

Beth Bradley
Dog Trainer/Behaviorist
(201) 247-8472
www.dog-trainer.biz

Training your dog is not an option

I received two phone calls in two days about adult dogs suddenly becoming aggressive. Unless your dog has a brain tumor, the aggression wasn't sudden but subtle and built up over a period of time until it became something you couldn't ignore.

Temperament or Environment

Some dogs are born to be Alpha, they are arrogant and demanding. Some dogs are born to be followers and will never push your buttons. First thing to realize is you can't train/change temperament; that will never change but when you are raising your puppy you can teach him or her what is and is not acceptable behavior. If you do not like something your puppy or young dog is doing, stop it right away. Your puppy is not going to grow out of the behavior, and you don't want to wait until the dog is too strong mentally and physically to address the problem.

Training

Most people take a puppy or Basic Obedience class and they think, that's it, I trained my dog. Basic Obedience is your first step in your dog's education. If your goal is to own a well mannered, friendly, outgoing and social dog, more training will be definitely needed for your dog and for yourself as your dog goes thru the different stages of his life. Basic Obedience compares to Kindergarten for children, skills are taught to your dog but not enough to carry him or her through the rest of his/her life. That class was just your first step to understanding your dog and how he thinks.

Sure, there may have been a marked improvement in your dog's behavior but this basic class is not a quick fix. As your dog develops physically and mentally and goes through the different stages in his growth cycle, different obstacles and problems may develop. This is normal. Continued training will help you understand how to deal with your dog during these times and how to overcome any obstacles so your dog can grow into a well mannered part of human society.

Retraining Behaviors

If you continue with training, you won't have to retrain or correct bad behavior. It is hard to retrain behaviors, in humans and dogs. When I am re-training or doing behavior modification with a 'problem dog', I have to look beyond the dog and look at the family and household. Most problems are perpetuated by the humans in the house whether they

realize it or not. Once I show the owners how they are allowing this behavior to take place, and show them how to institute the rules as I have explained, their dogs do not revert to the 'problem behavior'. Problem solved!

But, every so often, I come across a person who is in denial of their part in the dog's behavior or worse yet, refuses to change how they handle their dog or treat their dog so a change can come about. In order for the dog's behavior to change, the owner must change how they handle and lead their dog. The owner sometimes does not want to take on the role as Alpha or Pack leader. That individual does not want to set rules or believe that their dog is 'acting like a dog'. In many instances it is the owner that is refusing to change, and hence the dog's behavior never changes.

Dogs do what is good for them, what satisfies their needs at that time. That may mean obeying you or not. Dogs do what is good for them at that moment. It is up to the owner to establish him or herself as Pack Leader and not to allow unacceptable behavior. When the owner acts as the Pack Leader the dog realizes (a) obedience is not an option and (b) there is a consequence to acting 'outside of the pack rules'.

It's ok to take your time and find your perfect match

Just like you are not meant to marry every person you date, every dog's temperament is not going to be ok for you and your family. If you are a push over or couch potato, don't get a German shepherd, it will run you ragged and become the leader of the pack. If you like to run and want a dog to accompany you, a bull dog should not be your breed of choice. Are there exceptions in every breed? Absolutely, there are but on the average what you see in the parents you will see in the puppy.

Conclusion

Training your dog is an obligation; to your dog, your family, your children, neighbours and society. Training is not something you begin once the problems start; training is a way to prevent problems from starting. It's a big responsibility and time commitment to own a dog, if you are not ready to commit to the time, don't get a dog, it's not fair to you or the dog.