

BOUND ANGELS

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Bringing Home the New Dog.

This is an area in which I am often asked to help, often times after the wrong advice was taken. When you adopt or buy your new dog and bring him home there are many things to consider. The first thing people want to do is give their dog a loving home environment, lots of freedom, toys and the perfect life. This sends very scary and confusing messages to the dog's mind.

First off, we need to understand that dogs and humans relate very differently, and forcing our human ways onto a dog is highly unfair. Dogs do not see love the way we see it. To a human love is a warm fuzzy feeling that makes us tingle and happy. Dogs, although needing love, require structure before love. Structure makes a dog feel safe, love doesn't. Dogs are not creatures that function on an equality based relationships. Dogs are pack animals that understand and relate to pack structure. It doesn't matter if your dog is a 6-pound Chihuahua or a 180 lb Rottweiler. Instinct is instinct, and all dogs have instinct hard wired into their brains. Dogs strive for pack structure and will fight to maintain or achieve it. Dogs function on a hierarchical structure and want to know their place in the pack. Either you will establish this structure for your dog or the dog will establish it for himself, and consequently you. Believe me, you do not want your dog to establish pack structure for you. The leader of the pack establishes this and the rest of the pack lives by it. It is understood in a dogs mind who the leader is and once established this leader is respected and listened to. There are many qualities that the leader has in the canine kingdom, the most important of which are: strength, fairness and aloofness / indifference. In the dog pack the leader is established almost immediately. The leader is not a bully or a jerk, the leader does not put down a bowl of food and then take it away, the leader does not hit the other dogs or yell at them. The leader pays little attention to the rest of the pack, and therefore allows the pack to observe him as the leader.

When people first bring a dog home, the dog is given a great deal of love and freedom, until he messes up. He is allowed on the furniture until he eats a pillow, he's allowed in every room, until he pees on the nice carpet, he's given kisses and hugs until its time to watch TV. In other words the dog's world goes from very small, at the shelter to very big in the home. Until the other shoe drops and then the dog is confined to a crate, a backyard or worse yet, returned to the shelter. My advice on introducing a new dog to a home is simple and straightforward. The dog is given the opportunity to observe me as a leader and I require him to stay with me. Using a crate or some sort of initial confinement is a fair and simple way to achieve this. Forget your opinion on crates and open your mind. I use a crate as a safe place for the dog to be where nothing is expected of him, a place that is solely his. It is not a place of punishment or confinement; in fact I use the crate as a place where the dog receives treats, reward and his favorite blanket. From within the crate the dog can observe me, my family, guests and other dogs if they live in the home. When the dog comes out of the crate it is always supervised until I know he understands freedom. That includes being on a tether, a cotton line he can drag around

the house and always supervised. The less chances he has to make a mistake, the easier his training will be, and the better he will learn to be a non-destructive member of my family.

I find that getting a dog to enjoy being in a crate is a fun and beneficial game. We teach him to go to his crate and stay in his crate through a series of games, not by forcing him into the crate and slamming the door. I urge you to research the many methods of crate training available. I will write an article on crate training in the near future, so please watch the site for it. I can tell you now that using treats and positive reinforcement is the ONLY way to get your dog to “get” crate training. One of the easiest initial ways to get your dog accustomed to a crate is to feed him only in his crate.

The crate is the dog’s gateway to freedom. He stays in the crate to protect him, the house and to teach him structure. When he comes out we take the time to supervise him and teach him what is expected of him. As he begins to learn these behaviors he is allowed more and more time outside of the crate until eventually he will only go to his crate when necessary, which becomes less and less.

The new dog does not receive lots of “love and kisses” his first few days in the new home. There will be plenty of time for that, in fact, his entire life can be filled with love and kisses once we establish the fact that I am the alpha dog here. Dogs seek leadership, and giving hugs and kisses are not seen as leadership in the dog’s instinctual drive. I don’t spend much time fussing over him at first, instead I expect him to see me as his leader and look up to me. If I spend an immense amount of time fussing over him, he will see me as a pack mate, or worse yet a lower ranking member of the pack and therefore he will not be able to see me as a leader. People often times think these approaches are mean when in fact the cuddly – kissy approach is highly unfair and wrong to the dog. Like I said, there is plenty of time to become lovey with the dog once he understands and sees you as his leader. Trying to do both confuses the dog. Give the dog leadership and strength and he will love you, give him love and he will love you but not respect you. Respect is what dogs crave, as when they know they have a leader they will listen. And listen is what you want your dog to do.

I might add a note here that some people argue that their dog is fine, most of the time. Or that they feel this sort of treatment is unnecessary because they’ve had dogs their whole lives. My answer to them is, “Do as you wish.” These people clearly have no knowledge about dog behavior and if it works fine, go for it. However, I spend my time with the dogs that this did not work for. The dogs that I see are dumped at the shelter because they don’t behave or because they bite. I see countless dogs that are killed because humans think they “understand” and “know” dogs, which they don’t. I can assure you that the loving approach may work; however if it doesn’t, the dog is the one to suffer. Giving the dog structure, will undoubtedly work and will give the dog a fair chance of remaining in your family pack.

