When and Why to Add Another Dog to Your Family

Do you find yourself contemplating adding another dog to your household? Wonder what things you should be considering before you decide to do it? Thinking about how to decide if it’s a good idea or not? This month’s article will take you through two very important questions: WHEN and WHY to add another dog to your house.

OUR UNUSUAL SITUATION
We have four dogs in our house. Three are permanent -- ours forever -- and the fourth is a rotating position filled by a service dog in training. We started with just one dog way back in the beginning -- a challenging dog named Lucky (who turned out to be the best puppy raiser of all time, but that's a story for another day). When it was decided that Lily, service pup in training, wasn't cut out to be a service dog, and we were given the opportunity to keep her, we leapt at the chance. We were in love with her, Lucky enjoyed her company, and she was much happier as a pet. It made us all happy.

As puppy raisers, we were in the unusual position of "trying out" a dog IF we get the opportunity to keep one. We’ve raised 15 dogs so far. There were a few service dogs in training that we wouldn't have kept even if we had the room because they just weren't a good fit with our dogs and our lifestyle. Most people don't have the chance to live with a dog for a year to see if they're a good fit though, so how do YOU figure out if you should add another dog to your household?

A FEW CAUTIONS
Before we get into the whys and wherefores, know this: even if the dogs turn out to be best buddies, adding another dog means higher veterinary expenses, more hair and dirt, increased responsibility, and less room on the couch for you.

DOUBLE EVERYTHING
You’ll need two beds, two leashes, two sets of heartworm medication, two of everything! You'll have to buy double the amount of food, there will be two sets of veterinary bills. Think about your vehicle -- is it large enough to handle an additional dog? Also think about logistics -- can you manage walking both dogs together (or: if not, do you have the time and energy to walk them separately). There's a lot more dirt and hair, too.

PERSONALITY
If the dogs don’t hit it off, your trouble is just beginning. The dynamic between the dogs, in addition to
the added expense, is something worth considering as well. If you are currently experiencing trouble with your current dog, adding another dog could make matters worse. When in doubt, find a certified professional dog trainer (see www.findagreatdogtrainer.com) for advice and assistance with your decision.

WHY
First, take a good hard look at why you want to add another dog. Is it for you? Or for your other dog? There isn't a right answer, but honesty is important here. Don't use your current dog as the excuse for getting another dog if you really want it.

If the new dog's for you, think about how the new dog will impact your current dog. Will your dog welcome the new addition? Will your current dog get less time, exercise, training?

If you're getting the new dog to be a friend for your current dog, consider what kind of company your dog would prefer. Our two oldest dogs (age 10 and 11) are mature adults and think puppies are jerks. Without Nemo, our 8-year old perpetual puppy, we wouldn't be able to continue to raise service dogs. As puppy wrangler, Nemo keeps the service dog in training occupied (and tired), so the elders don't have to deal with such nonsense.

If your dog is quiet -- and enjoys it that way -- think about getting an older dog who is settled into himself and who doesn't want a lot of exuberant interaction. If your dog is young and energetic, think about looking for a dog that is a tad calmer than yours. If you get a dog that's more active than yours, you might wind up with 8 legs of chaos in your house that you aren't prepared for!

WHEN
If you've got a senior dog, think of him as living in his retirement years -- do you think he really wants to "raise another kid" in his senior glory days? Most senior dogs find puppies annoying and tiring. I've heard unfortunate stories about well-meaning families whose senior dog won't join the family in the living room because there's too much puppy-ruckus. That's sad and avoidable. If your dog is older, consider waiting a few years until the house is empty of dogs before getting a younger dog.

I like to have the current dog(s) at least a year before adding another dog to the household for a couple of reasons. Waiting to add an additional dog lets your first dog's personality and preferences emerge. You can establish a routine for that dog, spend time getting to know him, work with him in a couple of
dog training classes ensuring he has good doggie manners. Another benefit of waiting to get another dog is that you have time to build a relationship with your first dog. Adding two dogs to the household in a relatively short time can lead to a tighter bond between the two dogs than between you and each dog. Take some time to get to know your first time and show him all the fun you can have together, then add the second dog and cement your relationship with that dog as well.

Think twice before two dogs that are very close in age. There are a couple reasons why I suggest this. The first is a selfish reason: It’s really hard to say goodbye to two elderly dogs in close succession. I’ve known people who have lost three dogs in one year! Another reason involves finances. As dogs age, it’s not uncommon for medical issues to develop. Treating one dog for cancer is expensive, but treating two dogs for cancer might very well be cost-prohibitive.

Our original dog, Lucky, whom I mentioned in the beginning of this article was healthy until he was 13 years old. At 13 he began to have heart trouble. The medicine was expensive, but it was the weekly cardiologist visits that were the most difficult to handle. I was away from the house – and my other dogs – for half a day every week just to go to the cardiologist. He also had weekly visits at my own veterinarian. If I’d had another old dog who needed supervision, medication, or assistance, I wouldn't have been able to give Lucky the same quality of care (or time, or attention, or, if we’re being honest, drugs – they weren’t cheap!). When Lucky died at age 15, the oldest dog, Lily, was only five years old and care free, medically-speaking.

It’s a complicated matter, the decision to add another dog to your household. I hope my family always has a multi-dog household as I love my relationship with each dog, and I also enjoy watching the relationship that each dog has with the other. Carefully consider the points in this article and if you think it all points to getting another dog – go for it! Enjoy!

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