



# Let us Fight fire with Fire

by Lisa Dubé Forman

**W**hen you react you act quickly, almost reflexively to a situation. When times are-a-changing your reflexes may be out of date and not handle the changing situation properly. When you respond instead, you mentally step back and take a look at the situation with fresh eyes—seeking better answers,” says Tom Hopkins in his book “Selling in Tough Times”.

When I first read this passage I felt it summed up my feelings immediately toward a very important topic. I wish to delve into the distressing and perpetual topic of anti-dog legislation and I will say upfront my thoughts are not common. Afterward I suggest a different *modus operandi* to prevail. First though, I applaud the tireless efforts of so many dog coalition leaders and team members who have stepped up to the challenge to defend our liberties.

I look at this topic, *per se* the problem, very pragmatically. The issue is a White Elephant in the room. It is unwieldy, unyielding and undoubtedly a nuisance. I submit that most average dog people just wish it would go away. People really just want to get on with their lives and not have to deal with participation or caretaking the White Elephant. They have enough problems in their lives already. People mostly avoid confrontation, they do not like disruption and when given an opportunity they will walk away rather than engage. This is just one of the reasons the Animal Rights Activists have been so successful. For me, anti-dog legislation is always in the back of my mind as it gnaws away at me. It is beleaguering because the actions of others can and will directly affect mine and my husband’s happiness and lives. Without fail,

these activists will erode all our dog ownership rights we enjoy today.

Straight off, I want to debate our antagonist’s tactics. First, I believe the Animal Rights Activists (ARA) and their like-minded counterparts advance extremist legislation Bills as part of a stratagem for a reverse bait and switch. Step one: The ARA propose extreme legislation to make a less extreme bill ultimately appear more tolerable. This may force the dog coalitions into compromising and accepting a more “reasonable” Bill to swallow. For instance, one tactic is to introduce a state-wide Bill allowing for no more than 4 dogs on one property. Another is to redefine the state definition of a Pet Dealer to those persons who have 4 intact females making them subject to inspection and seizure. Naturally, the dog coalitions rise up with an enormous outcry in opposition to the Bill. The Bill does not make it out of committee or is defeated in the State Assembly or Senate. So the ARA premeditated counterstrike is to advance legislation with a 25 or 15-dog limit and to increase the number of what constitutes a Pet Dealer. Once again the coalitions stand up in opposition to this legislation.

What these effective ARA tactics do are to plant the seed of doubt into some legislator’s minds about dog coalitions, especially those legislators who are green and unsavvy to political machinations. Privately, these same legislators may identify and agree with the Animal Rights Activists (ARA) and their rationality—“what is wrong with having a 25-dog limit, why does anyone need more than 25 dogs?” Step two of their objective is the ARA instills doubt within some

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elected leaders who begin questioning the dog coalition's stance. Though it may not be popular or well-received, we must appreciate that politics is mostly about negotiating and diplomacy and the politicians demand that from others. Step three is easy enough because if the ARA succeeds, their next move is to amend their own Bills further regulating and drastically lowering dog limits. Once the ARA foot is in the door it is easier to shove the door open and that's all the opportunity they need.

The ARA *modus operandi* is to force dog coalitions to react. Reacting is usually acting quickly, reflexively with many of today's dog coalitions scrambling to defend our position. I believe the ARA successfully paints a portrait of the dog coalition as being selfish, irrational, uncompassionate and unyielding. They do so by utilizing many tools besides bending a politician's ear.

Look at the use of this slogan widely in play now "Adopt from a shelter, not from a breeder." Their motto successfully paints our dog coalition with negative-stereotypes. They say the reason there are dogs in animal shelters is because of breeders. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) website I quote, "Animal shelters are your best source when looking for a pet. Shelter Advantages: in an effort to make good matches between people and animals and to place pets in lifelong homes, many shelters provide adoption counseling and follow-up assistance, such as pet parenting and dog-training classes, medical services, and behavior counseling. Or they may be able to refer you to providers of these services. Another advantage to shelter adoptions is that the fees are usually much less than the purchase price of an animal from a pet store or breeder. And your new pet is more likely to be vaccinated, de-wormed, and spayed or neutered."

