

DOGS NEED A “JOB”...**IDLE “PAWS” ARE A DOG’S WORKSHOP!**

All dogs need a job that provides appropriate releases for their mental and physical energies. Even before domestication, dogs “worked to survive”. They formed stable packs for survival. This meant the pack members worked to define, protect, and retain their territory. Additionally, pack members worked together to provide resources that allowed their “pack” to survive. After many years, dog and man came together to serve each other. Archeology and paleontology has allowed us to follow the work and responsibilities dogs contributed to the development and evolution of man/dog relationships.

When man recognized the significance of certain canine traits and characteristics, man began selectively breeding to enhance, develop, propagate, and take advantage of the most valuable of these traits and characteristics. Through the subsequent years, dogs truly came to “serve” man. I believe there is strong evidence that the dogs played a key role in the survival of man and the development of communities and societies throughout the ages. While this is an extremely simplistic representation of early human/dog relationships, I do think it reflects how integral “having a job” has been to the propagation of the canine species.

Consequently, I think we can say that the dogs have an innate and instinctual NEED to work, to have a job. Even today, all around the world there are dogs who still work for their keep. Some dogs tend their flock without the supervision of their masters. Some dogs protect property, livestock, or crops for their masters. Some dogs hunt with their masters to provide food for the family. Some dogs serve mankind as a whole through their work as police, military, search and rescue, arson, drug, cadaver, or explosives dogs. Some dogs work to provide self sufficiency to their masters who have a variety of physical limitations. Some dogs alert their masters to imminent and specific physical problems. Some dogs work to provide emotional therapy for people of all ages and in all different circumstances. Some dogs entertain us on television and in the movies.

The scope and depth of the canine work force that is “in service” to man around the world is truly endless. There is one job that ALL dogs are eminently qualified for and this area also has the largest number of canine workers. Our dogs love us unconditionally as members of our families. I think this is arguably one of the most important ways that dogs serve man.

However, if you understand that the dogs innately and instinctually NEED a job, you will recognize how important it is for you to provide your dog with specific job responsibilities. Our dogs are mentally, physically, and emotionally healthier and happier when they fulfill a “sense of purpose”. Even your couch potato will benefit from having defined jobs in your home. We recognize this need for people in our lives and we need to come to that same realization with our dogs.

Having job responsibilities provide mental stimulation, emotional stability, and better physical health for our dogs. Additionally, channeling their mental, emotional, and physical energies into an activity we select and/or design for them, can prevent the dogs from devising their own. More times than not, the jobs our dogs come up with for themselves is not to our liking! Canine jobs in our home can be as simplistic or complex as is feasible for an individual dog. You will be amazed at the difference you will see in your dog when they have “purpose” beyond just living with you.

The more simplistic end of the job scale can include having your dog “sit” for food, treats, to go outside, to be petted, to be allowed on your lap, your chair, the bed, or couch. Teaching the “down” behavior is also valuable in these scenarios. This may not seem like “a job”, but for the dog it is because it requires they do something you ask of them. Having your dog sit or down in various situations has many benefits, including accommodating your alpha communication. Moreover, something as simple as requiring a sit or down for certain situations provides your dog with the foundation of pack rules and structure which all dogs need and want in their pack. In dog speak, your dog is “earning” their keep in the pack.

If you have a precocious dog who seems to always find new and inventive ways to get into trouble or engage in a behavior you do not want, give them a job! This channels their energies and precociousness into productive and purposeful behaviors. Dogs who have certain anxieties and/or confidence issues will become more relaxed and gain confidence as the pack rules and their role in the pack becomes more defined. If your dog seems to have a super short attention span, this can be due to not having the structure they need to help them learn how to focus. Do keep in mind that all pups have super short attention spans. Giving them a job like “learning” different behaviors will develop their thought processes and this will directly affect their ability to focus as adults. Also, a dog’s attention span and focus will wane IF you are boring or if their job does not “pay off”.

ALL DOGS WANT TO PLEASE THEIR PACK LEADER!! Use this to your advantage by creating a job for your dog that allows them the opportunity to “please” you. Be creative and make sure your dog knows when they DO please you. Their paycheck can be treats, their favorite toy, praise, petting, or some other emotional reward. Be sure your dog’s “pay scale” is reasonable and clearly communicates they did please you and “earned” their paycheck.

Canine jobs can be modified for the individual dog and specific situations. Most of these will have to be taught and some are behaviors that I feel should be a part of a dog’s normal daily life. Hopefully, some of these examples will spark other ideas for you and your dog(s). Be creative and remember that the basic concept is to provide structure and purpose for your dog within his “pack”.

Observe your dog for behaviors or activities that they do naturally or have developed on their own, and enjoy. Use those as a foundation to build on when designing a job for your dog. Some jobs should be a part of your daily routine as you interact with your dog. Other jobs will need to be “set up” by you.

[NOTE: When designing jobs for your dog, DO NOT select behaviors that in any way relate to a behavior your dog has an issue with or that would be unacceptable in other situations. For example, if your dog has a propensity for shoes, socks, or clothing you would not want their job to involve picking up those items in their mouth. If your dog periodically shreds paper, do not have them fetch the paper or help you bring in the mail.]

Keep in mind that “jobs, responsibilities” for the dogs can vary from the seemingly inconsequential or mundane to the more complex which can often truly “serve” us. Regardless of which end of this spectrum the job(s) you assign your dog falls, the job is valuable and viable to them by providing a “sense of purpose”. This is important to the dogs and enriches the quality of their lives.

