

## Communicating with your Dog

By Coral Atnikov

Most behavior problems with your dog are the direct result of failing communication. Dogs are not human and they don't speak English, so have you incorporated an effective communication system that lets your dog know the rules of the household? If not, then how can you expect your dog to understand and learn what behavior is expected.

When you watch a group of dogs interacting together, you will rarely see confrontation. Why? Because the dogs are communicating with each other. The problem that we run into is that when we bring dogs into our homes we somehow forget that they are NOT part of the Human race, and that they do NOT instinctively know what we expect. We have created this image of the dog being so human-like that we often attribute them with human skills, emotions and thinking patterns. As wonderful as dogs are, they are dogs and not people. If you want them to behave in a certain manner, then you need to communicate with them in way that they understand.

The first step to communicating with your dog is for you to know what you expect him to do. You can't teach your dog how to do something if you don't know exactly what that something is. Most of us have a few basic ideas, such as not peeing in the house. After that things get a little vague. When asked what they want from their dogs, some people will say that they want their dog to be well behaved, or they want them to be a good companion. That is great, but how do you teach those things to your dog. You need to be clearer on your goals. What does your dog need to do to be well behaved, or to be a good companion. Make a list of what behaviors you feel makes a well behaved dog, or a good companion, or whatever roll you have planned for your dog.

Once you have your list of behaviors you would like to see from your dog, make another list of behaviors you DON'T want to see from your dog. Beside each behavior you don't want, write down what you would like your dog to do instead. When you have completed that you will have your blueprint for what you are going to teach your dog.

Next you are going to teach your dog what your expectations are. The way to do that is to let your dog know when he is doing something right. When you reinforce something, anything, you are making it stronger. So every time you reinforce a behavior you are making that behavior stronger. You can reinforce behaviors in many different ways, food, toys, attention, praise, etc. But to be very effective, and make the behavior stronger faster, it must be something your dog really wants. The most effective reinforcement would be whatever your dog wants most at that moment.

When you see your dog doing something that you like, reinforce it. When you ask your dog to do something and he does, reinforce it. If you see your dog doing something that you don't like, redirect him to doing something that you DO like, and reinforce that behavior.

When you are clear and consistent in what you want, you are communicating to your dog in a way that he can understand. When he understands what the rules are, you will have a much easier time teaching your dog what is acceptable behavior and what is not.

