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Things You Need to Know About Getting An **Assistance Dog**



By Marcie Davis and Lovey



A special thank you to the staff at Assistance Dogs of the West who deeply believe in the power of the human-animal bond and to EnV Photography.

About Marcie Davis

Marcie Davis is a transformation agent, thought leader, businesswoman, public speaker, and assistance dog advocate. Marcie has been paraplegic for more than 40 years and has been partnered with service dogs for more than 20 years. She uniquely understands the operations of a successful assistance dog organization and the client perspective of living effectively with an assistance dog. She is the founder of International Assistance Dog Week, the author of *Working Like Dogs: The Service Dog Guidebook*, and the host of the *Working Like Dogs* radio show on Pet Life Radio.

About Lovey

Lovey is a Labrador Retriever. She was born on June 13, 2013, in New York and custom-trained as an assistance dog by Jill Felice, Founder of Assistance Dogs of the West. Lovey performs over 50 tasks, including opening doors and picking up objects as small as a dime. She was placed as a service dog with Marcie Davis in May 2015.

Lovey has an incredible work ethic. She serves as the co-host of *Working Like Dogs* on Pet Life Radio. Lovey is also certified as a Therapy Dog. She and Marcie work together as volunteers with the Santa Fe Animal Shelter's Pet Therapy Outreach Program. In her spare time, Lovey enjoys playing in her backyard, swimming, traveling, and chewing on her favorite toy.

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Are you thinking about getting an assistance dog and don't know where to begin? For over 25 years, I have been partnered with assistance dogs. As a person with a disability who uses a wheelchair, getting my first assistance dog changed my life. It increased my independence, employment opportunities, and overall quality of life. It's my pleasure to briefly share with you some of the lessons that I've learned.

1 What is an assistance dog and what can they do?

First of all, you need to understand what an assistance dog truly is and what a dog can do to lessen your limitations and the impacts of your disability. This will help you to determine if an assistance dog is right for you and your lifestyle.

In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines Service Animals as dogs that have been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability (i.e. guide dogs for individuals who are blind, hearing dogs for people who are deaf, assistance dogs for individuals with mobility challenges, medical alert dogs to help with conditions such as seizures, diabetes, autism, psychiatric challenges, PTSD, etc.).

The Department of Justice has specified that the dog must be trained to take a specific action when needed to assist the person with a disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service dogs under the ADA. A service dog is a working dog, not a pet.

Under the ADA, businesses and organizations that serve the public must allow people with disabilities to bring their service dogs where customers are allowed to go. People with disabilities and their service dogs cannot be charged any additional fees for services, but may be charged for any damage caused by the service dog. Business owners can legally ask you to identify the tasks that the service dog provides for you.

2 How will the dog be trained?

Secondly, you need to decide if you want to train your own dog, hire a qualified trainer to train your dog, or get your dog from a certified assistance dog organization. A major factor is your budget.

Individual Trainers

Hiring individual trainers can be costly. Many trainers say they have the skills necessary to train an assistance dog, but as with any major life purchase, you need to do your due diligence. Ask for their credentials and talk with other assistance dog handlers that they have trained. Don't be fooled, do your homework.

Assistance Dog Organizations

The same advice applies to assistance dog organizations. Do your homework. Ask if they are a member of Assistance Dogs International (ADI). Ask what specific costs you are going to be responsible for paying. Request an itemized list of what you will be responsible for paying such as a monetary fee for the dog, and training costs in order to train you as an assistance dog handler such as travel costs to the training facility, equipment costs, etc.

If an agency is an ADI member, you'll know they have to adhere to strict assistance dog industry standards to achieve and maintain that accreditation. If not, you need to research more deeply into the agency and ask about their policies and procedures applicable to training and placing assistance dogs. For example, what is their training philosophy? Will you own the dog,

share ownership, or will the agency maintain ownership? How do they retire a dog? Many organizations identify themselves as qualified agencies, but it's up to you to vet their capabilities and to determine if they are a good fit for your needs.

