

# Lessons from Charlie



# Lessons from Charlie

Rudolf Grimm

Author: Rudolf Grimm  
Cover Design: Rudolf Grimm  
ISBN: 9789403824185  
© Rudolf Grimm

In this book, some names have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved. Where practical examples are provided, they are based on real events; however, individuals have not been made directly identifiable.

This work has been translated from the original Dutch edition, *De Lessen van Charlie*, with the assistance of AI technology.

## Foreword

When my assistance dog Charlie came into my life, I couldn't have predicted how much he would come to mean to me. Of course, I had my suspicions, but whether they would materialize remained to be seen. Ultimately, he proved to be far more impactful than I ever could have dreamed. Charlie wasn't just an indispensable support for me; he was also invaluable to those around me. For instance, he became a source of inspiration and an unexpected teacher for my father, the author of this book.

The bond between Charlie and my father was special, so it doesn't surprise me that such valuable lessons emerged from it.

In this book, my father shares the insights he gained by observing and interacting with Charlie, and he translates these into the world of leadership. It shows how an assistance dog teaches us what it means to lead and to follow, to set boundaries and to give space, to be present without being intrusive. It demonstrates the importance of noticing what isn't said. This is precisely what animals, and Charlie in particular, excel at. They don't speak words, but they react to the purest and often smallest signals. By noticing these and acting on them, you can truly make a difference.

And for anyone who, after reading this book, still thinks Charlie was always a serious assistance dog? Absolutely not. Charlie was also known for his "middle fingers"—one on each paw—which he knew how to use quite well.

Also for his humor —because yes, dogs can have humor too!  
And for all those other special qualities with which he  
captured the hearts of many, right up until the end of his too-  
short life.

I'm truly honoured that my father wrote this book. I've  
always said, *"I wish everyone could have a Charlie in their life."*  
Now, through these pages, Charlie can keep doing what he  
was born to do—help people.

I hope this book inspires you as much as Charlie inspired us.  
May it invite you to look with different eyes—at yourself, at  
the people you work with, and perhaps even at the animals  
around you.

**Happy reading!**

Lieke Grimm

# Table of Contents

Why This Book: Lessons from Charlie  
Assistance Dog Charlie  
About Me: Rudolf Grimm

1. Attention
2. Patience and Perseverance
3. Communication and Understanding
4. Responsibility and Reliability
5. Flexibility and Adaptability
6. Self-Discipline and Focus
7. Trust and Loyalty
8. Solution-Oriented Thinking
9. Respecting Boundaries and Giving Space
10. Positivity and Encouragement
11. Resilience
12. Delay and Silence
13. Sensory Leadership
14. Egoless Leadership
15. Letting Go and Acceptance
16. From Well-Intended to Well-Executed
17. Shaky Foundation
18. A Promise is a Promise
19. Bonus
20. Yes, But...
21. Re-examining for Those in Charge
22. Letting Go with Love

Acknowledgements  
References





## **Why This Book: Lessons from Charlie?**

Sometimes you meet someone—or in my case, a dog—who changes your life forever. Charlie wasn't just any assistance dog. Besides being our youngest daughter's assistance dog, he was also my mate, my friend, my silent teacher. His presence, his behaviour, and his unconditional loyalty taught me a great deal about leadership, resilience, trust, and connection. These are lessons that extend far beyond the world of (assistance) dogs, and that's precisely why I want to share them with others.

This book was written to show how much we can learn from the simplicity, loyalty, and wisdom of this special four-legged friend. Charlie's story offers insights for anyone who leads, coaches, teaches, collaborates—or simply wants to better understand how to interact with others and with themselves. It's less about techniques and theories, and more about the power of attention, patience, service, and honesty.

The aim of this book is to make leadership more human: to prompt reflection, to inspire greater confidence in yourself and your environment, and to demonstrate that true strength sometimes lies in letting go, listening, and caring for others—just as Charlie always did.

In many organisations, leaders are trained to manage by KPIs, analyse data, and achieve results that way. Success is measurable, visible—and often a stepping stone to the next career move.

But precisely because of that, something essential often remains overlooked: the people behind those results.

How often do we truly take the time to pause and reflect on our team? To notice what's going on, who needs support, or simply wants to be heard? Leadership is more than just chasing performance. Charlie showed me how powerful it is to be truly present—not to control, but to connect. Not to perform better, but to care better. Within that attention and connection lies part of the foundation for true and lasting success.

By sharing Charlie's experiences and my personal stories, I hope to help you see leadership differently—not just with your head, but also with your heart. Because that is perhaps Charlie's most important lesson: the power of connection.

## Assistance Dog Charlie

The acquisition costs for an assistance dog in the Netherlands can amount to as much as £40,000. For most people, that's simply not an amount they can cover from their own resources. The only realistic way to obtain an assistance dog, therefore, is through healthcare insurance or the Social Support Act (WMO). However, these bodies primarily focus on the financial picture. If they're investing £40,000 in someone, they want to see a return: reduced reliance on regular care, increased social participation, or ideally, paid employment. An application is only approved if that 'return on investment' appears sufficiently guaranteed. If that prospect is lacking, the application is often rejected.

