

TAKING THE

Genie Tuttle left Corporate America to open her own dog-training business.

BY ALEX WILSON | PHOTOS BY VIKTOR BUDNIK

Genie Tuttle knows exactly how long she spent working in Corporate America: 22 years, six months and seven days.

Now, Tuttle owns her own successful dog training business, Dog Genie, but it's clear her experience working for a big company helped prepare her for taking the reins of her own enterprise.

When she was just 5 years old and growing up in Thousand Oaks, Tuttle, 60, begged her parents for a German Shepherd puppy after a neighbor's pet had a litter, which led to a lifelong love of dogs. She studied communications at California State University, Northridge, which she believes helped her succeed in the corporate world, and also had practical applications for Dog Genie: Her education helped her understand both her human and canine clients.

WEARING MANY HATS

Tuttle climbed the corporate ladder as much as she could during her time at a company that published more than 20 magazines on topics like motorcycles, speedboats and recreational vehicles.

"I wore many, many hats, such as software project manager; I was in charge of two different call centers in two different states, so I did a lot of customer service work; some technical stuff," Tuttle told *Ventana Magazine*. "I ended up senior director of corporate communications. I was kind of like the shortstop who wore a lot of different hats at that company. But it gave me a wide breadth of experience about different things for business."

Even as Tuttle was advancing, she started noticing there were very few women at the top of the corporate structure.

"I did have some female mentors, but the C-suite was mostly full of men," Tuttle said. "It kind of always was the same. There wasn't a big shift. It was mostly men that had the highest positions."

Tuttle was still working at her corporate job when she launched Dog Genie as a side business during 2003, more because of her love of dogs than because she envisioned it as a full-time career. After mergers and corporate downsizing resulted in her being laid off in 2012, she made the plunge to be in the dog-training business full time.

Many things she learned in the corporate world served her well as an entrepreneur.

"You have to be able to do the business side, which is like the legal stuff, licensing your website, working with technology, you know, getting insurance and all of that, as well as doing the actual dog behavior modification, showing up and being a subject matter expert on that," Tuttle explained. "And then, you know, working with the owners. Your clients are the humans, too. So, it was really fun to be able to take all my skills that I got from Corporate America and use them for my own company, which I care deeply about."

LEADER OF THE PACK

Genie Tuttle with Lucy 2 (left), Maizy, Penny and Cougar.



THE LEAD

PET PROJECT

Dog Genie grew out of Tuttle's own love of dogs and took off from there.

"I just had started training my own dogs growing up and reading books about it and being self-taught. And then I realized, there's credentials you can get, maybe I can do this on the side," she said. "So, it was always a fantasy of mine to run my own dog behavior consulting business. And then when it came to be it was so exciting. It's precious to me."

Tuttle started off doing classes for pet stores and parks and recreation classes on nights and weekends. When the pandemic happened and meeting people in person became impossible, Tuttle shifted to online classes. That turned out to be a good thing, because she figured out a way to incorporate those skills into her permanent business model.

"I'm still using what I would consider a hybrid version. My first session with any private client is remote, it's on Zoom," she said. "We go through the human training, the things that they need to understand about the approach when we're not also juggling their dog."

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Tuttle loves teaching people and dogs the best way to communicate with one another.

"I am in awe of dogs and their abilities and the giant gap that exists between people not understanding what dogs are capable of. I like to bridge that gap because dogs, as we know, they can sniff out cancer, they are used in conservation work. I mean, there's so much more to them than just some critter in the backyard," Tuttle explained. "You know, the dog is learning and the person is learning.



PAWSITIVE INFLUENCE "There's so much more to [dogs] than just some critter in the backyard," said Tuttle, shown here with Penny, 12, a smart and capable coon hound mix who has a way of calming nervous dogs.

They're both learning at the same time. And I like to show people how you can do that without pain or force or intimidation."

A motto of her method of dog training is "No pain. No force. No fear."

"There are two schools of dog training. You can either use the carrot or the stick to modify behavior. And so, I'm all about the carrot," Tuttle said.

"It's called positive reinforcement. So, we know that dogs learn by association, what they're looking at and consequences. And so, in positive reinforcement, we reward the behaviors that we like, and we know that we'll get more of them when we do that, instead of just waiting to correct or control a behavior we don't like."

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GOOD GIRLS Penny and Phoebe love getting their closeups.

“For example,” she continued, “if you wanted to extinguish jumping, instead of violently kneeling the dog in the chest like people did in the ’50s or some may still do now, instead of doing that, you would teach the dog a behavior that’s incompatible with jumping when they’re going to greet someone such as sit. And then you reinforce and give them a treat for sitting to greet someone. And then the next time they will increase sitting instead of jumping. So, you can do it like that using communication and rewards.”

While the first Dog Genie session is online, where she learns about the dog and gives some initial plans for owners to start working on, Tuttle typically travels to meet with the clients in person.

“The next session could be at their house or it could be out in the world at a shopping center, or it could be at a park, depending on what we’re working on. Like if you’re working to help a dog be more calm around unfamiliar dogs, we would work at a park. Not a dog park, but just a regular park where you can see some dogs and figure out an appropriate distance where your client dog can remain calm.”

Tuttle has two dogs of her own at home, both from Ventura County Animal Services (the Dog Genie is a shelter-dog advocate).

“Penny is 12 years old. Her DNA came back. She’s a coon hound mix.



CLASS IN SESSION Genie Tuttle works with clients and their humans at a local park.

So, she’s very big, and she’s got floppy ears, and she’s black and brown, and she’s a genius. She has helped me in my business with helping dogs that are nervous around other dogs to learn that it’s safe and okay,” Tuttle said. “And then Cougar is a mix between a German Shepherd and American bully pit bull-type mix.”

ADVICE FOR ENTREPRENEURS

While getting laid off from her corporate job wasn’t exactly part of Tuttle’s plan, it did serve as a catalyst for realizing her dream of working with dogs full time. She also has some advice for people starting businesses of any sort.

“Whatever your goal is, just start taking one step forward. If you want to be a dog trainer, you’re going to have to get a heck of a lot of information about dog behavior and techniques and behavior modification and just start doing the work,” she said. “Figure out what you want your business to look like. What kind of clients do you want to have? And kind of envisioning how you want to create this specialty that you have to put out into the universe. You have to seek out what would give you credibility in your industry.”

Even though dog training is an unregulated industry, Tuttle said she earned two independent credentials to ensure confidence in herself and in the eyes of her customers.

“So that if somebody does dig in and vet me, if you will, they can see that I’ve done a lot of work on my knowledge so that I can help them better. And that type of approach, I would think, would exist in just about any industry.” **M**

DOG GENIE
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