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Your Smart Dog

I Love My Dog – But He’s Driving Me Crazy!

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Lately, I’ve had quite a few clients tell me their dog is driving them crazy. It could be barking that begins at 4:30a, jumping on people to say Hello, or knocking them over as the dog charges out of the crate. Whatever the behavior, lots of dogs are driving their people a little crazy lately. The good news is that the solution could be pretty simple.

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Let’s first start by acknowledging the fact that most of the things that dogs do that drive us crazy are, well, normal behaviors for dogs. Dogs bark. Dogs jump. And dogs are excited to see us. Those things are *inherently* “dog.” We can’t change the fact that dogs are dogs and do doggie things. What we can change, though, is when and where they do these things. And that’s what this month’s newsletter will focus on.

Let’s start by taking a serious (and honest) look at how much interaction you and your dog have on a daily basis. Does it sound something like this: “Hi Fido, good to see you again. What’d you do all day while I was at work? Here’s

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your dinner, now go lie down and let me go through the mail, eat my dinner, and relax for a little while.” This isn’t uncommon, so don’t start squirming if this sounds a lot like your daily interaction with your dog. Let’s be honest, if you work a 9-to-5 job, it’s tough to find enough time to get to everything in the few hours you have in the evening. But... it’s not like you can just ignore the dog, either. There’s a happy medium (and a few ideas in here you might be able to use to meet your dog somewhere in the middle).

Back in the day, dogs had jobs to do. They weren’t just pets. Basically, if they didn’t serve a purpose, they didn’t exist. They worked all day and slept all night. And probably didn’t get into too much trouble because they were so worn out from working all day. **The life of the modern dog has taken a 180 degree turn: dogs today barely have anything to do besides sleep all day, and maybe a quick walk or two around the block.** Quite a difference, huh?

I noticed what a difference activity had on my own dogs’ behavior when



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we were on vacation in August, with the dogs of course. They were worn out at the end of the day. They spent at least 8 hours outside – swimming, running, jumping in and out of the water – and when they came in at the end of the day, they gobbled their dinner and then went to sleep as soon as their head hit the floor. And they didn't open their eyes until morning. We actually had a hard time getting them up to go to the bathroom before bedtime.

On a normal, non-vacation evening, the dogs are sprinting around the living room, jumping on and off the couch, playing tug of war with whatever they can find (sometimes it's my shoes!), barking up a storm, and generally creating mayhem. Keep in mind that a normal day includes *at least* three different run-around-the-backyard-like-crazy-and-chase/wrestle-each-other sessions that last at least 20 minutes each. And those sessions always end when the dogs collapse in the shade, tongues lolling out of the side of their mouth. Even with that kind of play three times a day, it's still not enough for these young, energetic dogs.

Dogs need stimulation – both mental and physical – if they're going to be happy and healthy. So, what's a busy, but loving, dog person to do?

The good news is there's LOTS you can do to keep your dog engaged in physical and mental activities. And that's key to having a dog who's tired and happy (read: and not driving you crazy!). **First, get the dog food bowl up off the floor – no more eating out of the bowl.**

Get several Kong® toys or other “stuffable” dog toys and stuff your dog's dinner in there. Use peanut butter or mashed potatoes as the “glue” to help the kibble stay inside and not just roll right out of the Kong. If your dog has already mastered the Kong and can eat his dinner in 5 minutes from the Kong, start freezing them! Mix the kibble with a mushy food (mashed potatoes, melted cheese, peanut butter, non-fat yogurt, etc.), stuff the Kongs tightly and then pop them in the freezer for several hours. I have about 20 Kongs (remember, I have four dogs) and I stuff all of them twice a week – and I have portable dinners all week for my dogs.

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A walk around the block isn't going to be enough exercise to take the edge off your dog; some dogs can do five miles without any effort whatsoever. **We've been taking the dogs to local dog-friendly parks and hiking the trails.** The weather this time of year is beautiful, and so is the scenery, and it's fun for both the dogs and for us. Just the excitement of being out in the woods seems to help take the edge off the dogs. We can spend less time in the woods than if we were in the backyard or going for a walk and the dogs (a) have more fun and (b) get worn out more quickly.

Another option to help give your dog some mental and physical stimulation is doggy daycare. Visit the businesses in



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person first, dig around and find out what some of their customers have to say about them, and consider enrolling your dog. I have a client whose 9-month old (very) large-breed dog was driving her up the wall; she enrolled the dog in doggy daycare a couple days a week and the change in the dog is astounding. The dog jumps, counter surfs, pulls, and barks less. Just from two days a week in doggy daycare!

If there's not a doggy daycare nearby, **find some folks who live near you and who have a dog that is compatible with yours.** Get the dogs together for play dates in a safely enclosed area. No one can wear your dog out better than another dog!

Another great idea (cheap, easy, and terrific side benefits) is to teach your dog new things. Yes, just the act of *learning* has a similar effect to exercise – it can help wear your dog out. Not to mention that it's fun, your dogs skills will improve, and you can enjoy spending time with your dog, too! It doesn't matter what you teach, just work together with your dog. Here are some things that I've been teaching my dogs to do lately: lick their lips on cue (Yum! is the cue word), give me a specific paw (only the left paw, for instance), back up, touch something with their nose, touch something with their paw, look over their left shoulder, play bow (hind end up in the air, while the front end is on the ground), and to speak. All of my dogs go crazy at the prospect of working with me and the chance to earn reinforcements. I work with only one at a time to make it easy (on them and on me!).

So the next time your dog is bouncing off the walls, the furniture, or you, try a couple of these ideas out and see if they help. Dogs need both mental and physical exercise – give them a little bit of both and you'll **both** be happier!

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