



Leadership and Coaching of **Dogs**

By Laura Pakis

Dogs are a part of our lives. They are a part of our families. We want to take them everywhere. We buy them the best food and their favorite toys. We love them like furry little children, but they are still dogs and need to be treated as such. Sound harsh? To a dog, it sounds like plain common sense.

To understand why your clients' canine companions are treating them like dogs, you need to help owners understand the way dogs think. In this day and age, it is very trendy to rationalize dogs' actions or explain

away their bad behaviors. However, it is unfair to humanize them by projecting our emotions onto them. People sometimes forget that dogs are animals; they don't have the same thought process as we do and can't always be expected to make the same decisions we would.

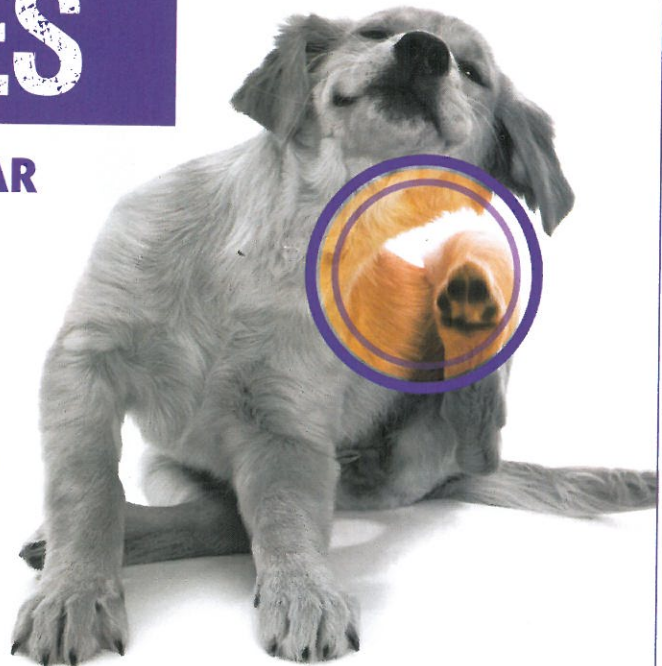
You need to encourage your clients to change the roles in their homes. Their dogs need to know that the owner is the leader of the household pack. The companion dogs we know today are still descendants of wolves, and

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they still have a pack mentality. It is our job as professionals to educate our clients on how to be leaders (i.e. making sure their dogs' basic needs are met, that they are safe from harm, and that they have a clearly defined social structure and lots of love and attention).

If the dog is certain that your client is doing the job well and that he does not have to continue to vie for the "top dog" position, it will remove a lot of pressure from his shoulders. He can relax, get comfortable, and enjoy being a pet dog. Ninety percent of behavior problems can be addressed by clarifying the dog owner's position and changing your clients' interactions with their dogs. And both will thank you for it!

Dogs communicate with body language and eye contact. You want to encourage your clients to remove as much of that as possible so there are no mixed signals between them and their dogs. To a dog, excessive eye contact is either intimidating or a challenge, neither of which an owner wants to communicate. Body language is how a dog reads a person's intentions and interactions. It is

a lot for them to process if someone is chasing after them and screaming. They are faster than most people, and someone chasing them probably just scares the bejezzus out of them!

Persuade your client to keep a leash on his or her dog and let him drag it around. Only have your client do this while at home to supervise the dog's safety, and do not have your client keep the leash on the dog while he is in the crate. If your clients need to correct their dogs or stop them from playing the "chase me" game, have them step on or grab the leash instead of the dog. It is best to teach a dog appropriate behaviors by setting up the situation. The owner is in control of the situation and more likely to define effectively the desirable response.

Consistency is the key to success. If your clients are inconsistent with their dogs, then they are confusing them. Remind your client that dogs learn by repetition, and they learn that a behavior is either right or wrong. Dogs do not have a gray area and do not generalize. It is your job to define the rules clearly to your clients and help them to establish

structure and boundaries in their dogs' lives. It takes time and effort, but as a team, you can help your clients have a wonderful, rewarding relationship with their dogs.

Some people may dream of a dog who can put his own toys away, and then some just want the dog simply to stop urinating in their home. Maybe your clients fall somewhere in between. Whatever their end goal is, you as a professional can reassure them that they are not asking too much, and with positive guidance and effective correction, their relationship with their dogs will improve. ■

Laura Pakis, owner and founder of Acme Canine, LLC, has been a professional dog trainer for numerous years. She feels responsible ownership is an important part of having a dog and guides her business toward providing dog owners with not only training knowledge but also care and understanding of dogs.

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