

Why My Dog?

It's a beautiful Sunday afternoon in the summer and you, your wife, two children and a new 5 month old pup are sitting on the front lawn. Coming by your house is a jogger, a person walking a dog, or a car that slows down at the end of your driveway. You blink and your pup is catapulted toward the **ACTION**. You call the pup, followed by unsuccessful screaming. The dog keeps going toward the road, is hit, and killed.

All this happens in front of your family as you watched helplessly, or are you helpless? Many people have too much faith or trust in their animals for the amount of training the animals (and the owners) have had. Why? Because they love their dog, sometimes more than they love human family members. The comment I hear most often is, "my dog is so good." In this article I will share some experiences that our clients have shared with us. Hopefully, you can keep your dog alive to reach old age.

We believe that the reason for many of these untimely deaths and injuries is that many pet owners attribute human characteristics to their animals. There is a term for this: *anthropomorphism*. By doing this, the owner forgets that animals are not human, are not capable of reasoning, and are not capable of seeing the outcome of their decisions. If we go back to the family on the front lawn, they could have had the pup on a leash, on a chain, on an e-collar, in a pen, or in a fenced in area of the yard. When asked why they didn't use one of these methods of restraining the animal, their reply was, "he likes it better when he is running free."

Many people would like to buy a dog with an ON – OFF switch. When they contemplate getting the dog they think of this euphoric experience walking the dog, getting exercise with the dog, and feeling good about life. Waking in the morning and walking the dog is the highlight of the day; except for when they wake up late, they're in a hurry for work. Then the dog does not get the walk. The human is feeling bad because he has short-changed the pup of its walk so the owner decides not to crate the pup (where it is safest). They go off to work and give the pup the freedom of the whole house. After all, we as humans like lots of space and the run of the house, so why wouldn't the pup like it too.

Unfortunately over the next 8 hours, pup is not more relaxed because of his freedom but is very anxious instead. What happens? While the cats are away the mice will play. There is nobody running around yelling, **NO, NO, BAD DOG**. He is having a field day, and every little sound he hears around him is stimulating his excitement. He starts his morning by chewing on the oak table leg, he continues by running between the door and the window looking for you. He makes his way into the closet and chews up a few of the expensive shoes or boots (and the cheap ones, too)! Then he is back to the door and window to look for you.

He continues his mad dash by going into the kitchen and, with this great nose, finds the overstuffed trash barrel because of course if you didn't have time to walk him you didn't have time to take out the trash. Lunch consists of tin foil, plastic bags, chicken bones, coffee grounds, and all kinds of other goodies. Back to the door and window; and then to the toilet, tub, or shower for a drink! Of course while in the bathroom, he sees his next project – the hand towel on the rack. He pulls it down and spends the next hour chewing and ingesting the cotton towel. He hears a new noise and is back at the door or window but finds that no one is there yet.

By this time his stomach is getting upset so he looks for a comfortable place to go, SO he heads for the bed with the new quilt on it and vomits. After vomiting he feels better, so why not chew the throw pillows on the bed since he's right there. But he hears a noise so he has to run

back to the door again but no, you're not home yet. However, with all the running around and stimulation, your pup's bowels have had, guess what's next? Of course, on the new carpet!

Now you come home and you review the disaster zone, and you begin to scream, **NO, NO, BAD DOG**. I would correct you and say, **NO, NO, BAD OWNER**. If you had put the pup in his crate (where it is safest) this mess never would have happened. But, you thought that you wouldn't like to be in a crate so neither would your pup. Fortunately at this point your dog is still alive. There have been many of these situations where dogs have died from electrocution, strangulation by twisted bowels, ingestion of toxins, punctured esophagus or stomach, and the list could go on as these are only cases that people have shared with us.

As a professional dog trainer, I hear things like, "my dog is so good," "my dog is so well behaved," or "my dog is so well trained." And this may be true in controlled, supervised, and structured situations. Unfortunately, people need to realize that with a young, developing pup or an older dog with bad habits and when the controlling factors and restraints are removed the dog is left to its own devices and the behavior typically turns undesirable and often hazardous. People want to believe that their dog is well trained and obedient. After all it is their dog and a reflection of them. You have spent all of this time, energy, and of course money to give it the best situation, you have bonded with it, loved it, and spent time with it. You ask how this could happen after all you have invested in the pup.

Easy, dogs are masters at teaching their owners to do what the dog wants them to do. Dogs also know when they can get away with things. Other dogs don't care and try to do certain behaviors no matter what the consequences are; at least that is what the dog has the owner believing.

So how can you prevent or fix the problems? Remember the old adage, *you can't teach an old dog new tricks*? **This is not true!** However, a young dog learns very easily. A 12 pound, 8 week old pup learns to walk on a leash without pulling much easier than a 70 pound, two year old dog. There are also many resources available to you. There may not be much free time, but there is training equipment (e-collars, pinch collars, choke collars), information books, videos, obedience classes, and instructors/trainers. But, I continue to hear, "I want to do it the old fashioned way," or "I want to do it the way I did it with my last dog."

People bring me two-year-old dogs that are out of control, won't come, sit, stay, or will jump up on any person who is nearby. Some of these people have given up, but after they observe a lesson in which the dog is behaving better within a few minutes, they often want to continue. Why does the dog behave for me? I don't make excuses for the dog such as: he doesn't like to do that or he needs his freedom, or the electric collar is too cruel. As I tell people at our training facility, at seminars, at demonstrations, or on the phone, **"You, the owner, have to change your thoughts, your expectations, and your behaviors."**

Another problem area is when the dog has a loose collar. Many dogs come for training and slip their collars within minutes. Owners don't put collars on tight enough because they think that the dog doesn't like a tight collar. But what about when the dog slips the collar and runs under a speeding car, when it jumps on a bicyclist, or when it darts out your front door?

If you think I'm exaggerating, just spend a day at a veterinary office and watch the accident victims come through the door. Are these people irresponsible? No, they are just like most dog owners. You need to put your human thoughts aside and think like a dog. He needs only a small space such as a crate so that he is safe. It is your thinking and your behavior that will put him in the safe environment he needs. Whether your companion is in your house, in your yard,

out on a run, or in the field hunting, your dog depends upon you to know what is best for him and to know how to keep him safe.

Just like children, our dogs should not have too much freedom. It is not about love, dogs unlike people are unconditional lovers. Your dog depends on you to love him enough to do what is best for him. You need to set the boundaries, take the time to train, and take the time to put him in a safe environment. Enjoy your dog for what it is – a DOG. Respect him for this and you will have a great companion who will bring you much joy in his lifetime. Your obligation is not to make your dog's life Disneyland, it is to keep it safe and healthy.

Good luck and great hunting,

John