

## **Avoiding Insanity**

### **Being Prepared to Address Unacceptable Behavior**

Beth Bradley

I always say to my clients, "If your dog does something one time, it is a coincidence; if he does the same thing twice, it's becoming a habit." If the behavior is annoying or undesirable, two times should be the limit! If you do not address the problem early, the habit will become ingrained and it will become extremely difficult to change the behavior. And if you think the behavior is annoying the first and second time. . . imagine how aggravating it will be on the twentieth, fiftieth, or hundredth time your dog engages in the behavior!

For example, let's say you take your dog for a nice long walk each morning. Upon returning, when you are safely in your own yard, you remove his leash. One day, Fido heads for the garden, starts tearing up the plants, and the next thing you know, he's running around with a mouthful of your prize-winning roses. The first time he does it, you may be surprised. But the next day as you come into the yard, you are probably saying to yourself, "I hope Fido doesn't attack the roses again!" You are anticipating the possibility that he will repeat the undesirable behavior. Therefore, if you simply take off his leash again, you should not be surprised if he runs for the garden again. If you know your dog has the potential to misbehave and you do not anticipate and prepare, you are simply repeating the same action and expecting a different result. According to Einstein, that's the definition of insanity. You don't want your entire lifetime with your dog to be crazy. Anticipate and prepare to teach him what is and is not acceptable behavior.

### **Be Prepared!**

There are several ways you can prepare to stop an instance (or two!) of bad behavior from becoming a bad habit. In all cases, you need to stay one step ahead of your dog by anticipating when he will misbehave.

- 1) **Redirection** When you redirect, you divert your dog's attention from the trigger for the undesirable behavior. You can accomplish this either by giving him something else to do or by changing the pattern that leads to the behavior.

Once you have identified the most likely times or triggers that precede the undesirable behavior, you can redirect your dog with another command. For example, in the case of the wrecked roses, don't remove your dog's leash as soon as you re-enter your yard. Instead, keep his leash on and have a mini training session. Spend five or ten minutes practicing verbal commands or hand signals for sit, down, come, and finish. Then, take your dog into the house. Do not give him the opportunity to even think about the garden, much less tear it up. After a few days, you can try releasing him in the yard after the mini training session.

Alternatively, you can try taking your dog into the house first and letting him into the yard from the house. It is possible this small change in the order of events will short-circuit his crazed attacks on your plants!

- 2) **Correction** If redirection alone does not prevent the undesirable behavior, you will need to correct it. Be prepared by having the tools in place to correct your dog in the act. In the case of the garden example, you would attach a long line to your dog's training collar before removing his regular leash. When he makes a bee line for the garden, you can correct before he even reaches his goal. The level of correction you use will depend on the dog. The basic rule-of-thumb is that the correction should immediately stop the behavior. If your dog takes the correction and still wants to rip up the roses, then you did not make an impression.

- 3) **Avoidance/Prevention** The key to ensuring that your dog does not form a bad habit is to prevent or avoid any opportunities for him to repeat the behavior. Until you are sure that your dog has learned that a behavior is unacceptable and will not repeat it, you must make it impossible for him to complete the action when you are not in a position to redirect or correct him. For example, if you know your dog jumps on strangers, put him in his crate or in another room when you have visitors and know that you will not be able to focus on training him. Returning to the example of the garden, until your dog has learned that those pretty flowers are off limits, do not allow your dog to be in the yard unsupervised. If you do not have the time or the inclination to train or correct him, do not take him into the yard with you. Each flower feeding frenzy reinforces his addiction to destruction so do not allow him even one opportunity to get back near those roses! Eventually, he will learn that this behavior is not allowed and you will be able to enjoy his company in the yard without constant watchfulness.

## **Conclusion**

Training a dog properly requires you to be present both mentally and physically. You are entirely responsible for your dog's behavior. Until he learns that a behavior is unacceptable, you must anticipate how and when he will try the behavior and be prepared to respond. You can redirect him, correct him, or prevent him. What you cannot do is allow your dog to get into bad habits by repeating the behavior because you think he should just know better. Maybe your dog is not ready or mature enough to give you the behavior you desire. As the higher form of intelligence in this equation, you must make the correct decision for your dog until he is mature or trained enough to understand what is and is not allowed. You must anticipate his behavior and be prepared to address it so that he does not repeat it. Otherwise, you are setting yourself up for insanity!

## **About Beth Bradley**

As one of the top professional trainers and competitors in the United States, Beth is committed to improving the lives of dogs and people through training. She teaches group classes and private lessons in basic and advanced obedience, competition dog training, puppy training, Schutzhund training, personal protection, Canine Good Citizenship, and therapy dog training.

Beth also trains and places service dogs for children with autism and custom trains "cross-trained" companion/protection dogs for families and individuals. She consults for shelters in the tri-state area and for New Jersey law enforcement on cases involving canine behavior and temperament.

Beth began studying animal behavior and dog training at age twelve. She has worked and studied under many renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. After graduating from Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice, Beth worked as a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer. In 1989, she founded her own company and has made dog training and consulting her full-time career since 1995. Competing with her dogs, Beth has earned national and international titles and championships in both Schutzhund and AKC Obedience. In 2003 and 2009, she represented the United States in the FCI World Trials. In 2015, Beth and her dog Fyte qualified for the elite team representing the United States at the WUSV in Finland. Although Fyte is the youngest qualifying dog in the history of this worldwide competition, Beth and Fyte ranked third among the US competitors and posted scores that placed the US team in the top ten. Competing with Beth nationally, Fyte earned the title of USCA IPO 2015 Vice Champion.

Beth is the author of *Real World Dog Training*, and has produced a number of training DVDs and videos. In addition, Beth trains and handles dogs for movies, television, and theater, with recent credits including appearances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, *Board Walk Empire*, the *Batman* franchise, *Damages*, *Blue Bloods*, *The Good Wife*, and *The Blacklist*.

## **CONTACT BETH**

Phone (201) 247-8472

[www.dog-trainer.biz](http://www.dog-trainer.biz) [www.servicedogsandautism.com](http://www.servicedogsandautism.com) [www.crosstrainedk9.com](http://www.crosstrainedk9.com)

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