

Get to Know Your Dog as Well as He Knows You: *The Benefits of Bonding*

By Mary Vanderlinden



Mary with her best friend, Duma.

Can your dog sit, stay, give a high-five, shake, rollover or any other action based on your command? If you answered “Yes” to this question then congratulations, you have developed rapport with your four-legged friend! As a trainer, I often hear “I wish my dog could do all of those things!” My answer is your dog can! Regardless of the breed, dogs can do all of the things listed above and so much more. How? The key is to build a strong bond with your dog by fostering his / her trust, respect and understanding.

It’s important to realize that your dog naturally wants to be with you. This is a construct that has lasted for more than 30,000 years when human first met canine and the symbiotic connection began. As the relationship fostered and man evolved, so did the dog! To become the faithful friend we know and love, he observed us, learned our routines and our moods. Dogs continue to watch us closely today, and in fact you can bet your dog knows more about you than you know about him! So, developing a relationship must begin with you!

trust

Dogs are smarter than we often give them credit and they do know when they are treated kindly and taken care of. This means offering a balanced diet, clean drinking water and regular veterinarian checkups is a must.

Along with these physical needs, you must attend to your dog’s mental state. Giving him / her quality time walking and exercising should become a daily routine, and such activities create a deeper friendship. Here’s a great tip: try sitting on the floor with your dog in or near his / her space and gently playing with a ball or toy. Your dog will love this intimate interaction and special attention.

respect

Dogs want a leader and that should be you. Set boundaries for your dog such as where they can sit or lay. As a leader, you must also instill what behaviors are or are not acceptable and most importantly be consistent: this will result in your dog’s respect for you as master. For example, if you don’t want Scout to jump on your bed then do not ever allow him in that space. As you set boundaries your dog will begin to understand your expectations.

understanding

Become observant of your dog and try to understand what he / she is communicating to you. For example, does your dog react differently to other canines in the neighborhood? Is he happy to see the Basset Hound but ready to attack the Husky? Investigate and see if you can

figure out what is happening - is there a height or size issue? Is the Husky taking a threatening posture? Is this a matter of territory and dominance? Investigate, analyze and take a pro-active approach so that your dog will become a well-rounded and respected citizen.

know your breed

If you have a mixed breed, or what is now termed an All-American, then know the makeup of your canine friend. Dogs are interesting because they retain their historical nature and by instinct do what they were bred to do! One of my favorite stories is when working with a young couple with a Welsh Corgi. During a training session they exclaimed, “Bentley barks a lot and he has stated to nip the back of my legs.” Indeed - Bentley is a herder and he is simply engaging in what comes natural to him. You can and should use your dog’s traits and instincts in training.

So, back to the question about training your dog to sit, stay, roll-over, etc. When embarking on the journey to train our dog, most often we think about items needed such as a leash, collar and treats. Unfortunately, many people leave out the most important element which is creating a bond through trust, respect and understanding. Here are a few last thoughts to close this article —

- (1) You must work on creating a bond with your dog each and every day.*
- (2) Building a bond takes time. Once established you will find that training sessions will greatly improve, your dog will learn more quickly, and you will reap the rewards!*

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