Most all of these actions have always been part of a reputable, conscientious, devoted breeders' mission statement. So here we are forced to defend ourselves against the constant stream of disinformation disseminated by the opponent. I know people who have adopted dogs from various state animal shelters with ease. If the people had money to pay for the adoption then few questions were asked if the adopters could meet the needs of pet ownership, such as finances, living environment (house or apartment), and exercise. A perfect example is my own son in his early 20s who adopted a Labrador from a shelter while living in a high-rise apartment. There were few questions or concerns on the part of the shelter adopting out this dog. There was neither supposed adoption counseling nor follow-up assistance. The dog was out the door and good riddance.

The Animal Rights Activists (ARA) tactic is to force ex-

haustion. It is similar to a wolf hunting its prey over long distances driving it to exhaustion—in this case the prey is us, dog coalitions. The ARA with its organized, well-funded coffers introduces legislation on multiple fronts usually within a short-time frame. The effect is the ARA shocks the dog coalition creating panic; the word goes out to band together to form letter or email writing campaigns and to make urgent calls into their Assemblymen and representatives offices. People take time out of their busy schedules to join in the outrage. The state dog coalition may defeat the Bill only to have a revised version rise up yet again on another day for yet another

fight. A good example is the NY Bill03591 Prohibition of Docking Dog Tails which we fought back two years past and now it's back again. Up and down battles can be exhausting because the ranks of the dog coalition are everyday people. Most of us work full-time to pay the bills, moonlight as taxi drivers for our children, run endless errands, prepare meals, clean the house and kennels, scoop the yards, exercise the dogs, and in our spare time we participate in kennel club meetings, volunteer for dog activities, groom, travel and exhibit dogs. The reality is that we all know of at least one dog breeder/fancier/friend that at some point in time could not reply to a legislative alert and participate in an Urgent Call to Action because they were too busy. They could not find the time to compose multiple emails or call the various Assemblymen serving



on a committee who were deliberating on an extremist Bill. The Animal Rights Activists (ARA) are not burdened with this issue.

I say again the efforts of the multitudes of volunteers serving as legislative liaisons and chairpersons for their respective states and dog clubs are inspiring. We also have both the vital AKC Legislative alerts and the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA). Frankly, I believe it is logical to say that we cannot win this battle based on urgent calls to action. We also cannot expect our volunteer leaders, our political activists to bear indefinitely the significant burdens of urging and organizing mass alliance involvement via email and the Internet without other significant tools. Despite all the good work, we are still reacting. I believe the Animal Rights Activists (ARA) enjoys this as they have effectively sized up their competition long ago. The ARA playbook is having us run reactive and defensive plays rather than offensive. Can you win a football game only playing defense? The dog coalition running defensive plays and continuously rising up & settling down creates opportunities for the ARA. The ARA does not sit back and wait. The ARA manufactures its' own opportunities and brings their fight to the table, not the other

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way around.

There are countless examples of ARA proposed extremist Bills. The reader can visit the American Kennel Club government relations website—2011 Legislation Tracking—updated daily for a complete list. As a reference aid for the reader to understand what an extremist Bill looks like here are summaries of two proposals. NY AB78 Bill to define "Pet Dealer". The new definition would be any person who a) sells or offers for sale nine or more dogs born or raised on premises or other than the premises of said person; b) maintains a total of six sexually intact female dogs six months of age or older... Pet dealers shall designate and provide an isolation area for animals that exhibit symptoms of disease or illness... Any pet dealer duly licensed shall designate an attending veterinarian, who shall provide veterinary care to the dealer's animals which shall include a written program of veterinary care and regularly scheduled visits to the pet dealer's premises. Exercise requirements: Pet dealers shall develop, maintain, document, and implement an appropriate plan to provide animals with the opportunity for daily exercise... Such plan shall be approved by the attending veterinarian and the department.

