

Dog Training Articles
By Beth Bradley

Friend or Leader

Once you bring a puppy home it is exceedingly easy to treat him like one of the family. The puppy and becomes another child. In this case your new puppy or dog now considers you a littermate, pack mate or friend, not a leader. For some dogs this is not a problem, for other dogs you can begin to see how your new puppy or dog tests you to see if you are going to step up to the plate and become ALPHA.

Dog Behavior:

Being your dog's leader is the foundation for dog training. Dogs live in a pack environment similar to the wolf pack and to the human family. Within this pack there exists a social hierarchy, a pecking order. There is an Alpha dog (or pack leader); a Beta-Dog (second in command) and so forth until you reach the bottom of the pack; that is the Omega. The Alpha dog is dominant to all other dogs in the pack, the Beta dog is dominant to all dogs except for the Alpha and of course the Omega dog is subordinate to everyone and dominant to no one. In the wild, if the pack leader or Alpha were to die, the Beta dog would be ready to step into his place.

The Alpha position is a position that has a number of privileges, such as eating first without being disturbed and being able to go anywhere unchallenged, as well as the right to restrict the movement of lesser-ranking members of the pack. The Alpha will keep a young subordinate, who has violated pack rules, on its back for hours without ever having to touch him. As other dogs in the pack get older and become sexually mature, they test the Alpha to see if he is worthy of his respected position. It is very important for the Alpha dog to immediately reprimand a subordinate who challenges him and such correction should make a strong impression on the 'challenging dog so as to not have the challenge happen again.

Signals that your dog is Challenging you

There are obvious signals, growling, snarling, biting, aggression with people or other animals. And there are less obvious signals, not coming when called, refusal to jump off of furniture or 'hogging' the couch, jumping on you or mouthing. Also refusal to walk when asked, pulling at the end of leash, constant tension on the leash when walking, barking for attention, barking or demanding to be petted, for play or food. Other signs include bumping or knocking into your body when you enter the house or yard or the need to constantly be reminded of a command he/she has been placed under.

Why be Pack Leader?

When you adopt or buy a dog, it is important that you are the pack leader, or Alpha. It is a lot easier to train a dog that accepts you as pack leader, than one who thinks he is the pack leader. A dog that thinks he is the pack leader does what he wants to do and not necessarily what you want him to do. Your dog is happiest when he has an Alpha to provide him with firm, fair and consistent leadership. But it is also his nature to want to better his position in the pack. That is where training comes into play. When your dog disobeys your commands he is testing to see if you are truly worthy of the Alpha position and his respect.

How to be Pack Leader

Obedience training will not only teach your dog how to sit, heel and come; it will also teach your dog to have self-control. Dogs want to please but they also want to do what is fun for them or what is self-rewarding. You must make him realize that he has to listen to you because you are his Alpha and that your position of respect demands for him to have control over his natural instincts. Your puppy has already begun training while he was in the care of his mother. You are resuming training where your puppy's mother's training ended. She already taught him his role in the pack; it is now your responsibility to continue the training process as well as she would have if the puppy were to grow in her care.

Conclusion

Don't concern yourself with making sure you are your dog's playmate or friend. If you make sure you are your dog's leader or Alpha your relationship will be so much better than trying to impress him and be his friend. I see it often in our training classes, when the dogs enter class they are all happy to see me and get my attention, because they know I am Alpha. They never have to doubt where they stand with me because it is obvious. That is why many dogs will not act up when I visit their home; they know I am not going to allow misbehavior. Being Pack Leader means two things (a) making sure your dog realizes that his adherence to a command is mandatory and (b) that he is not allowed to make decisions on his own.

You are Pack Leader and he must wait for your command to proceed in a certain way. Make sure that you are consistent with the way you command and handle your dog. Dogs are much happier when there are no grey areas in their life and their handling. Make sure your dog understands that 'heel' is 'heel' and 'down' is 'down' and misbehavior to any command is going to get the same correction and reaction from you no matter what the situation and circumstance.

Remember: love does not equal allowing your dog to get away with misbehavior. As Pack leader you need to set boundaries, protect the pack in an assertive way, enforce the rules of the pack, feed, water and make sure the pack receives the physical stimulation in the form of exercise that it needs and lastly, show affection. Our dog's love for us is unconditional but their respect has to be earned.