Training

Assistance dogs are specifically trained to perform three or more tasks to lessen the effects of its partner's disability. If you choose to self-train your assistance dog, you need to ensure that your dog is stable, well-behaved, and unobtrusive to the public. Your dog should always be clean with no offensive odor.

An assistance dog works calmly and quietly on a harness, leash, or other tether, and is able to perform its tasks in public. Assistance dogs must be able to lie quietly beside the handler without blocking aisles, doorways, etc.

The dog should behave appropriately in public, i.e. be "public access trained." It should:

- Not defecate or urinate in inappropriate locations.
- Exhibit appropriate behavior in public: no disrupting the course of normal business, and no unnecessary vocalization such as barking, growling, or whining.
- Show no aggression toward people or other animals.
- Not solicit or steal food or other items from the general public.

The ADA requires that service dogs be under control at all times. If not, businesses may request that the dog be removed from the premises.

For more information about assistance dog standards or certified assistance dog organizations throughout the world, contact ADI at: <http://www.assistedogsinternational.org>. I definitely recommend checking out their website and international list of certified members.

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Are You Ready to Make a Long-Term Commitment?

Thirdly, you need to realize that getting an assistance dog is a long-term commitment and you are going to be responsible for another living being. And not just any living-being—assistance dogs are highly trained and very physically fit. I always think of my assistance dog as an elite Olympic athlete that requires the best food, care, and maintenance. It will be your responsibility to maintain and monitor your dog's health and working ability. They will require high quality dog food, toileting on a regular schedule, regular veterinary check-ups, regular eye examinations, regular grooming and nail care, heartworm prevention, toys, and exercise and play.

It's a life-changing experience

You need to think about how your life will change when you are partnered with an assistance dog 24 hours a day. How do your immediate family members or significant other(s) feel about having a dog in your home? How will you transport your dog? If you get a breed that sheds, how will you feel about living with dog hair? Can you afford to pay for the high quality food and ongoing care that a professional working dog will require?

It takes time, energy, and commitment

Are you willing to invest the time and energy into creating a strong human-animal bond that is necessary to ensure a quality working assistance dog team? Assistance dogs are not robots. You are going to be responsible for working consistently with your dog to develop a strong bond and to motivate your dog to work with you. This takes time, energy, and commitment. Like any long-term relationship, it requires devotion and dedication. Are you ready to do the work necessary so you and your dog become a successful assistance dog team?



It's a financial commitment

Do you have the financial resources available to properly care for an assistance dog? Assistance dogs are highly trained, professional working dogs. They will require ongoing medical assessment and monitoring, high quality food and nutrition, and, depending on the breed, regular grooming. Do you have the financial resources necessary to provide the necessary high quality food and ongoing services or do you have a support system that can assist you in properly caring for your assistance dog?

Making the decision to be partnered with an assistance dog can be life-changing. Educating

yourself is invaluable when making your decision to get an assistance dog and to live well with your dog. I've been partnered with an assistance dog for 25 years and I am still learning. Being a lifelong learner is an essential element of being an effective assistance dog partner.

Partnering with an assistance dog changed my life for the better in ways that I could have never dreamed. But, for a variety of individual reasons, an assistance dog is not for everyone. I hope this information will give you some insights as you research and explore the possibility of pursuing an assistance dog and how it will impact your life, your lifestyle, and the people close to you.



Ready For More?

Education is the key to making the best decisions and shortening your learning curve. In order to help as many people as I can, I've developed coaching, workshops, and courses to give you that education.

For Individuals

Currently considering getting an assistance dog?
Already partnered with an assistance dog but looking to make the most of your partnership?

We offer training courses, books, and even one-on-one coaching to help you make the most of your partnership with your service dog.

For Organizations

We can help with issues of project management, special events, workshops, online courses, grant research and writing, fundraising, and more.

Either way, I'm here for you and we'd love to work with you.

Visit <https://workinglikedogs.com/learn-from-us/> today to learn more and see how we can work together.

Lovey and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

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