We have the Nebraska Bill 427 that requires anyone who owns four intact dogs of any age to comply with strict engineering standards and breeder restrictions. Under existing "commercial breeder" regulations, those who fall under the state definition of "commercial breeder" are required to be licensed, be inspected at least once every two years, and comply with basic standards of care. These standards include maintaining sanitary conditions; providing adequate food and clean water; providing adequate socialization and exercise; and providing adequate space based on the age, size, weight, and breed. Current law also requires that breeders develop and maintain a veterinary care plan in conjunction with a veterinarian and provide veterinary care "without delay when necessary."

Wow, this is just two anti-dog legislation examples being fought on all fronts. As the AKC has stated "these Bills confuse the issue of substandard care with the number of animals a person owns and places vague definitions in statute." This deception has been a very clever tactic winning over the public and politicians.

Now admittedly, not all dog legislation may be attributable to the Animal Rights Activists. It could be the result of a snowball effect. A well-regarded acquaintance who serves as a state dog coalition leader said she is unconvinced that all legislation is ARA accredited. Her opinion is well-respected

because of her extensive experience working with the politicians. I on the other hand do not have her experience and I tend to be more suspicious. I look for ARA fingerprints or to see if the Bill passes the smell test. Some Bills can be summed up as coincidental with unrelated origins. Our Assemblymen and elected leaders also are married with spouses and busy family lives with children and all the activities that come with it. Politicians can also be influenced and spurred on to action by friends and family. I remember a family mentor's comment to me once after he decided a contentious family issue. He said his wife wanted it that way and summed it by saying, "I have to sleep with her." This was straight talk meaning he did not want to hear about it anymore and unless he acquiesced to his wife's wishes she would never stop. Plain old pillow talk won in the end and can influence our legislative leaders as well.

Here are two examples of proposed burdensome legislation. We have NYSB61 Bill requiring all dogs and their owners to complete basic obedience training. Oh please! Can you imagine what a brouhaha that would cause with 20 million New Yorkers? Or NY Bills SS109 & 118, 112-a & 112-b, which requires the micro-chipping of all dogs. It would create a state registry to maintain the identification and contact information on all micro-chipped dogs and provides that such registry shall be available twenty-four hours a day. Besides the obvious assault against our right



Photo by Lisa Croft Elliott

to privacy is the residual concern on the safety of micro-chipping and an alleged causal relationship with cancer.

We need to get out in front of the anti-dog legislation. To do this we need to be willing to affect the other side of the economic model being the demand stream flowing from the consumer. We need to look at our opponent's maneuvers and learn from them. Media is one tactic the ARA effectively employs. We turn on our television and sit back to enjoy perhaps the "Nature" program on the PBS channel when a commercial begins with soft music in the background to memorable, heartrending images of abused, neglected dogs and cats. This commercial is sponsored by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and requests donations whereupon you will receive a photograph of your sponsored animal in return for monthly donations to help feed, shelter and provide veterinary care for this animal. The images are haunting and the commercial is clever as it does not direct blame at any one segment. The images elicit emotional responses from all including, naturally, us compassionate breeders when seeing a helpless, abused animal. Their mission is

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to amass donations from everybody, not just a segment of the population. We also have the Ad Council campaign sponsored by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and The Shelter Pet Project designed to encourage pet lovers throughout the country to make shelters and rescue groups the first place they turn to when getting a companion animal.

