

# Why does my dog do that?!

Written by Sandy Dow  
from Dog Worx







# Why does my dog do that?!

Does your dog have an annoying habit you'd like to fix? Or maybe you'd just like to understand why your dog behaves in a certain way?

Once you understand some of the fundamentals of dog behaviour you'll be amazed at what your dog is trying to tell you! You'll also be able to interact with them in a way they understand, so you can develop a mutually respectful and satisfying relationship with your 'best friend'.

In this informative e-book we'll explain how your dog's bad manners can be rectified with effective communication and leadership.

Plus, if you'd like more advice about how the information contained in this e-book can help with specific behavioural issues, you can contact us to have a chat about how we can help you and your dog.

*Every dog deserves a happy life; and every good dog owner deserves a good dog!*

**H**aving a well mannered dog is different to having an obedience-trained dog – there are plenty of dogs who'll walk beautifully on lead but have no manners around home or when they're off lead! Sharing our lives with well mannered dogs comes down to us providing effective communication and leadership to them.

**In this e-book we'll cover three key concepts related to providing effective communication and leadership:**

- Why you should avoid humanising your dog.
- Why it's important to provide effective communication and leadership to your dog; and how to implement it.
- Why most behaviour problems can be resolved through effective communication and leadership.

## Avoiding Humanising Your Dog

The key to successfully communicating with your dog is by understanding a few fundamentals of how they think and relating to them in a way they understand; basically treating them 'like a dog' rather than humanising them.

To refer to dogs as 'almost human' is doing them a huge disservice! They're phenomenal creatures who should be honoured for their 'dog-ness', rather than being humanised. It's fascinating watching dogs interacting together and observing the intricacies of their canine communication.

Although humans and dogs have lived harmoniously together for over 15,000 years, we're now more than ever seeing an increasing number of dogs with behavioural issues; and humanisation is one of the primary causes. So, understanding and respecting what your

dog's true needs are, rather than falling into the common trap of thinking that what we appreciate as humans will also be what's best for your dog, will enable you to either avoid or rectify the majority of behavioural problems, as well as developing a respectful and harmonious relationship. It also makes life a lot less confusing and frustrating for both you and your dog!





“The easiest way to achieve effective leadership is by providing calm, consistent direction”

## Provide Effective Leadership

---

Despite such successful domestication, there can be no doubt that our pet dogs still possess many of the same pack instincts as the wolves they're descended from, regardless of breed. They all still possess an inherent desire to be part of a well led, successful group.

Sadly, many pet owners misunderstand this concept and believe it's unjust to provide the structure and guidance that their dogs crave; whereas we're actually doing them a great disservice by treating them as human family members and giving them equal rights and privileges in our homes.

Dogs don't understand the concept of democracy; they perceive it as a lack of credible leadership and, owing to their need for pack structure, feel compelled to step up and take charge themselves if they don't recognise an effective leader within their 'pack'.

Some dogs are comfortable with this role and adapt to it easily, whereas others really don't. They find it very stressful and become nervous or bad-tempered dogs that resort to disobedience, growling or even biting in an attempt to manage the situation.

Providing credible leadership does not mean you need to dominate your dog or treat them harshly, it just means that their social status should be below that of the humans in their pack. They need to feel loved and included, while being given clear guidelines as to what your expectations of them are.

The easiest way to achieve this is by providing calm, consistent direction to your dog and effectively conveying how you would like them to behave in every situation.

You also need to be aware that even the most stressed, nervous dog may initially resist change, but within a matter of weeks will relax and enjoy the freedom that comes from not feeling responsible for their 'pack'.



“What you focus on is what you’ll get more of”

## Provide Effective Communication

---

Dogs don't understand our spoken language, but are incredibly astute at interpreting our body language, including changes in our body chemistry which indicate our mood, stress levels and state of health, amongst a host of other things!

The only words they understand are the ones we make significant by repeatedly linking to an action, for example, 'sit', 'stay', 'come'. The rest of what we say is just meaningless babble – it's our accompanying actions and body language that convey our intended message to them.

