons to deny access. People with fears and allergies argue that's their disability. The fears and allergies have to rise to that level. They can't kick you out because someone else in the line has allergies. It's up to them to accommodate themselves like it's up to you to accommodate yourself.

Once you know your rights, you can say, "I can go over here." Or you can have an attitude and say, "Forget you." But be professional. Be a service animal ambassador. If you were to meet somebody who was allergic, then it's up to that person to ask the boss for accommodations as you did. The boss has to accommodate both of you, just like in schools with kids.

Good manners are don't pet, don't feed, don't distract, don't interfere with a working service dog. There's no law against that. It's just good manners. Don't run up to the dog and startle it.

I have a different philosophy. I have a hearing dog. What's his job? To be nosey and alert me to things. I don't want for him to become afraid of people. Nope, don't touch my dog. All day long, nope, he's working don't touch him. My energy goes down the leash. Dogs mimic our behavior. In time the dog's get apprehensive of people coming up to say, "Hi."

There are reasons to not allow touching such with Guide dogs. You don't want to throw them off their path. It's a distraction.

Does your dog know when to work when the vest is on? My dog works with the vest on or not. We don't train in vest. We train them whether they have a vest on or not. We work with them all the time.

Some are taught to jump on you. Some are taught to sit. Wait. If you're walking and you drop something, the dog will get it. Hearing dogs don't have to specifically bring something to you. They have to tell you there is a sound and where it is. Some are trained to bring you to the sounds. However, some hearing dogs have an automatic retrieve versus the target. Retrieve is to go get this. Get your leash, That's not your leash. Get your leash. Yes! So we can tell them. Get your shoes, get your keys, get your vest, get your wallet. That's an automatic retrieve. Alerting for bells and other sounds is automatic in hearing dog work. (Knocking on the table. Dog alerts.) Yes! She does work.

Dogs are trained to do sign. (Signs to dog) Down. Do I really have to? Wait. Do you want to help me? This is that go get help kind of thing. Wait. Go light. (Dog turns on the light)

Yes! Going to get a person when you have fallen or panicked or had a seizure. (Turns on the light again) That's it!

He can pick things up, close, push, and tug things, turn on the lights and help me get dressed. A lot of the dogs work automatically. They can learn to tug clothes off, shoes off. Tug at the bedding, unzip jackets.

This is the bad part when you're deaf, trying to teach a dog to speak. You don't always know when the sound comes out. Speak, speak. (Dog barks softly)

**Audience Member:** I missed what you said about the petting. Can you repeat what you were saying about petting the dog and stopping people? I think you were implying that if you're telling them not to pet, your dog is getting a different message maybe.

**Carol Christopherson:** Exactly. Dogs read our body language quite often. Over time, some dogs, not every dog, because every dog's personality is different, can become insecure. Since every dog's temperament is different, you can have a very goofy, expressive, fun loving dog and that may not apply. If you have a dog that is already a little insecure, just a little hesitant, the character can change over time due to a particular circumstance. Maybe they started out being fine. I know a dog that got bumped by a door and now he doesn't want to go through doorways. Any little thing can happen to

your dog over time and they become insecure. So if you start telling the public "Don't touch my dog," in time the dog can develop issues and become protective.

Fear or dominance can create aggression. Is it going to happen right now? No. But in time, three or four five years later on, it can.

To clarify about how I never tell people no, you can't touch. Instead I might say I'm late for an appointment, which is almost always. Or I'm busy. Or I'll say wait, wait, let me get him under control. So it's really up to you. There's no law. Most programs will say don't touch. We would like to teach the people that, teach the public, leave the dogs alone. They're working. It can distract them. It really depends on your dog's personality. Whether they're goofy, fun loving or shy. We usually find that most of our energetic, little, goofy dogs run to the sound. Not the ones that run away. When a tray drops, we want the dog to run to it. Say "Hey, look mom. What's this?" Not the one who runs away.

We need a lot of automatic response. When we need our dogs the most is when we are at our worst. We don't hear. We're walking along and we drop something. Something falls out but we would keep walking. (Drops a coin by the dog) I saw him turn. Oh, okay, what are you doing? Initially I would say "Leave it alone, " because it looked like he's out of control. But with a trained hearing dog, later on, I might say "What's he doing?" Look down. So if we're walking along. (Commands to the dog) Shadow. Get it. That's it. Get it, hold. (Dog picks up coin and drops it) Oh, he said it's not a \$10. (Laughter).