It is important to remember that what you are doing is developing a relationship with your dog, NOT training him. Anyone who brings a dog home from a shelter, adoption, breeder, or wherever and immediately wants to start training them is making a huge mistake. Putting a collar on a dog and yanking him around or making them do sit, stay, etc. is downright stupid. The first thing to do with a new dog is build a relationship with the dog based on fairness and trust, then the dog has a reason to want to listen to you. Forcing a dog to do something does not strengthen the relationship. When your new dog first comes home, he is not given any training. The dog’s only responsibility is to be with you and look to you. For that he is rewarded. His

reward comes in the way of food, walks and positive reinforcement. This reinforcement comes in the way of “good boy” a positive voice that he will always associate with doing the right thing. The only thing I would correct a dog on in this early stage would be aggression. I will deal with that in another article, but I will say here that aggression is dealt with quickly, strongly and without emotion. There is NO YELLING. A firm voice is ok to get the dogs attention, but anger has no place in dog training.

The most important thing to do will be to remain somewhat disconnected from the dog to allow him to connect to you. It’s like a Japanese parable I used when I taught Karate:

“ A young man approached the river and saw the reflection of the moon in the water and grabbed at it and ran away. When he looked in his hand the water was gone and so was the reflection of the moon. He tried over and over again. The master watched from a distance and approached the young man and asked him what he was trying to do. The young man said, “I am here to take the moon with me.” The master said, “By force you will never get it, as you have seen. Allow me to show you.” The master gently reached and scooped up the water in his hands. He said, “As you can see that I now have the moon in my hands, yet its reflection remains in the water for all others to enjoy as well.”

The moral of the story is simple; by being forceful nothing is accomplished. If you keep pushing to get the dog to like you, he will determine when he’s had enough and will walk away. Allowing a dog the power to be a leader puts him in a dangerous position. Dogs that make decisions generally make bad decisions. I want my dog to look to me to make decisions for him, and to teach him what decisions he is allowed to make. This concept flies in the face of human logic and understanding, but makes perfect sense to a dog. The alpha dog does not go around hugging and petting the other members of the pack. And, when the members of the pack come up to him for affection, he often pushes them away or walks away. When the leader wants to give affection that is his choice. Do not treat your dog like a stuffed animal.

I had a client who told me that she got her dog because she does not have an intimate lover and wanted the dog to take the place of the affection that she craved. I found this quite stupid and highly unfair to the dog. Needless to say, this dog became an aggressive dog that she could not deal with. Dogs are not love sponges. They are living sentient beings that crave autonomy, respect and compassion. Treat a dog like a dog, not like a human. If you had a pet fish you’d be stupid to take it out of the tank to hug and kiss it and sleep with it. This is as physically dangerous for the fish as being lovey dovey is emotionally damaging to a dog in the phase of establishing his pack structure. I am NOT saying to be mean to your dog, I am saying be aloof.

One of the main ways your dog will see who his leader is will be by feeding times. In this area it is of extreme importance to follow what a dog understands from instincts. The leader of the pack eats first, and then the rest of the pack eats. That means, you, the human eats first. The dog does not beg at the table, and if he does he is ignored or pushed away without any words or emotion. If that doesn’t work, he goes to his crate. When you finish, his bowl is put down and you walk away. Do not pet him or try to put your hand in his bowl while he is eating. This is stupid and proves nothing. You ate, now it’s his turn. Keep children away from dogs when they are eating. If a dog understands that his food will not be taken away from him, chances are he won’t be food aggressive.

I'd also like to touch on dogs and furniture. This is a sticky point with most people. My rule of thumb is the dog does not go on the furniture until:

- a. they are invited on the furniture
- b. they clearly understand pack structure.

And no matter what, furniture is a privilege, not a right. The furniture belongs to the leader, not to the dog. My general rule would be that the dog is NEVER allowed onto the furniture until training and relationship has been clearly established. Allowing dogs on furniture puts them in an equal position with the human and therefore makes them see the human as a pack-member as opposed to a pack leader.

Countless people make the mistake in thinking a dog's behavior, or misbehaving is cute at first only to be annoyed by it later on. A trained dog is a happy dog and enjoys a happy, social life. Many, if not all of the dogs that I work with are "problem children," Sharpei, Pit Bulls, Chows, Shepherds, Dobermans and more. They are the breeds that when they slip out of control, they become dangerous. I've rescued countless of these dogs from death row and rehabbed them into loving homes. Dog aggression is issue I am called for most often and the root of the problem more often than not is improper family / pack structure.

It makes me sad when I see people "love" their dogs and not give them the structure they need. Inevitably these dogs end up as cast outs and spend much of their time ostracized to a remote corner of the house or yard. Trained, well-behaved dogs enjoy a great social life and are part of the family their entire lives. Giving your dog the structure he needs from the very beginning solves a problem before it begins. There is no reason that you cannot give your dog all the love you wish to once you've established yourself as the dogs clear leader. My dog is loved and hugged and kissed every day.... But, he understands pack structure. He knows that I am his leader and that makes him feel safe. That being said, I should make clear that I got him from a friend who "loved" him as a puppy, but as he grew older he became "out of control." Meeting him now, you could never tell that. I have had similar situations with numerous other dogs, so I speak to you from a place of experience and knowledge, and also from a place of undying love for dogs. I donate much of my time to rescue, rehab, and media awareness for those that are thrown away by our society: the dogs that are being killed every day because they are not understood and because they acted and responded to the treatment their leaders gave them. The leaders who did not understand their strong instincts lead them to become the out of control dogs they are.

If it is your goal to give your dog a happy healthy life, allow them to be a dog. Don't smother the dog, but instead give him the structure he craves. When the dog comes to his new home, make sure he understands that it is your home that you are sharing with him, not the other way around. Give him structure, and he will give you love.

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