The commercials and the Animal Rights Activists (ARA) do not always disclose that many of the neglected and abused animals appearing in their commercials and other advertising are not all filmed in deplorable puppy mills or undercover videotapes from a breeder's kennel. The dirty little secret is that many of these animals are rescued from the public—dog owners not breeders. Indeed, the very same consumer which donates money to the Animal Rights Activists (ARA) and their front organizations. Even The Ad Council Shelter Pet Project website quietly divulges, “contrary to popular beliefs, animals most frequently find themselves in shelters due to owner-related issues.” However, the sexier, popular and significantly profitable case for the ARA is NOT blaming John Q. Public. The ARA commercials and their whole line of attack are sleights of hand. They have convinced the public and many legislators that most all their shelter dogs and cats are the products of excess from heartless, selfish, uncompassionate breeders. It is as if they persuaded the public that the untold number of dogs they have living in the shelters were dogs the breeders and puppy mills could not sell or were no longer useful so these suppliers dumped the animals at the shelters. So, the ARA attempts to enact restrictive new legislation ultimately eliminating the accused supplier—us. They must minimize the role and responsibility of the consumer otherwise it would be financial suicide. To do otherwise would also entail the ARA confessing that enacting restrictive, oppressive regulations would not improve the welfare of most all dogs. Nor would it guarantee an effect on the population of dogs/cats in animal shelters.

The hidden, ugly truth is that a majority of the dogs in their shelters are surrendered, abandoned or rescued from single-pet homes. We are a guiltless, throw-away society. Everything is disposable these days. If the dog poses an inconvenience, then get rid of it. If we are moving and it will be a hassle to move with the dog, get rid of it. If we have a new relationship and that new person does not like our pet, get rid of the dog. The dog sheds too much, get rid of it. We want to travel and it's a hassle to board the dog in a kennel, get rid of the dog. Vet bills are increasing, so get rid of the

dog. The novelty is gone when the kids decide it isn't cool to poop-scoop and walk the dog; instead they want to hang out with friends so get rid of the dog. The ARA commercials depict animals in desperate need of proper nutrition, medical care, adequate housing, exercise and most importantly, love. These commercials avoid alienating and pointing fingers at the real culprits being the public who subsidize the ARA.

The ARA cannot wage war and win against the single-household pet owner but they can flourish and gain incredible wealth by using misdirection. This is done by supplying the convincing argument to the American public that the untold numbers of abused, neglected dogs/cats is due to the abundance of surplus from breeders and puppy mills. The ARA intentionally confuses the issue of substandard care with the number of animals a person owns. Our country has countless single-dog households and simply because there is only one dog does not define the level of care that dog receives. In fact, what I find to be the most heartbreaking truth over the years



Photo by Lisa Croft Elliott

is that you never really know about people. I am referring to the seemingly normal, average people--many with families, children and pet(s)--whom we see frequently or interact with at the grocery store, post office or chat with at ballgames. Notably, I learned never to assume that because of someone's professional status this somehow is representative of the level of care they provide to their animal(s). Nor would this status provide evidence that they were compassionate, decent human beings. I will forever remember a true story my veterinarian told me about a professional couple with a family; one or both parents were physicians and they obtained an Irish Wolfhound

puppy. It is unknown from what source the pup came.

Sadly, for one or all of the usual reasons one often hears, e.g., the dog is too big, he slobbers, the dog is ruining my carpet, he sheds too much, he smells--these supposedly upstanding members of the community proceeded to banish this pup from their home and chained it outside in the terrible heat, inclement weather and parasites. At last the pup was brought to the veterinarian and though the pup was quite young, the vet said he had never seen an animal so infested with fleas. Heartbreakingly, this pup was infested for so long that the pup was anemic suffering with tapeworm and was clinging to life. So, the owners euthanized the pup. The cruelty this poor, helpless puppy endured was unspeakable as it lived and died a life of loneliness and misery. I will never forget this story as my vet sadly and quietly related his shock that a health care provider,

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a physician who swore the Hippocratic Oath was capable of such horrid animal abuse. These were members of a professional community and John Q. Public—not backyard breeders or commercial puppy farms—and they too were capable of animal cruelty. They are examples of the demand stream in the economic model. Their impulsive, short-lived interest is not uncommon as they along with countless others clearly are incapable of providing a loving, caring, and compassionate home for any animal.

