



The Recalcitrant Supervisor

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Supervisor, n.

One who supervises.

1. *A person who exercises general direction or control over a business, a body of workmen, etc.; one who inspects and directs the work of others.*
2. *An onlooker, spectator, observer. Obs.*
3. *One who reads over, esp. for the purpose of correction; a reviser. Now rare or Obs.*
4. *One appointed to give tutorial instruction to an undergraduate student, a tutor. More widely, one who directs and oversees the work of a postgraduate research student.*

Oxford English Dictionary



Recalcitrant, a. and n.

A. *adj.*

1. *'Kicking' against constraint or restriction; obstinately disobedient or refractory. (Said of person or animals, and transf. of things.) Also const. to.*
2. *Characterized by refractoriness.*

B. *n.*

A recalcitrant person. Also transf.

1865 Pall Mall G. 30 May 10 All recalcitrants were treated as rebels and traitors.

1918 Oxf. Mag. 21 June 343/2 The American Universities have generally adopted the 'Elective System'... There is, however, a distinguished recalcitrant in the University of Princeton.

Hence recalcitrantly adv.; also recalcitrary a.

Oxford English Dictionary



PhD supervision

- Possession of a PhD degree does not qualify someone to supervise a PhD student;
- This is widely acknowledged:
 - Training of new supervisors;
 - Retraining of existing supervisors;
- Experience shows this to be true:
 - Problem-solving;
 - Appeals.



What do students want?

- Clear targets;
- Availability;
- Attention;
- A achievable first year project;
- Technical as well as intellectual advice;
- Initially - help, support and direction;
- Later - knowledge, competence but yielding of control;
- A reference.



“Rights” of a student

- A proper induction to PG life;
- A realistic project;
- Good lab/technical training;
- Journal clubs and public speaking;
- Transferable skills training;
- Time with supervisor;
- Encouragement;
- Help with a C.V. and publications;
- Advice on a future career;
- Help where the student has disabilities or other special needs.



Responsibilities of a student

- To work conscientiously;
- To take the initiative (they are adults);
- To keep abreast of the field;
- To participate in lab life (they are full members of the lab);
- To educate themselves (go to seminars, transferable skills training etc.);
- To keep their logbook up to date;
- To produce a PhD on time;
- To pay fees etc. on time.



QAA Code of Practice

11. Institutions will appoint supervisors who have the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support, encourage and monitor research students effectively.

...Institutions will expect existing supervisors to demonstrate their continuing professional development through participation in a range of activities designed to support their work as supervisors. Supervisors should take the initiative in updating their knowledge and skills, supported by institutional arrangements that define and enable sharing of good practice and provide advice on effective support for different types of student. Mentoring relationships are one example of how support can be provided for supervisors...



QAA Code of Practice

5. Institutions will only accept research students into an environment that provides support for doing and learning about research and where high quality research is occurring.

13. Institutions will ensure that the responsibilities of all research student supervisors are clearly communicated to supervisors and students through written guidance.

14. Institutions will ensure that the quality of supervision is not put at risk as a result of an excessive volume and range of responsibilities assigned to individual supervisors.



Supervisors

The supervision of postgraduate students is clearly personal in character, and influenced by many factors including the personalities involved and the environment in which students and supervisors work. There are also bound to be considerable variations in supervisory practice between disciplines.

The University of Edinburgh Code of Practice
for Supervisors & Research Students 2008/09



The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies





Choosing a Dog

The first consideration that most people evaluate when choosing a dog breed is general temperament. Some breeds, such as Golden Retrievers and Cocker Spaniels, are known to be more outgoing and friendly. Others, including the Bull Mastiff and Bull Terrier, are well known for their aggression. Which breed a family chooses depends on their needs: if they are looking for a guard dog or protective animal, a more aggressive breed may be suitable. If, on the other hand, they are interested in a family pet, more easygoing breeds are a better choice.

Temperament characteristics to examine include: aggression and protectiveness; energy, activity level, and playfulness; intelligence; loyalty; sensitivity; compatibility with other animals.

The Dying Breed

Spaniel

Gentle, playful submission, eager to please, outgoing, joyful, trusting, outgoing, eager to please, moderate speed and agility

Behaviour problems may include excessive barking, stealing food from table and counter tops and perhaps house soiling. May also snore.

Compatible with children, but use discretion. When startled or harshly punished they are prone to snap defensively.



The Research Star

Chow Chow

Very stubborn, bossy, prone to wilful disobedience and may become threatening to those who try to force obedience. Highly independent (don't-mess-with-me animal). If not trained, socialised and dominated at a very young age, will become the boss of the family.



Behaviour problems centre on dominance struggles. Chows may show dominance aggression toward people it considers submissive. It may guard food, bones, toys and areas of the house from some or all family members. The breed is sensitive to heat and may display irritable snapping on a hot day or if annoyed. A Chow Chow may be touch-shy and refuse to be groomed. Very dominant males may mark their indoor territory by squirting on chair or table legs.

Compatibility with children: use discretion.

The Inexperienced Supervisor

Scottish Terrier

Bold, independent, it is the most behaviourally variable of all the Terriers. In any one day a member of this breed can be playful, loving, aggressive, obedient, dominant, stubborn, submissive, sullen, snappish, quiet, and noisy.

Behaviour problems may include excessive barking and dominance challenges. Some people find its various behaviours a problem.



The Insecure Supervisor

Papillon

Loving, nervous, energetic, intelligent, quick learners, easy to pamper, alert, friendly, neither shy nor aggressive.

Behaviour problems may include house soiling and fear snapping. Some breeders indicate they are fragile and sensitive to the cold.

Compatibility with children: use discretion, due to their small size and fragility, they are better suited for older, more responsible children who will not accidentally hurt them.



The Interfering Supervisor



Cairn Terrier

Alert, energetic, intelligent, bold, stubborn, feisty, tenacious fighter, active, not particularly gentle with people.

Behaviour problems may centre on dominance challenges, and sometimes it will guard objects from family members.

Compatibility with children: Use discretion. Although generally affectionate, Cairn Terriers are very independent and do not make good lap dogs.



The Recalcitrant Supervisor

- Only one?
- All supervisors are unique - all have strengths and weaknesses;
- Effective management builds up strengths and nurtures weaknesses.



The dilution effect

- Put supervisors in teams where the strengths of one compensates for the weaknesses of another:
 - Thesis committees;
 - (Re)Training.
- Make sure the supervisor is only one (key) member of a team
 - Training should include information about other support services (student counselling, health services, chaplaincy, etc.);
 - Students should be clear about who to turn to if they have problems.



Suggested questions

- Personalities of supervisors and styles of supervision vary. How much should this be encouraged and how much should we seek uniformity in the student experience. How do we ensure acceptable standards of supervision across our universities?
- How do you reconcile the demands of the RAE (or its replacement) and quality PG education? Are they conflicting?
- How do we implement QAA standard?
14. Institutions will ensure that the quality of supervision is not put at risk as a result of an excessive volume and range of responsibilities assigned to individual supervisors.



Thank you!

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