

## **IT'S TIME TO MAKE SOME DECISIONS.**

**By  
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For the continuing benefits we as Human Beings receive from our Canine Friends, I believe it is time all of us who own dogs, or are thinking about introducing a dog into our family life, to decide which way of training, socializing, and working with our dogs is the right way for us.

By making such a decision, the insecurities which can develop will lessen and our understanding of what makes a dog tick can grow.

All dogs are different, and every Breed is different. It is important that we realize no two dogs are alike. What works for one, may not work for another. We can own many different dogs in our life span, and if we are educated to their individual needs we won't make too many mistakes.

What is happening around the dog world, (*has been for at least the last 5 years*) is the huge gaps that are appearing in the different methods of training and working with the dog.

Many now advocate that there is no such thing as PACK STRUCTURE. Dogs don't have an Alpha, some even feel and say Heritage and Instincts either don't matter or even don't exist, and therefore when they join our family, we do not need to set boundaries. If you go along with this way of thinking, then you will certainly favor the Positive Reinforcement method of REWARD REWARD REWARD for good behavior and give possibly Time Out for bad behavior. Certainly you will never CORRECT the dog for any reason. This may work beautifully for some dogs, and can when used properly be a great training method for that particular dog. BUT what about the dominant, arrogant dog who contrary to the beliefs of many who favor this method for all dogs, hasn't been informed that Pack Structure no longer exists, and it has the right to be the ALPHA in any situation and any family group. What happens when it is given no boundaries of what is acceptable and what is not. Could it be disastrous? Is this when biting and even worse death can occur. Who then is responsible? If we have chosen the wrong method for that dog, do we then have a lot to answer for?

I must add here, I have just finished with a phone call where a 3 year old Cocker Spaniel badly bit its female owner on the face causing her to have to go to the doctors. On questioning the owner and her husband, this dog has been trained in the gently gently

method, never given a correction in its life, and is treated like a child. Mum went to tuck it into bed, bent down to give it a good night kiss, and was bitten badly for her efforts. Don't for one minute think this is an isolated case.. This type of happening is becoming very common, and the dog is usually the loser. I handle many cases like this each and every week. Some can be fixed when the owner is prepared to alter their way of thinking. When they make an educated decision to change.

Who's at fault here? It's so sad. These people loved this young cuddly dog and now all they want to do is to put this dog to sleep – for good.

At this present moment here in Brisbane in a couple of outlying suburbs we have packs of dogs running feral. They certainly have their own pack structure, and they are causing damage and carnage to livestock around the district. The community has to lock up their own dogs at night for fear that these roaming feral dogs will savage their pets. The people are watching for any road kill, and removing it immediately it is found, as they know these carcasses will bring in the feral dogs. (These are dogs that have not been given the boundaries required, strong dominant animals that are now packing and running wild.)

I believe at least three (3) states in America are now charging the owners with criminal intent when a death to a human being occurs from an attack by a dog, and the owner is given a criminal record and jailed accordingly. Do we want this to happen here in Australia? How far does our responsibility for our mate go? What could we have done to prevent this type of thing ever happening? When should we have started to understand this dog? Should it not be when it was young? Would it show these tendencies at a reasonably early age and should we have recognized it, and set the boundaries for it.

Personally after 30 years of training all breeds of dogs, and living with 3 or 4 dogs at a time, I do believe Pack Structure still exists, and every dog from birth recognizes it for what it is. Watch a new litter of puppies. They will play fight, wrestle, and carry on together. You will note that one of them seems to be the leader and others may be very submissive and quiet to this top dog. This very quiet dog could respond very well to the gently method of training as it has no desire to be anything but what it is. It has no desire to move upwards in the pecking order. But unless things change over the seven weeks the pups lives with the litter, the leader pup will need much firmer handling. If what you see isn't pack structure at work then what is it? How then can we say Pack Structure doesn't exist? I can't live with a pack of dogs unless I know I can control them with a word. They then set up their own pecking order, and they live together within that order. I only have to step in as the ALPHA if or when really necessary.

