

Problems?

Part I

Having written a total of 23 articles on Basic Training and a further 11 on Canine Temperament I have now decided to write a series of articles on Problems people have with their dogs. This subject is, of course, inexhaustible. In this article I am just giving readers an indication of the various problems I will cover in much more detail in the months to come. Naturally, I will first of all cover the most common problems which the majority of dog owners encounter frequently. Later, I will write about rarer problems. Some of them can be very interesting, so keep tuned.

When dog owners telephone to enquire as to how I train and wish to book appointments, about fifty per cent would declare that they have problems with their dogs. The other fifty percent have no problems, but they are still anxious to do the right thing and receive professional instruction to train their dogs. In my opinion those people have a very positive attitude. They all wish to be responsible dog owners. I wish everyone had the same desire, don't you? The vast majority often sail through with flying colours and value the knowledge they have gained and continue in great harmony with their dogs. The sad thing is, our beloved dogs never live long enough, but I've always said that if a dog's age exceeds 11 years, then that is a bonus to be cherished. Let's now consider those who have problems with their dogs. These can be many and varied. They may exist within the home, whilst walking on the streets, in the parks, in shopping areas, travelling in the car, meeting people, socialising with dogs and/or other animals, in the show ring, in obedience trials and dog training clubs. As mentioned before in previous articles, problems can arise at any time in the dog's training, its temperament or general behaviour. Whatever the problem might be, the first thing you need to work out is: what was the cause, or likely cause, which produced the problem in the first place? That is not always easy to establish, but it can be worked out by making close observations in regard to the dog's behaviour, or in the way it responds to something it either scents, hears, sees, feels or tastes – in fact, through all its senses. This, of course, can take time. And that brings me back to the initial phone call or email enquiry, when the caller has explained everything about the problem. In most cases I can guess what the likely cause was, but not every time. I have to see the dog first and observe how it acts and interacts with its owner. In most cases the problem has been caused by the owner quite unintentionally, either through ignorance or by not handling the dog appropriately. But we must not blame the owner every time. He or she may have done a very noble thing and acquired the dog from a shelter, in order to give it a good home. In doing so, it is possible that there is no recorded history of the dog. No one knows how the dog was reared in the past. Therefore, it can be described as an "unknown quantity." So the new owner takes the dog home together with its problems. Actually, with experience it is not too hard to work out as to how, when, where or why the poor dog had been treated inappropriately. Dogs can't speak, but they can certainly show you. That is where you have to be able to read your dog? Watch everything it does, how it reacts and responds to everything. You can, in time, gradually work it out. You have to be like a detective.

Unfortunately, a lot of people don't bother to do their homework when choosing a dog. There are many Poodle crosses flooding the market these days. Purchasers read up on the Poodle and find that it is a fantastic dog with great ability to learn. They do the same with Labradors, Golden Retrievers, Spaniels, and a few other pure breeds and learn that they too have a great capacity to learn. People then assume that cross bred puppies, from those pure breeds mentioned, will be fantastic dogs. But unfortunately that is not necessarily the case.

If you breed from good pure breeds you can expect, with a certain degree of accuracy, that the offspring will be good. But if you cross two pure breeds then it's anyone's guess as to what the outcome will be. The results therefore, can be most disappointing to those who purchase these

fluffy little cross-breeds, often seen in the pet shop windows. The sight of these puppies emotionally captures the attention of particular people to purchase one. People would do far better in purchasing puppies of pure breeds from reputable breeders. Choosing a pure breed needs utmost care. Don't choose a dog because it looks nice. Find out all about its character: its instinctive traits, training ability, its devotion to man and so on.

The lack of socialising a dog with others at an early age and conditioning it to everything else in the outside world, can also lead to temperamental problems. Some owners feel their dogs are lonely on their own, so they decide to get another for company. But they can end up with a double problem as each one copies the other doing unacceptable things like: barking, digging holes, pulling the washing off the line, etc. Dogs often copy the unwanted behaviour from others.

Dog owners who do not take steps in preventing or correcting bad behaviour in the early days will more than likely end up with a string of problems. Those dogs are usually the ones kept outside and not allowed in the house. That is such a great pity. When a dog is brought up inside the house with a family, it is more relaxed, the bond becomes greater, and there is a greater opportunity for the owner to show the dog what is acceptable and what is not. This includes the dog being praised for good behaviour and corrected for bad behaviour. Vocal communication is so important, not just single words of command, but by short sentences as well. Never dominate, intimidate, or tease a dog. Be reasonable – don't expect it to come inside and remain on its mat for the evening. Let it totally relax and move around and accept all who come into your house.

On the physical side, be careful not to over exercise your dogs with long walks. Don't keep throwing a ball. Two or three times are quite enough. Excessive exercise can cause harm to your puppies' physical development. Don't let your puppy jump into or out of your car. Pick it up and place it in the car. When getting it out, pick it up and place it gently on the ground. Although it might be very eager to jump in and out, if allowed it could be a great strain on its hind legs getting in and stress on its front legs getting out as it descends with great force.

From time to time even experienced people have been known to give the wrong word or intonation of voice, or carry out a slightly altered signal or procedure in their communication with their dog. That is enough to cause confusion in the dog's mind and then a problem is created. To prevent this happening, handle with care and be consistent. Much self discipline is required when training dogs.

In my life time I consider that I have been most fortunate in seeing dog training start off in a small way, how it improved, and how dogs have been used in so many different types of work. I have also seen how devoted and dedicated people have increased their knowledge in training dogs and giving instruction to handlers. But I have also seen how dog training has declined, which is most regrettable. There are a few obvious reasons for this. One of these, which you have heard me mention before, is because of the ever increasing wide use of food treats as a reward, whereby the dog only does it for the food, but not out of affection and respect for the handler as it should. Another reason for the decline is where the dog is not corrected for an error. Consequently, the dog gets away with it and, once again, does not respect the handler as it should. In scent work, particularly in tracking, people are underestimating a dog's great ability to use its nose naturally. When instructing handlers they should be taught to keep their eyes on their dogs, not to stare towards some trees ahead. All these new ideas and methods have been introduced in about the last two or three decades. So, let me encourage you all to seriously RE-THINK about them and return to sound proven principles. It only needs a bit of common sense and ingenuity. Let's get back on track. Good Luck.

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