



Dogs Don't Celebrate

Quite often in my line of work, the obvious needs to be stated. In the midst of the 2007 holiday season, I briefly reminded my classes "Dogs don't celebrate Christmas...or any other holiday for that matter".

Expectedly, I got quite a few looks like "well, duh". The reason for bringing this up is to remind folks how we affect our dogs' lives, and subsequently their training. When we act inconsistently, our dogs *react* inconsistently. And this goes for anytime of year, not just holidays.

My busiest seasons are the start of the school year, and Thanksgiving-Christmas. Schedules change, and we are often more stressed than usual. A change in schedule is a change in the dog's routine. Dogs learn by routine and are comforted by it. The dogs can also probably sense your stress well before you yourself realize it. And when the leader is stressed, the dog will be stressed too. Especially when they don't understand what the anxiety is for.

Like people, different dogs will react differently to change. Some take it in stride, while others may do things like regressing housebreaking or acting out for attention. If your dog seems to be forgetting what he's learned, first look for environmental/lifestyle changes. Did you remove his crate too soon? Are you skipping scheduled training classes? Is your dog getting less playtime because of your full social calendar?

A pet should help relieve stress, not add to it. If you see negative changes in your dog's behavior, it's time to get back to basics. Make time each day to connect with your dog. Even a short game of tug can clear your head. Take a brisk walk to help both of you relax; endorphins are better than Prozac. And when our schedules are inconsistent, it's even more important to make sure our behavior is not!

Finally, if your dog's behavior turns into a "problem" such as separation anxiety, growling or anything potentially aggressive, contact a professional trainer immediately.