

Pat's "NO FREE LUNCH" Program for Problem Dogs

This program is intended for any dog that has an "Attitude". It is just as important for a fearful dog as it is for a bully type. Either type of dog will benefit from learning that YOU will make decisions for him or her.

If your dog's attitude has undergone a sudden change, please get a complete checkup from your veterinarian before starting this program. Sometimes there is a physical reason for behavior.

1. An ounce of prevention goes a long way. While you are working on getting your dog's attitude under control, use management to prevent confrontation. See my article on management. For instance, if your dog steals and guards Kleenex, keep them in a cupboard, and keep the wastebasket behind closed doors. If your dog steals food from the counter, put all food away. If your dog guards rawhides, don't give him any. You get the idea.
2. You must train your dog to understand at least one or two words. (Hand signals are great too – dogs learn these faster than spoken words.) Sit, at the minimum. Down is also good. (If your dog knows any tricks, such as "Shake", this can be used also.) Find an instructor who can help you to train your dog without harsh corrections, so you don't get into a struggle with the dog. Remember, your dog will not truly "understand" a word or signal until you have trained it in many different locations.
3. Control the food. Because food is such a highly valued thing, your dog must earn all food from you, including treats, by responding to some cue from a family member. For instance, ask the dog to "Sit" before putting his dinner dish down. If he obeys, dinner is served. If he does not sit, do not ask again – take the dish away until next mealtime.
4. Petting is a reward for most dogs, so take control, don't hand it out for free – especially if he "demands" it. If your dog approaches you for petting, first ask him to Sit or Down. If he does, pet and praise him for 10 or 20 seconds, then stop. If he doesn't want to do anything for you, walk away.
5. Toys and games. For now, keep all toys put away, and bring them out when YOU decide to play. All toys are yours; they do not belong to the dog. When your dog is in a playful mood, ask him to Sit or Down, then toss the toy. You also decide when the game is over – say "Enough", and walk away.
6. Sleeping areas are very significant to dogs. Lots of dogs sleep on the owner's bed with no problems. However, if your dog 'has an attitude', try this test: while he is on the bed, ask him to get off, or try to move him off. If the dog growls or glares at you, you have a big problem. Change his sleeping area by using a crate or putting him in another room. Also, if your dog has a favorite daytime resting place, sometimes go sit there yourself. Don't let your dog claim territory.
7. Access to high places can make a dog feel more important. Remove your dog from furniture until you get things under control. Do not grab for the collar -- use a 'house-line' for control. This is just a ten foot long piece of light rope attached to the collar,

and let drag. Please supervise whenever the dog wears the house line. You can also block his access to favorite places by placing upside down chairs on that spot.

8. Never chase the dog. If he steals to get attention, use the house line if necessary to get him out from under furniture. See #1, prevention.
9. Increase the amount of hard exercise and mental stimulation the dog gets. See my article "Exercise Your Dog".

It may take a couple of months before you see a lot of improvement with this program, so stick with it. Even if you aren't able to implement all of the changes, do as many as you can. If you are hesitant about any of these points, please find an experienced *positive* trainer or behaviorist to help you. Harsh punishment will only make things worse.

Remember, the lead dog (or person) controls all resources and interactions with the pack. Your dog will understand and respect you more as you gain control – and yes he or she will still love you just as much – maybe even more!

Pat Scott
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