



PROD

Promoting Responsible Ownership of Dogs

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Don't Let Your Dog Run Your Household

A Message from PROD's Founder

Cleo Sterling

"I believe leadership and supervision are key in heading your dog in the right direction.....we can all help our dogs to be successful so that they become life-long buddies."

--- *Cleo Sterling*

It's true that many in this country are substituting the need for children, or a mate with the companionship of an animal. Now, I understand the need for companionship, but dogs do belong to a different species and speak their own language. One is only asking for trouble when they consider their canine to be on equal footing.

When it comes to training I am not a natural born leader and consequently, living in a multi-dog household has presented its problems. I was typical of owners who were overindulgent, inconsistent, and reactive, where the dog dictated the agenda, but fortunately we old dogs can learn new tricks. And if one wants a well mannered, well behaved canine it takes know-how, time, and commitment.

We all know that dogs need leadership and structure, are routine oriented, and feel most secure when given clear boundaries. After making many mistakes myself, through the experience of fostering multiple dogs over the years, let me share with you just some of the basic skills I have learned from several dog professionals that make for a good canine companion.

Some Basic Training Suggestions

Your goal, from the minute your new dog steps into your household, is to teach him or her to respect you and your belongings. Leadership is key.

While you will need to continue to train your dog and reinforce her behaviors throughout her life, the first three months are the most important months for training to occur.

If you, or someone else in your household, cannot work with your new dog during that time, consider delaying your adoption until a later date.

■ Spend time with your dog to observe his behaviors

- Your goal is to determine if there are any undesirable behaviors that will need to be corrected or redirected.
- The more time you spend, the more you will be able to observe and learn.
- Observations are especially important when it comes to older dogs who are strays, who may have developed bad habits over the years.
- Keep in mind that a dog may not show her true tendencies until weeks later, when she's feeling more secure.

■ Be firm, clear, direct, and gentle when giving guidance.

- Most importantly come from a place of calmness, not irritation, so the dog learns to trust you as his leader.

■ Don't give a command unless you are able to help the dog follow through.

- Allowing the dog to ignore you will undermine your authority.

■ Help your dog be successful.

- If the dog is young, help her be successful by removing all valuables and make sure she has plenty of her own toys scattered about.
- Be sure to give your dog enough mental stimulation and physical exercise to keep him satisfied and out of trouble.

■ Whenever possible make your dog work for what he wants.

- For instance, if he wants to go outside or for you to play with him, ask him to make eye contact with you so he knows he's working for what he wants.
- Making a dog work for what he wants builds his trust in you as the leader.

■ If you can manage it, don't let your dog make his own decisions.

- Be there to supervise his behavior at all times. It's much easier to prevent certain behaviors from becoming a habit than correcting established unacceptable tendencies.
- When you're not able to be present, leave him in a small confined area or crate.

- Show him what you expect from him.
- **Correct inappropriate behavior immediately.**
 - Remember that behavior reinforces behavior. So whatever your dog is allowed to do, that habit will continue to be reinforced whenever he does it ... like fence running or nuisance barking, for example.
 - Remember as well, that some behaviors lead to other behaviors. Some dogs, for instance, that are allowed to kill wildlife, go on to kill domesticated animals.
 - Be one step ahead of your dog. Learn to anticipate her actions so you can prevent undesirable behaviors.
- **Use the “go to your spot” (or bed) command.**
 - This is one of the best things you can do to teach your dog who’s boss.
 - It’s also a great way for your dog to be welcomed anywhere, because she will always be under control.
- **Start to socialize your dog with other dogs at an early age.**
 - Try and get your dog around well socialized, good natured canines, and be there to supervise so you can correct inappropriate behaviors.
 - Remember that young dogs soak up everything like a sponge, so they may pick up behaviors they see modeled by older dogs.
 - It’s safest never to leave your young dog unsupervised with other dogs.
 - Keep in mind that because canines file away everything that happens to them for future reference, a bad experience may result in fearful behavior that will be difficult to overcome.
- **Get off on the right foot and sign up for an obedience training class with a local dog professional.**