

Owner's Habits Determine Dog's Behavior

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Dogs do what they do best; they act like dogs, period. When we fail to expect and respect this then we are unable to be fair to either them or ourselves. Anger directed at our dogs for their behavior is really misplaced disappointment and frustration with ourself for not acknowledging this fact. Dogs will get into the garbage because to them it's a Disneyland of smells and flavors. A dog will scratch at the door when left alone because it is unnatural for a pack animal to be left behind. Dogs are dogs.

Understanding that dogs will be dogs enables us to make choices and exercise habits or protocols that will promote desirable outcomes. Likewise we can adjust our current habits that permit or encourage undesirable behaviors. The habits that we practice will determine the level of enjoyment we share with our canine companion. Bad habits will compromise the opportunity to enjoy this privileged relationship. Good habits will respect and honor the mental and emotional well being of both of ourselves.

What habits can we train ourselves to practice to cultivate a positive experience with our dog and where do we learn them? The habits to practice can be learned from observation of our interaction with our dog (does it seem harder to retrieve objects out of his mouth ever since I've started playing tug-of-war?), reading books, or consulting with others. Some cause-and-effect dynamics are as obvious as is "the dog is a dog," which means they often times can be overlooked.

Let's look at some habits and behaviors:

We can practice the habit of getting angry and shouting when our dog soils on the floor, or we can make a habit of monitoring our dog's signals and providing timely excursions outside and praising his performance for eliminating on the grass.

We can choose the habit of allowing the puppy to run loose and unsupervised in the house to chew on the carpet or gnaw on the furniture leg, or we can develop the habit of having a leash attached to the collar and supervising the puppy's activity if not confined.

We can engage in an unpleasant struggle to put the dog in the crate for a "time out", or we can practice the habit of introducing the crate as a pleasant environment into which the dog will enter willingly by finding a treat or a favorite toy.

We can make a habit of dismissing our responsibility by permitting children to carelessly invade our dog's space (or vice versa) and putting either at risk for an injury or we can make the habit of incorporating vigilante monitoring and educating mutual respect; protecting both the children's' and dog's space

We can make a habit of allowing our dog the opportunity to bolt through the open door and gate, or we can establish a protocol for the family members that before any outside

door is opened, we are certain that the dog is under control by either being leashed or behind a barrier.

We can practice a habit of watching our dog run away from us when called, or we can make a habit of using a long line and not allowing him the option of not coming when called and using encouragement and positive reinforcement when he comes to us.

Our dogs have a sensitivity and dimension that exceeds our efforts to appreciate. The least we can do to enhance our relationship is to practice habits that assure the best possible outcome. If current experience with our dogs is less than satisfying then there is no time like the present to reevaluate our habits and change our ways. And yes, we can teach an old dog new tricks, just ask my wife!