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Relationships and Pack Leadership

“Do what has to be done, when it has to be done, as well as it can be done, and do it that way all the time.”

-Bobby Knight

Pack leadership is your greatest challenge, yet your best opportunity for a successful relationship with your dog. A well-balanced dog is an integral member of the family and has a clear ranking among the group. The word here is “clear”. Just like a single member of a soccer team, has a specific position and game plan to execute on behalf of the team...so does your dog! So therefore you become the coach: to maintain social order of the household team. Would you like an acronym for the word “team”? **T**ogether **E**ach **A**ccomplishes **M**ore. So, we can learn to expect more!

In the old days, the dog's role in the family was more practical. They had jobs to do. They guarded the house, got rid of rodents, they helped us hunt, they herded livestock, and, in some parts of the country they pulled sleds for transportation and to help find lost persons. People sat in rooms that were either cooler or warmer due to the lack of air conditioning or heat...and so did the dog. They ate table scraps after the family was finished with their meal. Dogs were also bred for their working qualities and not for looks or profit, as they are today.

Training methods have improved over the years however; the “gray” area for our dogs is in the unclear social order and the lack of purpose within the environment they live. Hence, many believe that this contributes to the vast amount of behavioral problems we see today. With our busy lives attached to cell phones, and our ‘on the run’ lifestyles, many dogs are just another thing for us to own! Just as you believe in certain values and rights for yourself and your children, a live being that you bring into your home has a set of rights as well. Ok, that is just my opinion. **HOWEVER**, since I am on the subject, in many states, if you are caught abusing an animal, you can go to jail!

On the other hand, here is another glooming issue. Today, dogs, in a lot of cases, are behaving as a team member who plays the game independently. They are allowed on the furniture without being invited. They eat out of bowls with free flowing food. This is analogous to a trust fund child who has had unlimited funds and would have no need to ever work for minimum wage. They come and go through out the house whenever they please. They have lots of unearned toys and possessions to guard. They have constant petting and affection. Owners like this, who treat their dogs like kings and queens, do not understand why loose leash walking is difficult, or why Fluffy won't come when called. Lastly, what about the family where both parents have to work, they have kids to tend to, and Fluffy is a last consideration. Now, Fluffy finds ways to entertain herself, such as digging, barking, obsessive play, etc. Guess what ends up happening now? Fluffy is a problem. Wow, this is quite opposite to abuse, you might be saying. But here is the reality; six million dogs a year are euthanized. Once Fluffy gets dropped off in a shelter, due to a behavioral problem, she is on borrowed time. As much as we would like to fantasize, don't think that the United States has joined the politically correct and passed a law to make euthanasia illegal. It hasn't. So, lets not fantasize. Lets fix the problem so that nothing bad will happen to your dog. You are in complete control of your dog's environment and you can make it a great environment! It only takes a little bit of education. After all, who is a man's best friend?

Running with the pack

In the early 90's, it was determined, for the record, that the zoological classification of the domestic dog be changed from "canis familiaris" to "canis lupus familiaris". What this means is that the wolf and the domestic dog are of the same species. This warrants the attention of the everyday pet owner. Dogs are genetically in the same category as the wild wolf. This makes understanding behavior even more important, and that we need to be conscious of what our observations of the wolf in the wild can tell us about our "best friends".

Originally, a few decades ago, behaviorists observed that there was a definite pecking order with in a pack, hence, the development of confrontational training methods. Certain myths were established as a "natural " way to be dominating over your dog. You've probably heard about the "alpha roll over", "scruff shake", and direct eye contact. Most recent studies of wolf packs have determined that these actions are extremely threatening behaviors and that an alpha dog in its right mind would only act in this way as a last resort and by no means as a way of "training or relating" to other members. It is then noted that dogs really have a more civilized way of relating to one another that relies on posturing, social rituals and avoiding confrontation. Dogs realize that if injured in a fight, hunting, foraging, and traveling to get food are at stake and now, so is the well-being of the pack. Now, in human terms, what this means is that you must also understand posturing and social rituals that make sense to your dog. It is important that you learn to be a strong, confident, dependable, consistent and most

importantly, a non-confrontational leader to your dog. Therefore, to your 'canis lupus familiaris', calm, confident energy from you will produce calm, compliant energy from him.

