

Your Smart Dog *Bad Dog Strategies* June 2009

People don't go looking for an adversarial relationship with their dog, or go looking for a dog that won't listen to them. But all too often, that's the relationship they unknowingly develop with their dog. **It's really easy to create a "bad dog."** This month's newsletter is going to focus on those little things people unknowingly do to create a dog that doesn't listen.

HOW TO CREATE A BAD DOG

Strategy #1: Say "No!" to Your Dog.

If you're saying "No," to your dog on a daily basis, you're not teaching your dog anything helpful. In fact, you're chipping away at the relationship you have (or are trying to have) with your dog. The word "No" conveys absolutely no helpful information at all to your dog. If he's in the trash and you yell "No!" does that tell your dog what *to do*? Of course not. What does it tell your dog? To avoid getting into the trash when you're around. It's safe to do it when you're gone, not when you're present. Not the message you want to get across, is it?

The word "No" conveys absolutely *no helpful information* at all to your dog.

Instead of yelling "No," tell him what you want him to do. "Fido, come" in a pleasant voice will accomplish your goal. Once he comes to you, praise him lavishly, give him an appropriate dog toy, and make a note to yourself to put the trash in a less accessible place. If your dog gets in the trash and scores a half-eaten sandwich, he'll continue to go back into the trash. **So it's up to us, the ones with**

the big brains, to make it easy for the dog to stay out of trouble.

Strategy #2: Take Things Away From Your Dog and Scold Him.

Your dog is exploring his territory and happens to pick up a shoe that was left on the floor. You yell (probably "No!" – see previous paragraph) and then go over and snatch the shoe away. You think you're teaching the dog to leave your shoe alone, but that's probably not what he's learning. **He's probably learning that you're not to be trusted – you're unpredictable, you steal things, and he gets in trouble when you see him.** All of those things he's learning are unproductive. Those things lead to dogs who run away when they have something good, who growl when you reach for their goodie, or who begin to fear your presence.

Instead of yelling and taking things away, why not teach your dog how helpful you can be for him. When the dog has something he's allowed to have, ask the dog pleasantly "Whatcha got there?" Encourage him to come over to you. When he does, praise him and let him go back to playing with his toy. Or, have some really tasty treats handy and drop several near the dog. When he drops his toy to eat the goodies, pick up his toy and hand it to him as soon as he's finished eating the treats. (*Note: if your dog growls or is not happy with you being close to him and his toy, leave him alone. Do not try this with an aggressive dog – find a professional, positive reinforcement trainer for help.*)

Strategy #3: Punish Your Dog When He Comes to You.

Your dog has run off with your slipper, galloping around the yard. You yell at him to come, he does (eventually) and you read him the riot act, then throw him in the house. **In that one instance,**



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you've just taught your dog how *not* to come when called. Because, after all, he did what you asked: he came to you. Maybe 10 minutes after you called, but he still came to you. And when he did, instead of telling him how good he was for coming, you showed him just what a bad idea coming to you really is. You punished him. You're well on your way to having a dog that goes the other direction when you call him.

Instead of scolding your dog when he finally comes to you, have some extra special goodies. The instant he arrives at your side, praise him and immediately drop a handful of goodies on the ground. Then praise him some more and feed him more goodies. He'll understand just how good it is to come to you, and he'll probably do it more quickly the next time!

Strategy #4: Lie to Your Dog.

It's late, you're tired, and you want to go to bed. You let the dog out (in a fenced yard) to do his business before bed and he won't come in. You know how much he loves car rides, so in desperation you say "Fido, wanna go for a ride?" The dog comes running, you close the door and say "Sucker! We're going to bed, not for a ride!" **Your dog will wise up quickly – you are not to be trusted, you're not reliable, you're not predictable.** You've now made everything you say or do suspect in your dog's mind. He'll stay outside longer, he'll stay just out of reach, he'll grab something and run – in short, **you're helping to create a "bad dog."** You're teaching him, he's learning.

Strategy #5: Punish Him for Growling.

This is the most dangerous thing you can do for your dog. A growl is a warning, and a good one. **Punish your dog for warning you, and you'll get a dog who bites without warning.** If you only address the growl, and not the reason *behind the growl*, you're only setting your dog up for failure. When he growls, he's telling you something. It's very important to listen to your dog. You may not like growling, but would you prefer biting instead? Keep

punishing that growl, without finding out the cause behind it, and that's what you'll get.

Smart Dog University offers *Canine Building Blocks* (group courses) to help you and your dog develop a cooperative relationship. If you can't come to a Canine Building Blocks class, find a positive reinforcement trainer in your area. Contact me if you need help finding a qualified trainer in your area.

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