EXAMPLES OF DOG JOBS

** Having to sit or down in various situations. Once your dog is performing this most simplistic of jobs, you can be creative and modify their job requirements. Some dogs can be taught to “sit up” or to turn in a circle before they sit. You could teach your dog to rollover from the down position.

** Bring the leash to you for their walk.

** Teach your dog to unload the clothes dryer or load the washing machine.

** Carry a small bag or box for you when you take out the trash.

** Fetch the newspaper for you (on leash).

** Go with you to get the mail and carry back an item that will not be harmed by a wet mouth. You may want to take a card or something with you in case there is no mail or none that can be carried by a wet mouth.

** Carry in a small bag or box from the car. You may want to keep a “spare” in the car so they always have something to carry for you.

** When folding laundry, have your dog hand you items to be folded.

** When putting clothes away, have your dog carry one item for you.

** Have your dog “open or close” cabinet doors for you.

** Have your dog pick up and place their toys in a toy box or basket.

** When playing ball with your dog, have them place the ball in your hand. You can require this to have the ball tossed again and/or to end the play session.

** When going for a walk or jog, have your dog sit or down before exiting the door, re-entering the house, at all curbs, and greeting other people.

** When giving treats, have your dog “ask” or say “please”. Beowulf would sit up and when I told him to say please, he would spring down and back up with his front paws. Treasure and Rocket both lightly tap my hand with their nose. Ryan and Beau would lightly place their paw on my arm or paw the air.

** Have your dog shake hands or “give you five” for their treats or whatever you want them to ask for or to say “please” or really for any number of other situations.

** Have your dog “wait” before exiting a door or their crate. Have your dog go to their crate or a special place on command.

** Have your dog hand you things you drop.

** When you check the doors at night and turn off lights around the house. Have your dog accompany you as you go through your “securing the house” ritual. Beowulf would go with me and stand up on each door as I checked the locks. If I didn’t check one of the doors, because I knew it was locked, I would get to the bedroom and Beowulf would not be with me. I would find him sitting by the door I had not checked. Beowulf took all of his jobs very seriously!

If your dog loves doing something that is a nuisance, you can actually modify their behaviors to yours and the dog’s benefit. Get creative! Most dogs love to help us make the bed and to be honest sometimes we actually enjoy their antics and participate. Unfortunately, there are other times when we do not have the patience or the time to put up with their antics which prevents us from getting the bed made as quickly as possible. It is very unfair to allow, reinforce, and participate in a behavior that is acceptable sometimes and not acceptable at other times!

The solution is simple. Teach your dog to help you make the bed, but determine “how and what” you want them to do. I have my dogs carry the pillow cases and place them on the unmade bed. Then, they do a down stay while I make the bed. I use this opportunity to have some fun with the dogs while also reinforcing their down stay. I may brush the sheets over them or drop a pillow partially on them. They really like this, but stay. Once the bed is made, I call each dog up on the bed and allow them to sniff and inspect the newly made bed. Then, I call them off the bed for their treat which is their payment for helping me make the bed.

Another major situation that can be turned into a job is the vacuum cleaner. Being a good terrier, Beowulf initially believed that the vacuum should be attacked and killed. He was not upset AT the vacuum; rather he saw it as a really unusual critter that needed to be disposed of. I did not like having to put Beowulf outside or crate him every time I

vacuumed. Unfortunately, I had not desensitized him to the vacuum as a pup, so I had to undertake this task after he was adult. We worked on this for quite some time.

The final result was Beowulf helped me vacuum by being in each room with me, but not engaging the vacuum. We would always leave the kitchen for last. When I turned the vacuum off and rolled up the cord, I would tell Beowulf “okay, do your thing”. He would come over and grab the front of the vacuum and use his fiercest “critter disposing” growl for about five seconds. Then, Beowulf went to the counter and sat for his reward. It probably would not be advisable to allow all dogs to engage the vacuum as I did, even at the end. But, this should give you an idea of how you can modify behaviors into a positive and rewarding “job” for your dog.

Interestingly, after being desensitized as pups, none of my other dogs have ever shown any interest in the vacuum, dust buster, or any other like cleaning tool. This was in part because they were desensitized as pups and in part because they saw “taking care of these items” as the responsibility of the “lead dog”, Beowulf. The other dogs became so “patterned” to NOT participate in these activities that even when we lost Beowulf, Treasure never attempted to engage in this behavior. I have even invited her to do so, and still she will not. After about six months, she did begin to go with me from room to room as I vacuumed. So now, I have made it her job to be in the room when I vacuum.

I hope your insight and creativity have been sparked and that you are motivated to find, design, develop, and train your dog for a job or jobs. Once you have added this dimension to yours and your dog’s relationship, you will both reap the rewards and benefits. There is one more side benefit to this endeavor. While all dogs need plenty of mental and physical “energy releases”, there are times when they really just need to fulfill a “sense of purpose”. If they have had plenty of mental and physical stimulation and release and are still “bugging” you for “something”, you can often satisfy their need by letting them “do some job”. When you are puzzled because you have done all the things that normally satisfy your dog, and yet they are saying they need something more, get up and have them perform some little “job” and be “paid/rewarded” for their “services”. I know that may seem absurd or too simple to be the answer, but I promise that often this is the answer. Moreover, this is proof of how very important it is for the dogs to have a job, a “sense of purpose”, and to serve their master...their pack leader.

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