Contrary to what most pet owners believe, most dogs are not born to be a leader. It is actually quite stressful for most dogs to be without a leader. Simply put, it is your job as a caretaker, owner, and trainer, to be a kind, benevolent leader and role model to and for your dog. He will be happier in this environment. He will want to please his new role model once you have assumed leadership. Your dog will actually be relieved and you will see behavioral changes that are for the better. Remember, dogs may at some point in time, as a pack leader gets older or elderly and cannot maintain control, there will be a fight for that position, maybe even to the death. However, dogs do not fight for the number 2 position. So if you have dogs fighting in your presence, beware! This could mean that you are not perceived as the leader. Another important note: There is a difference in the terms "dominant" and "aggressive". Many people tend to think that if their dog appears to be dominant or aggressive, he is positioning for leadership. A dominant dog is assertive and independent. An aggressive dog is hostile, combative and perhaps defensively antagonistic. Keep in mind that a submissive dog can become aggressive if provoked.

So, when a dog looks to the family for a leader, which is what he is genetically wired to do, and he sees none, he will feel it is up to him to fill this void. Most dogs who are pushed into this position unnaturally, will become stressed. It is here that perhaps a dominant dog will manipulate their way into leadership, taking advantage of an uneducated, new owner. Other dogs may use aggression to maintain order. Dogs that are self-appointed into this position will come up with all sorts of unwanted behaviors to maintain their status in the family unit. Here are a few signs that this could be happening to you:

- Pushy at the front door
- Attaining the central or elevated sleeping position
- They don't like being disturbed while sleeping
- Barking excessively
- Food possessive
- Sensitive at times to being touched
- Demanding attention

If you are seeing any of the above behaviors, please do not worry. We can change the game!! Here is how you can portray yourself as the leader; and provide a sound environment for your dog.

The Gameplan:

(Rules, Techniques, and Fundamentals)

Feeding:

- Puppies 2 to 6 months old can be fed 3 times a day.
- At 6 months old to 1 year old, you can feed 2 times a day.
- At 1 year old or older, feeding once a day is acceptable unless your breed has specific needs.
- You eat first, and then feed your dogs.
- Ignore the dog while you eat and never feed him when he is whining.
- Make him sit while you put down the bowl of food. Have him stay until you give the release command.
- He should finish his food in one sitting. If he walks away, pick up the food until the next feeding.

Sleeping:

- Dogs shouldn't sleep on the furniture or bed. You can get the dog used to dragging a leash around so you can remove them from the couch or whatever piece of furniture they are lying on. Give a treat when you lure an aggressive or dominant dog off furniture, to minimize unwanted responses.
- Dogs should sleep in a crate. If you are one of those who would like the dog to protect your environment, then only allow him to roam when the dog's manners are good. This means that the dog is calm, obedient, stays off the furniture, is housebroken, doesn't chew anything and stays out of forbidden areas. Only then can your dog earn the job of protecting you or your property

House manners:

- You need to introduce the dog to his environment. This sets the rules, limits, and boundaries so that the dog has a clear idea in his mind where he is allowed to be and where he is not allowed to be.
- Give the dog a house tour.
- Walk him through the house on a leash. Allow him to sniff around. Praise when he is calm and give a treat.

