Creating a Subconscious Mess

By Cheri Lucas

Simple Ways We Unknowingly Mess Up Our Dogs

> " To begin to turn things around with your dog, you don't need to take any activities away from him, just do them on YOUR terms instead of HIS. "
>
> *-- Cheri Lucas*

A few weeks ago I rescued a 13-year-old Dachshund from death row at a high kill county shelter in Los Angeles. "Willie" has cataracts, a little arthritis and only about 3 teeth left!

He's incredibly happy and adjusting beautifully to his new home. But Willie has one annoying bad habit; he barks like a seal if he's outside and wants to come in. His message is clear – "Let me in! NOW!"

I have an amazing assistant. Maria takes immaculate care of the dogs while I'm away. She knows their medication schedule like the back of her hand. Their water bowls are kept full of fresh water. Their food is prepared lovingly every morning. But Maria has one fatal flaw – she practices affection, affection, and affection with the dogs 100 percent of the time. No dog should every have to suffer the indignity of boundaries or discipline as far as Maria is concerned.

As Maria was leaving my house yesterday, she told me that Willie was in the back yard with the rest of the dogs. "He's being very quiet," she said. "You don't have to let him in until he starts barking." Wow, thanks for the heads up, Maria! This was a major "AH HA!" moment!

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No wonder I was having so much trouble turning Willie's incessant barking around! Every time he shouted his command to Maria, she happily obeyed him. My efforts were being sabotaged by one of my own!

When we give in to a dog's demands, we are essentially reinforcing his bad behavior by rewarding it. Think about it: if you pet your dog when he paws at your leg, you are teaching him how to demand affection and get it. Most of the time we nurture bad behaviour unconsciously. Our responses to our dogs "demands" are pretty much automatic. But if you want to mold your dog into a model citizen, stop and think about the dynamics that are in play during your interactions with your dog. Make an effort to see how things appear through your dog's eyes.

For example, if you love to take Rover to his favorite park to play "Let's go chase the squirrels!" then is it any wonder he still chases the neighborhood cats? If it's okay to practice aggression with one species, can we really expect him to not chase another species that he considers prey? Can you see how easy it is to inadvertently nurture bad behavior?

To begin to turn things around with your dog, you don't need to take any activities away from him, just do them on YOUR terms instead of HIS.

For example: Invite your dog to play fetch with you when he's NOT standing over you with a slobbery tennis ball. Instead, when he's calm and submissive, grab his favorite ball and initiate a game of fetch. Make sure you win the game by ending it and putting the ball away ON YOUR TERMS.

If your dog is following you around the kitchen in an effort to speed up his dinner service, ask him to go to his pillow in another room. Have him remain there calmly until you invite him back in for supper. If your dog approaches you as you're

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watching TV and plops his head on your knee, fight the urge to see this behavior as adorable and see it for what it is: a command for attention. Send him to his pillow for a few minutes. Once he's calm again, INVITE him over to you for that head massage he was hoping for.

Human or canine, the pleasures in life are so much sweeter when we earn them!

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