



Melinda C. Suglio

www.thek9gameplan.com

ph.951-768-7374

Welcome to the Class

Welcome to the K9 Gameplan! You are about to engage in a team sport; you and your dog. Your dog should be an integral part of your family and therefore act appropriately. What are appropriate responses of a canine family member? He should act as though he is a member of **your** pack. Running with the pack is what your dog is hard wired to do. It is your responsibility as a dog owner and as a member of society, to be the leader of your pack. It is the dog's genetic make-up to operate as a pack member and to fill that roll. Like any team member, each player has a specific contribution and function to the team and its success. In human terms, a modified definition of a coach is "to take you where you could not take yourself". The modified definition of a teacher is to "give out information". For any given "machine" (team, handler, dog) to run to perfection, all of its moving parts must be at optimum capacity. You are going to become the coach, teacher, pack leader to your dog. Your dog is your valued recruit and star player! At the K9 Gameplan, we will train both ends of the leash. Let the games begin....

In the early 1990's, Mammologist re-classified the domestic dog as the species, "canis lupus familiaris". What this classification means is that the wolf (canis lupus) and the domestic dog are the same species. This warrants your attention, the dog owner. Considering the genetic, physical, and behavioral similarities between the wolf and your dog it is extremely important to recognize how the pack functions and what is expected of a pack leader. (see my article on "Relationships and Team Leadership")

Roles of a pack leader:

- They stay calm and in control.
- They do not let their personal space be invaded.
- They do not beg for attention.
- They set the pace and direction of movement.
- They sleep on higher ground.

- They eat first.
- They decide when play begins and ends.

Very few dogs are born as the true alpha dog. However, if the human shows no signs of leadership, the domestic pet feels he needs to become the leader. Without a leader, survival is at stake. This is in their make up to have a leader. Again, the majority of dogs are not born to lead and can become stressed if they find themselves in this position. As a result they will be poor leaders. To the human, this is considered a “behavior problem”. If we then scrutinize the relationship between the owner and the animal in question with the problem, frequently it is an issue with the human being at fault. Put simply, there is no leadership or there is inconsistent discipline. Both conditions are very stressful for a dog. Your role as owner is to provide exercise (both physically and mentally), discipline and then affection to your dog, in that order. There is a difference between giving too much affection, verses presenting yourself as a leader. You cannot love your dog to death without consequences. You will then only be a caretaker to your dog and not a leader. What will you be lacking then? Respect! So....

In human terms, this is your role:

- You go through the door first.
- You lead when out on a walk.
- You decide when to play and when to give affection.
- No free treats, they must be earned.
- Stay calm, confident and expect calm, compliant behavior.
- Lastly...if the dog is absolutely perfect in its behavior, in every conceptual manner, and you invite the dog to sleep in the bed, don't let the dog jump up there uninvited!!!

Signs that you may have the true pack leader in your dog, are growling when you approach their food, aggression when you play tug of war, other unwarranted aggression, and the showing of teeth. If you see these behaviors, you may need private consultations. Please don't be afraid to ask me if you are in doubt.

As for our class, I would like you to keep these basic concepts in mind regarding learning theory: If we reduce our game plan to its simplest terms, training a dog, behavioral modification or elimination, it is a four part process, or better said "this game has four quarters".

The four Quarters of the Game:

1. The learning phase
2. Managing the situation and setting the dog up to succeed
3. Consequences
4. Consistency

If you are simply training the dog for obedience, it begins with the step-by-step building blocks, or as some would say, "shaping". If we are working on extinguishing or modifying a behavior, we will set the dog up to succeed. By managing the situation, (i.e. don't let a 5 month old puppy have free run thought out the house, just as you would not let a two year old run free with out supervision). Again,by managing the situation we facilitate the dog's success and prevent failure! In order then to be clear to the animal, we reward good behavior or we provide consequences. Consequences can be anything from the lack of a reward for an incorrect behavior to a collar correction. And the game plan falls apart if there is no consistency. I am referring to everyone and anyone who touches/interacts with the dog, consistency, consistency, consistency.

Sixty percent of the dogs in the shelters are there because one or more of the four elements above were not carried out and the dog was never clear about his role in the family pack. Without the four elements in place, you lack leadership. Dogs become anxious and insecure without a leader. As the dog then tries to fill this role (probably unnaturally so) he is thought to have behavioral problems. If the owner is not capable of finding solutions, the animal is then in jeopardy of being re-homed or sheltered and euthanasia is then imminent! Being of a higher order, we the human, can educate ourselves so this never happens to an animal that we invited to come into our lives.

Therefore, by attending this class, my hat is off to you for taking the first step to developing a heart warming, successful relationship with your canine companion. Thank you!

What you need to bring to class

1. A bed, mat, or towel for each and every class
2. A six foot leash
3. A long line 15 to 20 feet long or longer
4. A hands free treat bag holder, fanny pack or clip on
5. A large bag of really good treats (in your dogs opinion)

6. A hungry dog
7. 'Poop picker upper' bags
8. A collar, harnesses only for small dogs, prefer a buckle collar vs. a snap
9. Special note: please come to class with the collar tight enough so that the dog does not get loose. The rule is that you can only slip/fit 2 fingers under the collar.

My Philosophy

My training technique teaches dogs that obedience and other desirable behaviors, like not jumping on people, earn him the things he likes, such as; treats, toys, petting, and praise. This type of training creates a dog whose primary motivation is based on earning a reward as opposed to avoiding a punishment. My goal is to teach you to look at your dog as an individual and use the things he likes as a way of rewarding him whenever he does something you like. This will motivate both you and your dog without causing confusion or stress and it's a lot of fun as well!

****My philosophy and thoughts that went into this article are a direct result from the "*Animal Behavioral College*" Experience**

What is a good trainer?

"Finally, the good dog trainer has a worldly understanding of his pupil, and knows it for a dog, and only a dog. He realizes that the animal does things for its own reasons and does not necessarily live its whole life in order to please its trainer. He accepts that sometimes his dog will be less than completely brave, that the animal has no sense of fair play or honesty, that it does nothing for spite and that its basic nature is that of an opportunistic predator. For the trainers respect for his dog should arise the capacity to self-examine. Let the trainer examine himself when his dog makes a mistake or does not understand an exercise, and ask himself, "Where am I at fault?"

--Susan Barwig and Stewart Hilliard

"Whomever shall find the answer to the question "How shall I say this to my dog?" Has won the *game* and can develop from his animal whatever he likes."

A quote from Max von Stephanitz (founder of the German Shepherd dog)