

## THE SEARCH FOR THE ALL IN ONE TOOL

In most businesses, tools are necessary to simplify daily tasks. In fact, the difference between an amateur and professional is acquiring the correct tools and using them appropriately and efficiently. Sometimes, we underestimate the power of a good tool. It is valuable to know that all tools work very differently, so it is especially important to match the correct instrument with the job at hand. Wouldn't it be fantastic if we could build a whole house with only one tool? Think of how much money we would save! Now consider the tool that you would choose.

In the grooming industry as well as in veterinary medicine, we would all like to get by with the minimum number of instruments, however, our jobs cannot be thoroughly completed if our toolbox is not full. For example, what if as a veterinarian I only had one drug to treat all dogs and cats with? Would I be able to treat an infection as well as a thyroid problem with the same drug? As funny as this sounds, I regularly get asked by groomers which one shampoo (not including a conditioner) they can use for every pet in their salon. There is really no such thing. If you are grooming short-haired dogs, they need to have more oils/greases for their hair and skin, because they do not have enough hair to protect them. If I used the same product on a drop or long coated dog, it would be a disaster both in appearance and function.

It is vital that we maintain the mentality that products such as shampoos and conditioners are essentially just tools. They are not the "cure all, end all" to grooming. If you are using them on an incorrect coat type or for the wrong reason, it would be similar to fixing a toilet with a hammer. Yes, it is a tool, but it is the wrong instrument for the job. If I use a degreasing shampoo on a dog that has irritated skin and is producing excess sebum to soothe the problem, it will drive the skin into shock and exacerbate the issue. Similar to a seasoned carpenter, we need to study the plans and establish what has to be accomplished BEFORE we grab a tool and start swinging blindly. This will definitely not provide the results that we want. I often have groomers and pet owners tell me that their dog has a skin problem, so they started them on a medicated shampoo. "So, what are the skin problems?" Answer: I do not know. "So, what is the shampoo medicated for?" Answer: I do not know. Basically, they are treating an unknown skin issue with a product that they know nothing about. That is similar to me treating a cold with an antacid and then wondering why I am not getting good results. Knowing the science behind the skin issue and having extensive product knowledge becomes especially important in getting the best results.

If you decide to build a house without the proper training or tools to do so, what do you think the results would be? Useful education on the basics, correct technique, and a box full of the correct tools is vital to succeeding in any profession. We also need to decide what specialty we want to be involved in. Very few carpenters also do plumbing or electrical work. Similarly, skin issues may not be your cup of tea, so do you know a groomer with that passion who you can send those cases to or do you just use the routine products and disregard the client's concern? Ideally, if you do not want to work in an area (large breeds, skin issues, rescues, doodles) you should seek out someone that provides special emphasis in those fields. Go have a conversation with them. You may find that they despise something that you are greatly passionate about, which in turn can become a perfect working relationship. For instance, I don't treat snakes, but one of the veterinarians in my neighborhood does and I gladly send those clients to him.

You should have tools that accomplish what your objective is. Every salon that is full service should consider 3 basic core lines. The first line is for routine baths, which includes products for short, medium, and long coats for healthy pets. Many salons have learned that a way to increase income without raising the base cost of a bath is to have multiple levels of the routine line such as luxury products, facials, special paw treatments, etc..

**SIDE NOTE:** If you raise the cost of a routine bath or groom that is forced on a client. If you offer an upgrade of a higher level of care or “pampering” then that is a choice by the client.

The second line consists of products for dry coats or early allergy cases. In the spring and fall, we tend to see a lot of dogs that are “itchy” and constantly scratching. If you consider your own skin or follow social media posts during those seasons, groomers are often posting about the same issues. During these times, whether it is the shift in weather, heating/cooling in the house, or the change of the season, dryness is common in many areas. If this is the case in your area, I suggest being proactive and use products that have extra hydrating qualities. This is an upgrade and I recommend charging extra for this service, not only because these products tend to be a little more expensive, but also because you should be properly compensated for the knowledge and expertise that helped provide a solution to the problem. The client that takes the “wait and see” attitude will often listen more closely after they see the high veterinary bills that follow by not working on the prevention side. Studies show that even if these dogs are truly “allergic” (versus dry skin) that the symptoms will be lessened if not eliminated by having a healthy sebum.

The third line consists of therapeutic products. It is much more involved, because as we discussed earlier there is not a one size fits all solution. Ideally you should have products to combat fungus/yeast and bacteria as well as products that balance PH, work as anti-inflammatories, and promote hair growth, etc.

Whether you are building a house or taking care of the skin and hair of pets, a thorough plan is required as well as the necessary tools and knowledge of their purpose. Our goal should always be to get the very best results, not settling for mediocre (or worse) outcomes, because we haven’t armed ourselves with the tools and knowledge we need to do it right.