So what do I suggest to be our plan of attack? How do we try to win this war? We need to fight fire with fire. I want us to use media vehicle tools. We need to create high-quality, video public service announcements (PSA) and run these continuously on our local television stations. Let us create a message to educate and remind all consumers that basic criterion should be met before getting a puppy or dog. We need to emphasize that interaction, compassion, appropriate lodging, exercise and income is necessary to care properly for a dog. In the end our message is unmistakable, “Think before you buy a puppy!” Have the same craftily arranged 30-second formats with simple but evocative composition amplifying our message and public exposure. Let us focus our hard work and attention on changing consumers’ impulsive demand which keeps disgraceful breeders, commercial puppy mills and pet stores in business. These are principally distribution outlets—animal brokers and most of all breeders who maintain animals in deplorable conditions. I have suggested to my state Assemblymen that powerful, public service messages are a much better use of taxpayer funds. These PSA’s can concentrate on consumers impulsiveness which is fueling shelter populations instead of casting broad, restrictive, and far-reaching legislation requiring expensive municipal, county and state enforcement. Moreover, Bills sponsored by the ARA imposing numerical limits will not address the underlying issues of responsible ownership and proper dog care. Limiting the number of dogs owned does not automatically result in better dog owners.

Educating consumers by employing powerful, regular public service TV campaigns will help us in many ways. It is not just great public relations; it allows us to chip away at the ARA base. We portray ourselves as a collective of responsible, concerned breeders who want the best for our dogs and

cats—that is lifelong, loving homes and to remind people dogs are NOT disposable. TV stations are required by law to allot a certain amount of time for PSA’s each year. The consortium of Specialty and All-Breed Kennel clubs in our respective states can develop these service announcements as long as they are non-profit organizations. We can minimize costs by looking within our own ranks and our bountiful resources. We have several nationally-recognized people within our ranks that we can appeal upon to serve as our spokesperson for the ads. Instead of hiring, we have many members who have experience appearing on TV to volunteer as actors. We would not need to hire any trained dogs because we have a wealth of smart, trained dogs from our obedience and agility dog coalition. It involves having these experienced volunteers train their dogs for a different skill or performance. Production services for film crews would pose an expense and these may have to be covered by the respective state consortiums. To help ease these costs The National Institute of Justice website

suggests an excellent resource being the communications or radio/television departments at our local colleges. They state that students are often looking for projects to develop and expose their talents. Or similar to AKC’s Political Action Committee (PAC) perhaps these expenses could be covered by club membership donations or necessary dues increases. The latter may be unpopular but the reality is our members’ way of life is threatened—look at the alternative if we lose this war. The ARA is significantly outspending us in lobbying politicians and in the media markets where we do not have a presence. We must employ a continuous, positive offense which I feel may be the determining factor if we survive this assault.

I am not referring to patronizing commercials that somehow infers that dog ownership is for a privileged few. I want public service messages that REMINDS people of what it is like to own a dog, and all the inconveniences that go with it. Yes, the inconveniences because again a majority of the dogs in our nation’s shelters are there because of owner-related issues. Besides financial reasons and others listed earlier, there are a myriad of excuses. They are too busy, they no longer wish to care for the dog, the dog became too big for them to handle, the dog developed behavioral issues or the people are moving and can’t or don’t want to bring the dog with them. We are a throw-away society. When I field puppy



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inquiries from people with busy lives and families with children I have found it helpful to remind people of typical inconveniences. I like to jog their memory and remind them about the realities of having a puppy or dog thrown into their otherwise hectic, daily routine. I describe the following script which many people can relate to and it certainly strikes a chord.

