

Dog Training Articles By Beth Bradley

The Blame Game

The “Blame Game” runs rampant through our society with dogs and children. When dogs misbehave, owners blame everyone under the sun: the previous owner, the breeder, the rescue group, the breed, and, of course, the trainer. The truth of the matter is owners and handlers must make sure to relate to their dogs in the present and not justify behavior based on their dog’s previous misfortune in life. I’m not saying that dogs do not feel or do not have souls. I’m saying that if we immediately react to negative behavior, the message that we are conveying is that this behavior is not acceptable. Dogs follow strong and dominant leaders who are confident and sure of themselves, not leaders that give lots of kisses and cookies. Misbehavior continues simply because proper behavior is not made perfectly clear to a dog. Sometimes, the owner instills improper behavior unknowingly, because the owner feels sorry for his dog’s previous life, or because the owner does not know how to show leadership; yet, still want to have a warm and fun relationship with his dog. Setting boundaries and limitations will only make the bond between human and dog stronger; rather than push the dog away from you.

The Pack Leader

On television, how often do you see an alpha wolf walking his pack on leash? Never. That is because the Alpha has set the rules of dominance early in a young pup’s life and the puppy or pack member is now the follower and will follow the pack leader wherever he goes. This leadership is demonstrated every minute of the day to the puppy or young dog, not only during a 20 minute training session. My clients ask me all the time, how often do you train your dogs? I never stop; every minute that I am interacting with my dogs or client’s dogs, I am training and showing my dominance or pack leader mentality.

How do I do It?

All potential clients ask me the same question and there is no clear-cut answer. Equipment changes from dog to dog and client to client. My goal when I am working with a dog is to have a dog that receives minimum corrections but responds immediately to any commands that I give. When I am training a dog for a client I need to establish the leadership role; however, I also need to establish a bond. I don’t want the dog to fear me but have respect for me. I also need the dog to have fun and relax with me; because no dog can learn if they are afraid or stressed. When I am training with a dog, I need the dog to play with me, to run with me and to want to be with me. When the dog needs a correction, I do not hesitate to enforce my rules, but I make sure to keep the correction part of the training to a minimum, short but effective. My correction must immediately stop the unwanted behavior.

Dog Talk

Dogs communicate through the use of body language. When commanding keep your conversation with your dog to a minimum. Give commands and do not speak in sentences. Speaking in sentences, asking your dogs questions, etc. is telling your dog he is reacting correctly. For example, telling your dog it is ok when he is growling at a stranger, he believes you are telling him it is ok to growl. This is incorrect. Instead, I would simply correct the dog and give him a command. What I am telling the dog is that it is wrong to bark but good to sit. Also, be careful with the constant touching and kissing, dogs do not communicate in this way so you again are encouraging wrong behavior. Do not talk or touch your dog but give him a command and make sure he follows it.

Your Job as Owner

Your job as your dog's owner is to make sure he is (a) well mannered and (b) is emotionally and physically taken care of. It is not okay for your dog to obey your trainer more than you. It shouldn't be the trainer's job to correct your dog when he barks or snaps at another dog; that is your job. I guarantee, your dog will obey your trainer but will he obey you? You should be able to travel and take your dog anywhere and have him welcome, and if you can not, you have failed your dog. You wouldn't leave your child locked up when you go out, why is it ok to leave your dog behind? And, it is not ok to allow your dog to terrorize your community by barking or acting out, again you wouldn't allow your child to 'beat' on others, why should your dog be able to?

Conclusion

No one wants to admit that they have failed to raise their dog properly but it is never too late to set boundaries and start enforcing rules. If you are clear and consistent in the manner in which you train and communicate with your dog he will understand immediately what you want from him with little stress. Don't leave this important job of raising your dog to another, become active in your dog's life, and learn from a knowledgeable person on how to handle and correct your dog and you both will live a happy life together.

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Beth Bradley began studying animal behavior and dog training at 12 years of age. She became a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer in 1986. Beth graduated Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice. Throughout her schooling, Beth worked and studied under many well-renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. Beth formed her own company in 1989 and has made dog training her full time career since 1995. Beth is also a writer for the *Animal Companion*, she has produced CD-Roms and DVD's on training and is author of a training book titled *Real World Dog Training*.

Beth is a member of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America, the German Shepherd Dog Club of America – Working Dog Association, the United Schutzhund Clubs of America, and she is Secretary and Training Director of the Greater Philadelphia Schutzhund Club. Beth actively competes in both American Kennel Club and Schutzhund Trials both in the United States of America and Europe. Beth is a certified Canine Good Citizen Evaluator for the American Kennel Club. Beth can be contacted via the web at www.dog-trainer.biz or her business (201) 247-8472.