So you drop things. Your money, your keys, you lose things all the time because we don't hear them or feel them. Usually when I don't have my dogs with me, I lose stuff. Dogs are very reactive in nature. They're nose-y. Because that's just their nature of a being reactive. It doesn't mean that they're all going to be good hearing dogs. I want the one that when I'm sleeping and that fire alarm goes off, I want to know that that dog is going to wake me up.

Now some dogs do it naturally. That's what my German Shepherd did. He went to where the main breaker was and scratched the wall. I thought the dog was going crazy. I heard the heat strips on. I smelled the heat stuff! Smoldering fire behind the wall. Yikes. Second floor balcony. My dog wasn't trained to do tasks for me and I didn't know about hearing dogs or what they could do or anything. But when he went nuts on my wall, I of course I called 9-1-1 and the police guys showed up and the fire department. The Fire Chief said "He saved your life." One of those stories.

**Audience Member:** You said that dogs are always working. When do they relax and play? Can you take them to the dog park?

**Carol Christopherson:** We don't like the dog park for service dogs. That's probably the worst place. If you don't have a place to let your dog run and be a dog, then sure. Go find your local dog park. But for a service dog, most people in the public have their pet dogs and they don't maintain their dogs. Look at those dogs playing and then a fight breaks out. Then your dog has an issue. Any little thing can make your dog no longer usable in the public as a service dog.

Guide dogs work for the blind when they move. Otherwise they're down. Our dogs work all the time. My hearing dog is over there waiting for the next sound to happen. They're always on guard. They're being a dog. But we always take them off guard. We relax them. They're a regular pet. They still work, but they're still a dog. We play with them all the time. When somebody tells me they're working all the time, that's a program mentality.

**Audience Member:** This is about retiring your guide dog. What then? You need a new dog?

**Carol Christopherson:** Oh, I hate that term. Yeah. If you got your dog from a program, some programs own a dog and you can return them. If you did it yourself, you can keep the dog or find the dog a new home. When I retired Buddy, he had problems. He was always stressed. We can create stress in our dogs because we don't separate from them. The service dog ends up going with us everywhere. When you do that and create that bond, when they're separated from us, they think they've done something wrong. You create that separation anxiety.

**Audience Member:** I'm not sure that I understand what you meant about in airplane for the emotional dog. And can you explain more about Emotional Support Dog.

**Carol Christopherson:** They are just a regular pet. The name makes them feel good. Kind of like a therapy animal that I bring for you to pet in the nursing home. Makes you feel good. It doesn't matter if they've been trained or not. It doesn't matter about the training. The fact is if the dog has not been trained for your disability, but it still has to help you because the doctor says you're depressed. You need your animal to keep on living your life. It makes you feel good. However, if the animal is running around, sniffing and checking everything out and not lying there with you, then it's not probably going to be connected with you. There has to be a connection to your need. Usually the emotional support animal is tied to psychiatric disorders of some kind. That's usually depression but it could be PTSD. It could be panic attacks. It could be any kind of psych issue. Nevertheless, the dog that has not been trained. It just makes you feel good.

**Audience Member:** I see it has the vest on, but there are different services. Do the different services have different intentions? Are they trained differently then?

**Carol Christopherson:** The clothes do not matter. I can literally bring him in just like this without anything on. People can ask me two questions: Is it a service animal required because of a disability? Yes. And I don't look disabled. His job doesn't look apparent. They can ask me the next question: What job has he been trained to do for your disability.

Pick things up that I drop that I can't hear. That's pretty much it. The clothes do not make them a service animal. It helps to have a vest on. But now it's going the other way because of all the hype about the fake vests. We have no problems with the vest. I tell people now the dog doesn't need it. You can go make your own clothes. It's not the clothes or the ID cards that make it. Behavior and training, that's it.

Thank you everybody!

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Carol Christopherson is the president and founder of Florida Service Dogs, Inc., established in 1999. She has completed over 500 hours of dog obedient, service dog instructor trainer course, and disaster animal relief education.