Therefore, the best way to communicate effectively with your dog is to use positive interaction to make desired behaviour significant, while minimising the significance of undesirable behaviour. Basically, what you focus on is what you'll get more of!

For example, if you don't want your dog to toilet on your favourite rug, the worst thing you can do is point at the rug and say “Don't you dare pee on the rug”. Conversely, if you take your dog to the area where you want them to toilet, wait calmly then praise them when they go there, you'll achieve successful toilet training.

The old saying “give a dog a bad name” is so true! If you constantly reprimand your dog for bad behaviour, it becomes the best way for them to get your attention; they don't really mind that you're growling at them! So, when your dog's lying calmly or otherwise behaving well it's very important to praise them for it, rather than only acknowledging them when they're doing something annoying!

Every single interaction you have with your dog is a teaching opportunity, so try to make them all positive ones!



“Giving lots of praise when your dog is calm reinforces this desired behaviour”

## Eliminating Unwanted Behaviour

---

A very successful way of eliminating unwanted behaviour is through consistently providing effective leadership to your dog in every situation. This involves you taking control and preempting your dog's unwanted behaviour by giving them positive guidance about how you wish them to behave.

For example, if your dog greets visitors to your home by running to the door, barking like a maniac, then jumping all over them – while you run to the door behind him yelling “Buddy, stop that!” – you will not be successful in changing his behaviour!

Whereas, calmly putting Buddy on lead (ideally before your visitors even arrive) then, when they knock on the door, calmly leading him to the door and asking him to 'sit' and 'wait' while your visitors come in, then praising him, will – with consistent practise – achieve your desired result.

Giving lots of praise when your dog is calm obviously reinforces this desired behaviour. Plus, if your dog gets overly excited, you'll find practising sitting calmly at the door when there's no-one actually visiting, then giving lots of praise, is the best way to achieve success!

Through effective leadership your dog will learn appropriate manners and, over time, will look to you for direction rather than feeling compelled to unilaterally deal with situations. For dogs with insufficient leadership, they think it's their job to race out and check who's arriving to make sure it's safe to allow them to enter their 'den'.





“By providing effective leadership, your dog will relax into his role as a loved and respected, but subordinate, pack member.”

## Implementing Effective Leadership

---

Effective pack leaders control all of the pack's resources so lavishing treats, praise and social benefits (such as access to toys, beds & furniture) on your dog with “no strings attached” conveys to them that they're dominant and you're subordinate. It then becomes very confusing for them when you ask them to obey your commands, and you get frustrated when they ignore you!

The most obvious case of this is when you're at the dog park or the beach and you can't understand why your dog won't come back when you call them. If they don't have to take any notice of you at any other time, why would they suddenly do it when you're out in a highly stimulating environment with lots of excitement and distractions?!

However, by providing effective leadership, your dog will relax into his role as a loved and respected, but subordinate, pack member.

There are many kind and simple ways to demonstrate to your dog that you're an effective leader, which in turn makes your dog feel safe, confident and relaxed. The simplest way is by positively managing your interaction with your dog as well as their access to privileges, space and food.

### **Some key points are:**

- Use positive body language to convey to your dog that you're a credible and effective leader. Maintaining a confident, relaxed demeanour and using enthusiastic, positive instruction whenever possible when interacting with your dog reinforces your leadership.
- Pack leader goes first. This enables you to manage your dog's behaviour, while also sending a strong message to them that you're in control and will deal with any situation, so they don't need to. It's also a sign of respect to allow the leader to proceed through doorways first, rather than charging ahead. Teaching your dog the 'wait' command is the best way to reinforce this behaviour.
- Feed your dog after you've eaten. The pack leader eats first as this is a key indicator of dominance and leadership within the pack. It's also not advisable to leave food down all the time, but rather put your dog's food down for about 15 minutes, then take it away, even if he hasn't finished it all within that time. If you leave food down all the time, you're telling him that you're subordinate because you defer to him by not eating his food – he doesn't realise you'd rather go hungry than eat dog food!