SCENE ONE: A typical suburbia kitchen and its pouring rain outside. Inside the kids are arguing, the TV is blaring and the telephone is ringing off the hook. SCENE TWO: Mom as chief cook and bottle washer is multi-tasking. She is preparing dinner and refereeing a shouting match between the kids. She is shouting “turn down that TV” while helping the kids with their homework. CAMERA PANS to the kitchen door where we see the family puppy that has been scratching and whimpering to go outside. On a side note when describing this scene I add that the dog has diarrhea and has to go outside every half hour. SCENE THREE: Mom and puppy are coming back in the kitchen door and she has now reached the limits of her patience because she and the dog are soaking wet and dinner has burned. SCENE FOUR: We see Mom packing up the car with the kids and the dog in the pouring rain as she has to get the dog to the veterinarian’s office because of the diarrhea. FADE OUT as the car drives off down the road. END OF SCENE. Now just imagine the conversation the wife has with her husband when he comes home from work. I’d gamble the dog’s fate is the primary subject.

If you have juggled children and dogs, this script is not a far-fetched dramatization, it’s called life. Parenthetically, I cannot tell you how many puppy inquiry calls I have received over the years from potential buyers who had NO fenced yards. I inform them of our unconditional fencing requirements and explain why it is mandatory for hunting hounds and I use a customized script of the above to help them envisage why fencing is needed for all dogs, not just Sighthounds.

Another televised ad could be a scene in a cozy home with a family of four sitting around the dining room table eating dinner and the camera pans to the window overlooking the backyard. There we see the family pet chained outside gazing longingly at the house. However, this commercial is similar to the storyline of Planet of the Apes. The family of four are dog actors seated at the table and the pet chained outside is a person. Add a twist where the viewer sees that unlike many humans, dogs are capable of great compassion and one of the dogs goes out to bring the person inside! Even The Ad Council uses humorous campaign ads to give their shelter pets a voice and to remove negative-stereotyping. Well, we can

use it as well.

So back to my earlier true story about the sad, wolfhound puppy that died: would public service announcements (PSA) have prevented this tragedy? I cannot say for certain. However, I do believe that PSA’s can remind potential dog owners about the costs, time, training, compassion and responsibilities involved in ownership before getting a dog. I think that a dose of reality in the form of an evocative PSA might have made the physician and family think twice before getting that Wolfhound puppy. By no means have I minimized the role and responsibility of breeders because we bear the burden of making certain puppies are placed in appropriate, caring, life-long homes. Yet, a PSA that tugs at the consumer heartstrings may make them realize maybe it isn’t such a good idea to get a dog. PSA’s also emphasize the sad but unmistakable changes that have taken place within our society—we shirk our responsibilities and get away with it. Unfortunately for all of us, in this lesson, we have taught our children well.

Oftentimes it is a casual or capricious decision to get a pet or a specific breed. A good example is a member of my own extended family who, after losing their beloved mixed

breed, purchased a puppy (not of my breed) from a pet store. Despite having an experienced purebred dog breeder and exhibitor in their own family this person fell prey to an impulse whereby their act embodied demand resulting in profit for a dog broker. Thankfully, she is financially sound, dedicated and devoted to her dog; even so she is one of the millions of Americans who yield to their whims. Our problem is the millions of people who are not financially sound, dedicated and devoted to their dog who yield to their whims. We all ac-

knowledge there are disreputable, unscrupulous dog breeders amongst our society who sell puppies--“have credit card, will ship.” We cannot do anything about them but we can reach out and target the people who own the credit cards. With creative PSA’s, we can make them think twice, three times, before buying a puppy and then perhaps we will make a difference.

The Animal Rights Activists (ARA) declared war on us. In their pitiful minds they believe that if we no longer are breeding, then dogs and cats will no longer suffer neglect or cruelty. Our engagement and principle for battle is more honorable than the ARA. Our principle is to promote the welfare of animals, not to cease animal ownership. I fervently believe responsible dog ownership begins with educating the public to prevent the high incidences of unwanted pets in animal shelters and rescue organizations. Let’s stop reacting. The best defense is a good offense so let’s use their tools to do so.

