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Your Smart Dog Teach More, Scold Less December 2007

“How can I get my dog

to stop jumping up on people? How can I get my dog to stop barking at the neighbor’s cat? How can I stop my dog from pulling me when we walk? How can I get my dog to stop stealing from the counter?”

These are the questions that a very exasperated client peppered me with as soon as I sat down for our first meeting. It was clear that this person was at the end of the rope and needed answers fast.

It’s really hard to teach a dog to NOT do something.

It’s not unusual. The most asked question is “how can I get my dog to stop _____?” **My answer to that question is “I don’t know, I don’t teach dogs to stop doing things I teach them to DO things.”** When asked what they’d like their dogs to do, most folks are stumped! It takes them some time to actually think of things they’d like their dog to do. Any coach, professor, or teacher will tell you – **it’s really hard to teach a dog (or a person) to NOT do something** because well, we’re always doing *something*.

When I ask people to describe the typical situation it usually goes something like this:

Dog Owner: “The guests walk in, the dog jumps up.”

Me: “So what happens next?”

Dog Owner: “Next?! Next I yell at the dog to get off!”

Me: “And then what happens?”

Dog Owner: “The dog keeps jumping. If yelling worked, I wouldn’t need you!”

Aha! “If yelling worked, I wouldn’t need you.” Yelling doesn’t usually work. Why? Because it yelling doesn’t

help your dog figure out what to do. **To really influence and change behavior, you have to teach your dog what he *should be doing*, not just scolding him for what he shouldn’t be doing.** If you’re only scolding, you’re leaving out the most important information! And, just as importantly, **you’re eroding the relationship you have with your dog.**

Analyze the Situation, Step-by-Step

Think of a situation in which you’d like to change the behavior of your dog. What happens first, second, third, etc. Let’s take the example of the dog jumping on guests. What happens first? The doorbell rings or there’s a knock on the door. Then what? The dog probably starts barking immediately.

Next? You move toward the door, and so does your dog, probably still barking and getting more excited. And then? You open the door and your guests enter. Next? Your dog gets even more excited and jumps on your guests.

And then what? A couple of things, probably: your guests may pay attention to the dog, you may yell. In any event, the dog is getting just what he’s after – attention! From you and from your guest.

Scolding the dog is the easy way out for us (not for the dog!) and isn’t fair to the dog.

The dog has formed a chain of behaviors that starts when the bell rings and doesn’t stop until the guests are inside for several minutes. Breaking this situation down step-by-step shows us that we need to teach the dog exactly what we’d like him to do. A possible solution: teach the dog to run



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directly to his bed and wait for a goodie when he hears the knock or the bell. Clearly, the dog gets excited and out of control when the guests are still outside (when the bell rings), so it's not reasonable to expect that the dog's behavior will improve when you open the door and the people come inside.

How to Teach Your Dog

Look at that behavior chain and find out where the problem first occurs and address the problem there. In our example, the problem behavior starts when the dog hears the visitors at the door. So that's where we start.

Your first task is figure out what you want your dog to do. In our example, it would be nice if your dog would go to his bed instead of running to the door and barking. Your next task is to teach your dog what to do. For the details on how to teach this behavior see September's newsletter "[Spot On!](#)" It's our job to teach our dog what to do. **Scolding the dog is the easy way out for us (not for the dog!) and isn't fair to the dog.** If you don't teach your dog what to do, you shouldn't scold him for doing what he thinks is the right thing to do.

This process might take a few weeks. But those weeks are time well spent! Think about it – your dog will live for 10 or 15 years. What's a few weeks of your time if it means years of polite behavior? You can't beat that return on investment!

The Bottom Line

You cannot expect your dog to do something you haven't taught. Scolding, reprimanding, or correcting your dog doesn't help teach him what to do. You owe it to your dog to teach him what he needs to do. It's really quite easy, especially if you break it down into small, easily achieved steps. **You'll feel good about your dog, your dog will know how to do what you want, and your guests will thank you!**

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