



Laurie Luck, CPDT
Box 1111
Mount Airy, MD 21771
(240) 848-3468
laurie@smartdoguniversity.com



Your Smart Dog When Training (By Itself) Isn't The Answer March 2009

I've recently had several clients come to me with what they call "out of control" dogs. When I met their dogs, it became clear that the problem wouldn't be solved by training alone. **Most people don't know that a well adjusted dog needs a lot of other things in addition to training.** If you're wondering why you're having trouble with your well-trained and brilliant dog, you'll love this month's newsletter. This month's newsletter will focus on four other components of a well-adjusted dog: exercise, interaction (both human and doggy), management, and structure.

EXERCISE

For most dogs, two (or even three) walks a day simply isn't sufficient. In fact, those walks don't come close to meeting the exercise needs of most dogs, both large and small. In order to properly exercise the dogs in our house, we need to run them hard, three times a day, for at least 30 minutes each session. This isn't really that hard: we have a fenced yard and we make good use of our Chuck-It™. Once we get one of the dogs running, the others usually join in and race around the yard as well.

Be creative in exercising your dog: find some hills and hike up and down, throw a toy up and down the stairs, find a safe place for your dog to swim, visit the dog parks, enroll your dog into daycare, hire a dog-walker who will actually *exercise* your dog during the walk, teach your dog to chase the laser light, take your dog running with you... You're only limited by your creativity and your dog's physical condition. *Note:* Please check with your vet before starting your dog on a new exercise regimen.

Even beautifully trained dogs will wreak havoc if they don't get enough exercise. They'll steal things so you'll chase them. They'll jump on you to get you to interact with them. They'll rip siding off the house because they're bored. They'll steal the mail because it's fun to rip it up. Exercise your dog – you won't regret it!

INTERACTION

Dogs need both human and canine interaction. You can greatly enhance your dog's quality of life (not to mention improve your relationship) by simply taking 30 minutes to sit with your dog, rub his ears, play with him, work on his training, and give him some lovin'. This isn't hard – it can relieve *your* stress, too, as well as lower your blood pressure. (So say medical reports.)

Management helps keep your dog out of trouble and helps keep your frustration and anxiety levels in check.

If your dog likes the company of other dogs, you should also schedule regular appointments with other neighborhood dogs so your dog can "catch up on the neighborhood (canine) gossip." Well, dogs may not gossip, but they still need the chance to meet up with other canine buddies and run off some steam. Find a safely enclosed space and allow the dogs to, well...be dogs! Allowing your dog access to other friendly dogs will go a long way to keeping your dog's social skills well polished, ensuring him many more years of happy social hours with other dogs.

MANAGEMENT

Management helps keep your dog out of trouble and helps keep your frustration and anxiety levels in check. If your dog likes to counter-surf, you could manage the situation by either crating your dog or not allowing him access to the kitchen. You're not actively teaching the dog to keep his paws on the floor, but you're not allowing him to practice this bad habit, either. And that by itself is a really valuable nugget!



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Management is what we do when we either haven't had time or the inclination to teach our dog the appropriate behavior. Another example of management is putting an Easy Walk Harness on your dog when you go for a walk. If it's 20 degrees outside, you're not likely to take the time to teach your dog how to walk on a slack leash. You'd rather get through that walk as quickly as possible so you can get back in front of the blazing fireplace. So to avoid teaching your dog that pulling works, you use the Easy Walk Harness. So simple!

Another example of management is putting your dog on a leash when visitors come to your door. If your dog can't reach the visitors, he can't jump on them. Using the leash to limit your dog's access to the visitors ensures he won't get better at jumping on them. It also decreases your frustration and embarrassment. It's a win-win!

Training is part of the solution, but your dog needs more.

STRUCTURE

This is one of the most overlooked tool that owner's have. Just a little bit of simple structure can really make the difference to your dog. Structure equals predictability. And predictability, to a dog, is a really good thing. They no longer have to "try things out" to see what happens. An example of a dog trying something out: your dog grabs your sock as you're trying to put it on. You may yell, laugh, or chase him. In any event, your dog has learned that stealing your sock is pretty fun – it gets him attention! If, however, you teach your dog to get your attention by sitting calmly, your dog doesn't have to resort to "trying things out" to get your attention – you've already given him a clear and easy way to get it.

Another good example of structure (or the lack of it) is the dog that jumps. The owner doesn't mind the jumping if he's got his old sweats on, but doesn't want the dog to jump if he's got he's headed for work and has a suit on. The dog doesn't know the difference between a suit and sweats. So a smart owner would never reward jumping – no matter what kind of clothes

he's in. Jumping would always result in the dog losing attention (not gaining it!). Turning away from the dog accomplishes this really easily. And better yet, teaching the dog to sit to earn petting is even better and more effective!

Training, by itself, isn't the whole answer. It's definitely a *big part* of the solution, but it won't work by itself. Only by meeting **all the needs** of your dog will you begin to have that mild-mannered, well-behaved canine companion. Check out past issues of *Your Smart Dog* to find helpful insight on meeting your dog's needs.

Laurie Luck
Certified Pet Dog Trainer (CPDT)
Faculty, Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training and Behavior
[Smart Dog University, LLC](#)
Box 1111
Mount Airy, MD 21771
(240) 848-3468
laurie@smartdoguniversity.com
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