

## Dog Training Articles By Beth Bradley

### Training the Individual

Recently, I had the pleasure of training with a special white Boxer and her “Aunt” (I’ll leave their names out just in case they would rather stay anonymous). This Boxer is a recent rescue and her owner is undergoing cancer treatment so this special dog was sent to New Jersey to live temporarily with her Aunt. This Boxer is older and has obviously lived a life in fear of humans. She does not trust easily but once she warms up to you she is the typical, licking you in your face, Boxer. Luckily, her Aunt realized that a trained dog is a happy dog so she sent this Boxer off to Boot Camp while she went on a planned vacation.

Ms. Boxer was in our Basic Obedience Class for four weeks before boot camp but I really didn’t know or understand her until I spent some alone time with her. In class I assumed she was more fearful of the other dogs, but I was wrong. It was fear of humans the whole time. For the first few days I watched as Ms. Boxer kept a nice, safe distance from me, yet followed me closely. She didn’t play with the other dogs and just took in her surroundings. I thought this training process would take forever.

After 36 hours of this, I sat in a chair and as she walked by I just said her name out loud. Ms. Boxer stopped dead in her tracks, looked back at me and proceeded to walk toward me. I had no clue what was going to happen as there was no expression in her face or body language; she was just walking toward me. She proceeded to jump in my lap and lick my face clean. YES, now we can train!

When I began working with Ms. Boxer I had to change the way I train because of her personality. I also changed my priorities according to her personality; of course I made sure I was on the same page with Ms. Boxer’s Aunt. She and I were in agreement with what our goals would be. All dogs need to be treated as unique individuals.

There is no set way to train a dog. In most instances I am tweaking training techniques and equipment so that I can get the best response from a dog without changing the dog’s personality. Many times potential clients ask me questions over the phone on how I would handle situations and my honest answer is “I don’t know until I work with your dog”. That is not an answer I am giving to get additional clients. That response is the truth. Each dog is equally important to me and some nights I lose sleep thinking about what is best for the dog!

Anyone who works with me realizes that I am a 100% person. I will give my all and I expect the same in return from my dogs and humans that I am training. However, over the years I have realized that what I think is 100% may not be what that

particular dog or individual is able to give me. I have learned that in many instances my expectations must be dependent on the individual dog's capabilities.

When Boot Camp was over, Ms. Boxer's Aunt and I discussed what is now expected of Ms. Boxer. She is neither a show dog nor an obedience competitor. She has fears and issues that she is not going to overcome in two weeks of boot camp. Ms. Boxer is giving *her* 100% to us, and as long as she is doing the best she can, we are happy.

### **Unrealistic Demands:**

We humans put unrealistic demands on our children and dogs. When you bring a new dog or puppy home, it is important that you treat it like a dog. Treating your dog like a human leads to stress. Your dog should feel that you love him but that you are the master and his leader not his equal. You could be the one giving your dog some mixed signals.

For example: You expect your dog to listen to commands although you infrequently train with him; and make exceptions he doesn't understand, i.e., allowing him to jump on you but not your grandmother; allowing him to 'play bite' you but not your two year old son. Or you expect him to know that he should immediately respond to the command 'come' but it's not important to do so for the command 'sit'. Or you expect him to sit at home, alone all day and not want your attention when you come home from work.

It is also important to treat your dog as an individual. You cannot expect him or her to behave or learn as quickly as your previous dog. Many of my clients tell me; I've had (fill in the breed) all my life, but never a dog like this! Each dog is an individual. Do not make expectations on your current dog based upon the performance of your previous dog.

If you do so, you and your dog will certainly be stressed and upset. We know how it feels when you can live up to someone's expectations, your dog may not feel the same emotions but your dog will certainly stop trying to obey because it just gets him in trouble anyway. Unrealistic expectations leads to stress and stress can cause all forms of behavioral and physical problems in dogs.

### **Conclusion:**

When you are training treat your dog like an individual and realize your dog's potential. Don't place unrealistic expectations on him or give mixed signals. The only way training is going to be fun is if you eliminate the confusion and make it clear to your dog what is expected.

I am proud to say, that I have received reports that concur with what I have always believed, that Ms. Boxer is a much happier dog now that she is trained. She knows

what is expected of her. She gives 100% to her Aunt and realizes that her best is all that is demanded of her. We did not push her past her limits and in essence, break her. We never put unrealistic demands on her. Ms. Boxer is now more willing to approach strangers and have strangers approach her. She may not act like a Labrador greeting a stranger but she is not afraid of humans. Ms. Boxer also is less stressed in new situations. She is not chasing her cat house- mate and is an all around happier dog. *She is a success story.*