Let's look at the word ALPHA. (BOSS)

I think some see being the "BOSS" as being Over the Top, Cruel, Aggressive, My way or the Highway attitude, Unrealistic, Dominant. Etc. These are the people who use such things as continual Alpha Rolls (where you flip the dog on its back and stand over it for even small misdemeanors.) You hit the dog to get your control, you never praise for the

good things, you don't allow the dog to have any independence, you rely on certain equipment to give and maintain your control. YOU ARE NOT A GOOD OWNER, or a good Alpha.

Some now see being the "Boss" as being the one to continually reward the dog with either food or toys and never give any correction at all. Usually timing is very important in rewarding successfully, but this is not explained, or they can't do it. No boundaries are set, and the dog soon learns it can do as it please. Families become dysfunctional, children often get hurt, and dog in many cases as it gets older finishes up in animal shelters because the family now can't handle this disobedient member. YOU ARE NOT A GOOD OWNER or a good Alpha in this scene either.

To be a 'BOSS' you should set the boundaries, (this you can do, this you cant,) you are never cruel, you never punish the dog, but you do make correction if and when necessary, you are consistent and constant in all you do, you are never aggressive with the dog, but you can be and possibly should be ASSERTIVE, your understanding of the dog makes you CALM, at all times, and your voice becomes your best training aid. You encourage the dog to think for itself at times, but your training if always FIRM, and you earn your dogs respect by giving it the respect it is entitled too. You are never hesitant to REWARD for the good behavior, but when the dog is out of order you will quickly give the reprimand necessary for that action. If you have to make a correction it is immediately followed up by an action which will allow you to reward.

If you are training on the premise that you only reward for the good behavior and ignore the bad behavior, then you also have to be consistent, calm, quiet. You may need to carry a lot of treats with you most of the time, particularly in the early stages of learning

I have no doubt that a very good positive trainer will do a good job of getting very big positives from their dog, but I think the dog has to be of a gentle quiet nature for this success to be achieved without any corrections ever having been made.

An equal balance of methods is the ideal for most dogs.

Watch a dog in a Trial who has a great relationship with its owner. It is not the dog who is continually given food to do the work which is required. Quite often, when no food or toy is at hand, (none of this is allowed in the competition field.) the work the dog does goes totally to pieces. It is often the one who runs out of the ring, shows no regard for the owner as a pack leader, and (pack leader doesn't exist for it anyhow). The dog which has been trained in a positive ,firm calm, respectful manner, and has been corrected for bad behavior (not talking about mistakes it makes in training here) is the dog which shows what it thinks of being a member of this pack by the attention, respect and great work it does TOGETHER with its owner. This dog and its owner are a pleasure to see and should be emulated by all who do see them. Balance is what is required.

As a trainer you should be aware of and able to successfully use every different method there is out there, but you have to form an opinion and make some decisions. As an

owner, you need to make enquiries before making decisions on how you will go about being this dog's owner. There are of course many books written of the subject by many different types of authors. Reading is a great form of learning, but nothing really takes the place of experiencing lots and lots of different types of dogs, and how the different methods react on them. You need to be able to actually handle the out and out aggressive dog, the shy, retiring frightened dog, the food aggressive, the fear aggressive, the maternal aggression. If we stop learning, then that is the time to give it all away, but as a mature person, I know you can't wipe out, and say it doesn't exist, methods that have been successful for many years. If we do, then perhaps we should be born old, and get younger each year (WOULDN'T THAT BE FUN.) At any age we should be open to change, as long as that change is a good thing. We need to continue to think outside the square. Tunnel Vision, Hard and fast rules with no deviation allowed is the ruination of most things. Let's not get that way with our dogs, and most importantly, -You really can't suddenly say Pack Structure, Heritage, Instincts don't exist anymore. Animals are not human. They don't think, talk, walk like us. Their psychology and physiology is different to ours.

It is time to start making choices. We should be asking questions. We need to be open to discussions. We need to understand there is never only one right way to do anything. It becomes the right way only after intelligent and sufficient thought has been given and then an educated decision is made.

LET'S GIVE THE NEW OWNER OPTIONS. EXPLANATIONS OF ALL METHODS AND LET THEM THEN CHOOSE WITH WISDOM FOR THEMSELVES WHICH IS THE BEST FOR THEM AND THEIR FAMILY PET.

Keep our minds open.

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