

dilemma of the modern dog

LISA MCCLUSKEY SUGGESTS WAYS DOG TRAINERS CAN HELP THE DOG ADJUST TO LIFE IN MODERN TIMES

With the time of year upon us that we tend to be more active in going on holiday and wanting to partake in fun activities with our families and dogs, I have noticed the need to discuss our role as the owners and guardians of our canines in my classes. This seems to happen every spring more and more each week as the weather in the Midwest USA opens up many possibilities to us after a very long and difficult winter. For many years, I tend to become sad towards some of the inquiries and questions I receive as the attitude of my students tends to revolve around the mentality of “how do I **stop** my dog from doing...” instead of “how can I **help** my dog understand what I would like him to do...”

One of the most poignant exercises I worked on to help understand my role as the companion of my canines was a speech topic assigned at a seminar courtesy of the world renowned canine behaviourist John Rogerson. The topic was entitled, “The changing role of dogs in society; has our modern way of life left the humble dog behind?” I wanted to share some of my thoughts on this topic since it seems that every day, this is a concept that I am constantly dealing with when training my clients’ dogs.

As with most problems, the first question should be to investigate the ingredients that have conspired together in the problem of the dog not having a well-defined, appropriate role in our changing society today and then make recommendations on how to improve the role of our dogs and ourselves in this article. For those of us that are dog trainers in profession, we need to ask ourselves if we are educating clients on the needs of their specific breeds by offering breed group specific classes, workshops, and seminars. Many clients find it helpful and



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supportive to realise that others are going through similar challenges with their dogs and by organising classes in this manner, similar problems with games, fetch, focus, distraction, and recall can be addressed based on the genetic similarities of the dogs enrolled in the seven sporting, working, toy, non-working, hound, terrier, and herding groups.

I personally like to add an eighth group (some call them mixed breeds in the USA), but the dogs are typically farming, settlement, or village type dogs. Interestingly enough, the mixed breeds of the Midwest for my classes look almost phenotypically identical to the street and village dogs I interacted with on my recent trip to India. This experience was most beneficial to me as a trainer and much of what I learned about this type of dog in India, I shared with my clients that own mixed breeds. Needless to say, they were

delighted by my insights on their type of dog from my trip abroad.

Another difficult service we need to consider offering our clients and doggie friends is the benefit of our experience in the canine field and to bring those human dog guardians up to speed on the realities of owning opportunistic scavengers that evolved eating garbage around human settlements (canines). These are the same pups that we allow all sorts of benefits in our homes. I often find myself reminding my clients that the freedom of choice our dogs experience is a privilege, not a right and, therefore, is controlled by those of us with opposable thumbs that work everyday to write the checks to pay the veterinarian, pet supply store, and dog trainer.

There is new research supporting the concept that abilities of dogs helped domesticate the human such that dogs became our noses to accomplish our hunting

for food more efficiently so we could develop our minds to become more productive in other areas. The irony here can be quite obvious as we offer the worst cruelty to some of our dogs in society - sensory deprivation, as we are caught in the rat race forward. As humans, we use our minds to consume more in society as our dogs use their noses less. We also then confuse food/hunger for love and try to buy our dogs the right items and toys instead of being the perfect playmate. Playing with your dog is the quickest way to forge a relationship with him. Without play, strong bonds and relationships are unable to develop and prosper.

The challenge lies in teaching clients and fellow dog owners to embrace a more appropriate role as a pet's companion. USA leash laws have removed the right to freely exercise well-behaved dogs, fenced dog parks have been created to imprison our dogs in with poor canine models of behaviour and the banning of dogs from most public parks has prohibited us from bridging a relationship between children, the community, and dog owners. Modern dogs certainly do have much more to cope with than dogs of previous generations due to the pressures of our society today. As a society, we need to be practical in our recommendations of how to make improvements on this issue. Dogs need child proof areas and kids need dog free zones in the home. This is a fact, not an

option for the busy households of today. In addition, we also do need to create play areas for children near venues where dogs are trained and walked successfully. Wouldn't this be a great community project for those that would want to address this issue one step further?

We, as trainers, must help our families and friends achieve pet dogs walking under control with good recalls that are non-negotiable as dogs running up to other dogs and people is not enjoyed by members of our community that are out and about. Poor behaviour is what keeps dogs out of venues and out door patio restaurants. We should strive to be realistic in pet training and education as owners only pick up where good breeders have left off with socialisation (this includes well-adjusted, locally obtained mix breed dogs). Social behaviour is constant and dogs are always learning. Therefore, we need to teach owners to create an emotional working relationship with their dog using reward based training equipped with appropriate penalties and consequences. This is done through guiding, helping, showing, and shaping the dog to do the behaviours we like while discouraging and letting the dog know what the behaviours we dislike are.

On a final note, we dog lovers need to examine accountability in who is responsible for teaching a given dog their flawed or proper perception of the world. Is it owners, breeders, trainers, and/or community

restrictions? Honestly, the humble dog wants clear instructions and leaders. In addition, many of us serious dog folks instruct others that you must be firm to be kind in training our canines, but is it a double standard when addressing our friends and clients? Are we able to help our human friends be more accountable for the relationship they have with their dogs? How well-behaved are the dogs we live with and train? As a canine community, the future resides in all dog enthusiasts being more consistent in their relationships with dogs in order to offer our humble canine companions the achievement of a proper quality of life in order to no longer be left behind. 🐾

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bug-detecting beagle

A pest control company in America has enlisted the help of a Beagle called Squirt to help sniff-out vermin. Squirt searches for bedbugs in hotels and homes. The bugs are known to conceal themselves in the tiny crevices in mattresses and between floorboards; in addition, their size and nocturnal routine make the vermin hard to detect.

Research conducted by Amtech, a pest control firm based in Danbury, who are also Squirt's employers, have stated that humans only see the bedbugs on a mattress in 50% of cases. A dog can identify 90% of the bugs on the same surface. "As good as we are, a dog can do more with his nose than we can do with our sight," said Gary Petcavage, an Amtech employee, reported K9 Magazine.

Squirt was headhunted from a Florida dog training school where he was trained for law enforcement work. His new job, however, uses much of the training he gained from his school days. Hopefully, Squirt will continue to enjoy his work, which has already gained him recognition within his firm. "He is by far the most accurate detection system out there," said Amtech owner, Pepe Peruyero.

