

The Importance of Being a Fair Leader

By Cheri Lucas

There's a popular misconception that creating structure and setting boundaries for our dogs is akin to punishment. Nothing could be further from the truth. In actuality, when we take the time to give our dogs the direction they crave, we become relevant in their lives.

Everyone understands the importance of raising our children properly. We teach them right from wrong. We show them by example to live their lives with integrity. With proper guidance, our children will grow up to be successful, productive and happy adults.

These same principles apply to our dogs. With very little effort, we can teach our dogs to look to us for direction. Their mothers begin teaching and disciplining them when they are only a few weeks old. When they leave their mothers and become a part of our family, it's incumbent on us to show them how they need to behave in our human household.

One of the first things I teach my dogs, or my client dogs, is to go in and out of any "threshold" calmly. This means that they come in and out of a crate when they are calm and when they give me eye contact. The same is true for going in and out of the house, gate, or car. The idea is to teach the dog that wherever he goes, he must go there on our terms. This simple exercise can be done

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multiple times throughout the day without actually setting time aside to do formal training.

This is what I consider part of "foundation" training. So often I see dogs that are punished for practicing unwanted behaviors, but their owners have never shown them what acceptable behavior is. The dog is not "blowing off" their owner by not complying to their wishes. They simply don't know what to do in lieu of the unwanted behavior. In other words, the punishment they are receiving has no context to the dog. After all, the owner never taught him an alternative way of behaving!

When you find yourself frustrated by your dog's antics, stop and take the time to analyze the situation. Consider the possibility that your dog may be behaving in a certain way because he just doesn't understand what you want from him. This will keep you from taking your dog's behavior personally.

Then, start over. Yes, start over. Ask your dog to wait before he gets anything. Then take him for a walk and show him that you want him to be by your side. Or, practice sending him to a place to lie down and relax for awhile. Teach this exercise the way a dance instructor would break down a dance. Show your dog what you want, step by step. Keep your sessions short - no more than 15 to 20 minutes at a time. Notice how he will begin to check in with you by giving you eye contact. You are becoming relevant! Then crate him up. Let him experience the latent learning process. Commit to doing this three times a day. I guarantee you, you will have a new dog within days.

Always remember...a good leader is a fair leader. By making sure your dog knows what you want, you will be creating a bond of mutual respect and trust - something you both deserve.

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