## Implementing Effective Leadership

- Dogs should earn their treats as this reinforces that you have control over food. Plus, asking your dog to sit, drop or roll over, then giving a treat, is a fun way to build his confidence, while reinforcing positive behaviour.
- Your dog should walk on a loose lead. Again, it's respectful to walk beside or behind, rather than charging ahead. Plus, a relaxed subordinate dog is happy to trot along paying attention to their leader and be ready to take any instructions that may be given. Even young pups should be gently discouraged from pulling on the lead.
- Your dog should only be allowed on furniture or beds when invited by you! In your dog's mind, if he's allowed to rest or sleep at the same height and in the same spot as another pack member, it means he has equal status in the pack. Having said that, you can still have cuddles with your dog, but it's important that you initiate the contact and you end it – you can teach him the command 'up' to invite him up, then 'off' when it's time to get down – followed by lots of praise when he complies.
- Your dog should not jump up on people, whether it's you or visitors - it's obnoxious and disrespectful! You also need to keep in mind that talking to your dog, handling him and even growling at him to stop jumping usually just reinforces this behaviour! As we said earlier, pre-empting this behaviour by having him on lead when visitors arrive and encouraging both your dog and your visitors to greet each other calmly is the kindest way to teach nice manners in this situation. Likewise, when you arrive home, your greeting should be calming, rather than enthusiastic!
- Avoid playing games that encourage dominance. You should never chase your dog, because if you regularly chase your dog and can't catch him, it undermines your credibility as an effective leader. Chase games where your dog chases you are fun and can be an effective way of teaching him to come to you when called. Tug of war and wrestling games should also be avoided as they teach your dog that he can compete with you physically and sometimes win, which is a sure way to erode leadership status.
- Your dog should not mouth, lean on you, step on you or mount you as these are all dominance based behaviours. While these actions may not be significant to you, they certainly are to your dog; and when doing them he thinks he's conveying a clear message to you, which you should not underestimate!
- Your dog should have time away from you each day, so he maintains his sense of independence and doesn't become over bonded to you. Also, by actively managing your dog's daily routine you're again asserting positive leadership, ie. house time, yard time, crate time, rather than giving them total free reign all the time.





## “To Be Effective You Must Be Consistent”

- Consistency is the key to raising a nicely mannered dog, so it's important that everyone who has regular contact with your dog adheres to the same philosophy, so he learns what's expected of him. Inconsistent interaction is not only confusing, but will also teach your dog that it's worth attempting undesirable behaviour because he might just get away with it this time!

### Summary

---

In summary, a lot of dogs' behavioural problems are caused by a lack of effective communication and leadership from their owners.

- Dogs are pack animals that possess an inherent desire to be part of a well led, successful group and thrive in a loving, respectful environment that provides calm, credible leadership.
- Without effective leadership your dog will get stressed and confused trying to figure out who's the leader of their pack, where they fit in and what's expected of them. They get mixed signals from you if you allow them free reign most of the time, then at other times expect them to be subordinate to you, like when you want them to come when you call them at the park!
- Humanising your dog is disrespectful and also adds to their confusion over what you expect from them. Honouring their 'dog-ness' and treating them like a dog is the kindest thing you can do for them.
- Using appropriate body language and providing positive interaction will enable you to communicate with your dog in a way they understand. Making desirable behaviour significant while minimising the significance of undesirable behaviour achieves the best results. What you focus on is what

you'll get more of!

- A very successful way of eliminating unwanted behaviour is by taking control of every situation and pre-empting your dog's unwanted behaviour by giving them positive guidance about how you wish them to behave.
- The simplest way to implement effective leadership is by positively managing your interaction with your dog as well as their access to privileges, space and food.
- Consistency is the key to effective communication and leadership!
- Even the most stressed, nervous dog may initially resist change, but within a matter of weeks they'll relax and enjoy the freedom that comes from not feeling responsible for their 'pack' and you'll have a relaxed, happy dog who is a joy to share your life with.



## Conclusion

---

This method can work for every type of dog and every owner, you just need to do it! 'We are what we consistently do'

Good luck on your journey with your 'best friend'. We hope you enjoy the privilege of sharing your life with a happy dog.

