



Pet Peeves

As you can imagine, as a professional trainer I've come across a lot of dogs and owners over the years. Fortunately, most people are caring, responsible owners. But even the most loving dog owner sometimes makes faulty decisions. When this happens, typically owners are thinking emotionally rather than logically. Save the emotions for your successes and take keep them out of the training.

The following is a list of my personal pet peeves. Yes, the pun is totally intended. Hopefully this information will bring additional awareness how these situations affect training and how they can easily be remedied.

Obese pets

There is absolutely, positively no excuse to having an obese pet. YOU control their food intake and exercise routine. If they are not getting as much exercise as before, then cut back their food or increase the exercise, or both. If a medical problem is suspected then see your vet. If you feel guilty reducing their food, examine closely why you feel this way and deal with it appropriately. It is irresponsible to let weight gain go unchecked until an animal becomes obese. Just as in people, obese pets have higher incidents of illness, disease and injury. The money you save on food and vet bills could go to buying your dog higher quality dog food he may actually enjoy more. It's about quality, not quantity.

Leash Control

The purpose of a leash is to maintain physical control of the dog. But many times I see owners letting the dog drag them around. This is especially disconcerting when a 10 lb dog is pulling a 120 lb owner. Outside of training your dog to walk properly on a leash, there are a couple other reasons for this. First, if your dog is pulling, shorten up on the leash and hold them closer. The more leverage a dog has, the easier it will be for them to pull. Secondly, make sure you are using an appropriate leash. For example a leather leash is smoother and harder to grip than nylon. Retractable leashes are also not appropriate for pullers, again due to the large amount of leverage provided.

Disciplining Growls & Barks

Why do we get embarrassed if our dogs growl or bark in public? The dog is communicating vocally. And a dog will bark and growl before biting. If the warning signs are disciplined, we are training out our signals to intervene before trouble starts. When your dog is growling or barking excessively, remain calm and simply remove him from the situation. Once he calms down, praise him and try re-approaching slowly. Pay attention to body language and further vocalizations.

Dogs Left Outside Alone

Domestic dogs have been bred to live and socialize with humans. That's why we have pet dogs after all. So don't fall under the misguided notion that fenced-in dogs are "happy" to be outside by themselves for long periods. Leaving dogs unattended outside can also be hazardous. If an unattended dog were to become severely ill, the owner wouldn't know if or what it may have ingested. Other unfriendly animals frequently cross boundaries of electronic fences and sometimes physical ones. Dogs can also get caught up in things, and of course even escape. Ultimately, a pet dog is an animal for which you have taken responsibility. Please take good care of it.

Dismissive Behavior

In my experience, dismissive behavior tends to be an issue with toy breed owners. By Dismissive Behavior I mean an owner that doesn't intervene appropriately when their dog misbehaves. An example of this is a dog that you go to pet, it snarls and bares teeth at you and the owner says, "Oh, just ignore her. She wouldn't bite anybody". Perhaps due to the dogs' small size a dismissive owner may think the dog can't do much harm. But this is just encouraging the dog to think they have to take matters in their own hands. It is not "her house" it is *your* house and you need to be the leader by taking charge.

Overbearing Behavior

On the flipside is Overbearing owner behavior. Specific examples of this is physically putting the dog down in a submissive position, shouting, threatening gestures, etc. The idea that we need to "dominate" our pets is outdated. Establishing our leadership through calm, confident actions is much more effective and reliable.

Closed Minds

I'll be the first to admit I don't know everything about dogs and training. Even with the years of experience I do have, every dog and owner I meet teach me something new. Many clients have come to me saying, "I've never had a dog like this before. Also remember, not every trainer or method is right for every situation. Educate yourself and you will be able to make the best possible choices for you and your dog.