- If he drags you, stop and wait for him to orient back to you.
- If he gets into something you don't want him to, stop, clap your hands, and interrupt the behavior.
- Don't use your voice to interrupt him. This way he won't get the idea to only leave things alone when you are there.
- Take the puppy to a well-trafficked area and tie him up with a 6-foot leash and a buckle collar. Place a good mat or bed there for him and make this his "place". Give an appropriate chew toy and invite him to relax in that area. Reward calmness. If he gets crazy, just take him outside if he can't stay calm.
- Only put him in a 'place' for 10 to 30 minutes at a time at first. Make sure if he is fussing, it is not because he has to go to the bathroom. These suggestions should be implemented after potty and exercise.
- Start teaching boundaries for the areas off limits. Once basic obedience cues are learned, take him on a leash tour...ask for a down/stay in front of a room that is off limits. When, or if he crosses into the room, shut the door on him. Practice down/stays on the correct side of those doors, which lead to the rooms that are off limits to him.
- Teach the puppy not to touch certain items. Go through the house first and spray a product such as "bitter apple" on the things that are off limits. Then take the dog on the tour. When he gets near a treated object, he should recoil due to the smell. Praise and treat. Repeat once a day, both spraying the object and taking the dog on the tour until he ignores the off limit items.
- Repeat all steps with the puppy dragging the leash instead of you leading him.
- Gradually the puppy earns freedom without the leash. One mistake means you take a step backwards. Perhaps only give the puppy freedom in one room for a while. Most owners go too fast with giving freedom! Remember, you wouldn't allow a 2 year old to roam around the house unsupervised. Most dogs cannot go loose until 8 to 10 months old.

Playing:

- You choose when to play and when to quit.
- You provide toys when it is playtime and you remove them when playing is over.
- Fetch, obedience, and trick training are great ways to interact and play with your dog.
- Tease slapping, wrestling, chasing, allowing him to bark or win at "tug of war" are unacceptable ways to play.

Obedience:

- No free lunch!!! Ask the dog to do a simple sit to get the things that he likes, such as a meal, petting, a car ride, a walk, or a toy. Don't give these things for free. He will see no reason to be obedient when you ask; if he gets the things he likes all the time anyway!
- Teach him to wait at the doorway and you go through first.
- Make sure he sits for petting and attention regardless if it is from you or your guests. If the dog breaks from the sit or the down, the petting stops.
- Here is an easy one...when the dog is good, do not forget to reward him. Most people feel that when they watch T.V., and the dog is calm, all is well. Well then, the dog gets ignored when "all is well" doesn't he? So reach down and praise occasionally. Remember, if the dog wants attention and you are busy...so you say "no, don't", that is better to the dog than being ignored. You can then inadvertently teach your dog to be "bad" to get you to focus on him. It is better than no attention.

Conclusion

Remember, this is about the "rules, limits, and boundaries" as the Dog Whisperer, Cesar Millan, would say. You are in charge and this is the how to and the why. Your family and your dog will co-exist together in a much happier state if everyone understands their role in the family unit, the family pack.

Remember, duties of the leader:

- Establish the rules
- Enforce the rules
- Maintain social order

Examples of how you must behave to be the leader:

- You eat first
- You go through the door first
- Stay calm and in control (yelling and loud remarks to a dog means instability)
- Lead on a walk
- Do not let your personal space be invaded
- Determine when play starts and stops
- Do not beg for attention from your dog

- Do not offer free treats without at least a sit from your dog
- You sleep on the bed and the dog sleeps on lower ground
- Do not change direction or step over the dog to get around him
- Leaders assign the resting spot to the other pack members
- Leaders provide the food and the order to which they eat

Now, you have acquired knowledge and increased your level of canine education. Putting together a game plan to develop and enhance your relationship with your “best friend” should be less intimidating. Make it fun and rewarding. Make it a game plan for a lifetime, and you will win your “best friends” respect! Thank you, Melinda

“Life is a game that holds many rewards for those who dare to compete. Winning is never an accident; neither is losing. The key to success is knowing the rules, techniques, and fundamentals of the game, and having a plan for attaining the goal.”

-John Baxter (USC football coach)

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you”

Job 12:7

This article was written by Melinda Suglio, with references from the Animal Behavior College course work.