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Your Smart Dog

All About Doggie (and Human) Manners

April 2007

Tango and I just returned from a trip to Cleveland, Ohio, where we attended a three-day behavior conference called **Clicker Expo**. The conference was sold out – there were 400 human attendees, and about 200 of the canine variety. The conference space was rather tight, when moving between sessions it was like rush-hour traffic – bumper to bumper on all sides. **With 600 bodies in such a small space, I expected some grousing (from people and dogs alike!).** To my amazement, I could count the number of incidents on one hand – and most of those were just barks (from the dogs) and exasperated sighs (from the people).

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I quickly noticed that almost everyone there with a dog was well-versed in “doggie etiquette,” and I believe this etiquette was a large part of why every one (and every dog) was so civilized. If you’re wondering what the heck “doggie etiquette” is or what it looks like, you’re in luck. This month’s newsletter will get you up to speed! **To be accomplished in doggie etiquette, both the dog and the person need to have mastered some basic skills.** We’ll talk about the people skills first, and then we’ll go over the dog skills.

PEOPLE SKILLS

Know Your Dog

Everyone at Clicker Expo knew their dog and knew how to keep him happy and out of trouble. This skill alone can keep you out of sticky situations about 80% of the time. A few of the dogs there had space issues – didn’t like other dogs sniffing them, for example. The owners of those

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dogs worked to keep their dog out of the reach of curious dogs. Even in close quarters like the elevator, the person made sure her dog never felt uncomfortable, positioning herself between her dog and the other dogs. The leash was kept loose, the attitude calm, and all dogs and people were comfortable. If you’re really good at this, it’s nearly invisible.

If, on the other hand, your dog is extra friendly and is an exuberant greeter, know that other dogs often find this offensive. **Help keep your dog out of trouble by keeping his attention on you. If he’s paying attention to you, he can’t also pay attention to the other dog.** In both of these examples, *the owner’s behavior is what really matters.* **We can help keep our dog out of trouble if we know our dog – and take responsibility for his comfort level.**

People-Dog Manners

One of the most remarkable habits I noticed was the manners of the people. We didn’t let our dogs go up and greet or sniff another dog unless we asked the owner first. Not even to sniff noses or give a quick “woof.” **What we think is polite in the human world, dogs don’t find as polite in the dog world.** We think it’s nice to greet people with a friendly hello and a smile. Most dogs can do this greeting without ever getting close to each other – their vocabulary consists of body language like tail position, ear flicks, breathing rate, and eye contact. We, the humans, miss this silent conversation and think our dogs need to “say hello” like we do – by initiating contact with each other. And we usually also initiate the problems by doing this.



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DOG SKILLS

Teach Your Dog

Some of the dogs at Clicker Expo were mere pups, yet they had basic skills and were calm and well-behaved even in tight quarters. **Your dog doesn't have to be at competition obedience level to be able to behave in public.** The essential skill is **self control.**

The room was filling up as Tango and I were waiting for a session to begin. We had a prime spot – the end of an aisle (lots of room for Tango to stretch out and take a nap). This prime spot comes with one caveat – lots of other dogs and people need to pass through to get to their spots. This could have been a nightmare if Tango lacked self control. I'll be honest, he's no genius – he'd never win an obedience competition – but he has pretty good self control. And that self control alone allowed us to welcome folks and their dogs to step over us as they made their way to their seats without incident. Dogs and people stepped over him as he occasionally raised a lazy eye to catch a glimpse of his new neighbors, but he never got up.

What To Do

1. Ask the owner if your dog can say hello *before* you get too close.
2. Let your dog sniff for about five seconds, then ask for his attention back on you. If you can get that attention, let him interact again with the other dog.
3. Keep asking for attention from your dog intermittently while he's interacting with the other dog.
4. Reward your dog for appropriate behavior.
5. Help your dog – if he's shy, don't let another dog invade his space. Tell the owner of the other dog your dog's issues and be prepared to protect your dog's space if needed.

What Not To Do

1. Don't let your dog run off-leash if you don't have a solid recall. Simply yelling "Don't worry, he's friendly!" as your dog bounds off to say hi doesn't help the owner or the

- other dog – particularly if that other dog doesn't appreciate exuberant greetings!
2. Don't let another dog invade your dog's space if your dog is uncomfortable.
3. Don't assume that every dog you meet is friendly and wants to play with your dog. All dogs are different and your friendly dog could get a nasty response if he inappropriately invades another dog's space.
4. Don't force your dog to greet dogs if he doesn't want to.
5. Don't punish your dog for being fearful or for wanting to put some space between him and another dog.

Don't forget, we are ultimately responsible for our dogs' behavior. It's up to us to teach them how to behave appropriately and to keep them safe around other dogs. Dogs aren't born with this knowledge; it's our responsibility to teach them. If you don't know how to get started, try a basic manners class, taught with positive reinforcement. It's fun for you *and* your dog and will get you started down the right path to a well-mannered dog.

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