Even if the application is approved, new obstacles arise. For instance, there are long waiting lists, and the assistance dog is only provided on loan. This means the dog is not, in principle, your property and can be reclaimed—for example, if it fails its annual examination or reaches retirement age, usually around nine years old.

For my daughter—who would greatly benefit from an assistance dog due to her health—this was simply too great a risk. That's why she chose a different path: she bought a puppy herself, with the firm intention of training him to become her own assistance dog. To do so, she received weekly guidance from a private trainer, who coached them and assigned tasks.

It was still a costly and intensive process, but it gave her greater control over both the journey and the outcome. Through *team training*—where owner and dog are trained together to become a functional unit—her puppy would grow into a certified assistance dog, one that wouldn't simply disappear from her life.

That puppy was Charlie.

Charlie was a black-and-white Labradoodle, born in South Holland. His breeder collaborated with the Assistance Dog Foundation (*Stichting Hulphond*), which had first choice in assigning the puppies.

Fortunately, Charlie—the largest of the litter—wasn't selected. He was considered just a bit too social for the official assistance dog programme. And so, he became available to my daughter. Under the name *Top Dog*, he entered her life—and eventually mine too.

What followed were seven years of dedication, growth, and close collaboration. My daughter and Charlie formed an increasingly strong team. Charlie proved eager to learn and highly intelligent. He passed his annual exams with ease and developed into a stable, reliable pillar of support in my daughter's daily life. Together, they found ways to overcome obstacles, and their bond deepened over the years. Charlie's presence not only enriched her life, but also had a profound impact on those around her.

I too—as Charlie’s ‘grandad’—built a deep bond with him. We shared a warm connection, and I genuinely enjoyed watching him work. He taught me things I could never have learned from books: about patience, trust, and unconditional dedication.

Above all, he gave me a sense of reassurance. I saw that my daughter, partly thanks to him, was beginning to stand a little more firmly in life. They were a super duo!



## About me, Rudolf Grimm

After a successful career as a leader in logistics and supply chain, I've been guiding aspiring and current leaders in their development since 2010. I do this as a lecturer, coach, and mentor—both at vocational (MBO) and higher professional (HBO) education levels, as well as through training courses and individual coaching programmes. My focus is on leadership development, communication, and other essential skills needed to lead with confidence and conviction.

Over the years, I've had the privilege of supporting hundreds of leaders in their growth, and I consistently return to one central conviction: truly knowing your team is perhaps the most crucial prerequisite for effective leadership. No model or method can outweigh the power of genuine attention, understanding, and connection. People instinctively sense whether you see them, hear them, and take them seriously—and only when that happens does space emerge for collaboration, ownership, and trust.

One moment that meant a great deal to me personally was the day I spent with Jos Burgers, whom I've admired for years. As a fan of his books—at the time, particularly *De Wet van Snuf* (*Snuf's Law*) and *Hondenbrokken* (*Dog Biscuits*)—I had the opportunity to accompany him: a day together in the car, attending three of his performances, and engaging in conversations about his work and his views on customers, behaviour, and influence.

It was a remarkable experience that not only inspired me, but also gave me plenty to reflect on.

That day, something was set in motion—a seed was planted.

Years later, the idea emerged to describe in this book how valuable lessons for leaders can be found in the behaviour of dogs—and especially assistance dogs. Lessons about attention, alignment, clarity, mutual trust, and unconditional support.

Lessons that, in my view, perfectly reflect the challenges leaders face today. It became clear to me: after *Snuf's Law*, it was time for *Lessons from Charlie*.

Let me be honest from the start: I don't claim to come anywhere close to Jos Burgers' writing style. His strength lies in simplicity, humour, and razor-sharp observation. But what I do hope to achieve is that this book, in its own way, will resonate, provoke thought, and inspire. Not through theoretical models, but through the story of a remarkable assistance dog—Charlie—and the valuable insights he gave us.

This book is for everyone who works with people. For leaders who want to look beyond KPIs and meetings. For professionals who believe that connection isn't a 'soft skill', but rather the solid core of effective leadership. And for anyone open to learning from an assistance dog.



## Attention – The Strength of Unprompted Generosity

Charlie was my daughter's assistance dog—a black and white Labradoodle with loyal eyes, a soft coat, and a remarkable gift: an uncanny sense of when someone needed something. And he didn't act because he was asked—quite the opposite. Precisely in the moments when my daughter thought, *"I have to do this alone,"* Charlie was there. Her silent support, always at the right time, without anyone needing to ask.

What I perhaps admired most about Charlie was his undeniable talent for anticipation. He sensed things before we did. Even before my daughter herself realised she was feeling uneasy—that her breathing was quickening, or that she was beginning to withdraw—he was already there. No grand gestures. It was in the small, the subtle: Charlie would sit beside her, gently rest his head on her lap, or give her a soft, reassuring nudge with his nose. No words, no explanations. Just: *"I'm here. I see you. You don't have to do it alone."*

What Charlie offered was pure, unprompted attention. No expectations. No judgement. And, crucially, no question of *"What do I get in return?"* It was simply: *"You need something, so I'm giving it."* Freely. Unconditionally. And that, precisely, was the power of his presence.