

## **Owner compliance; is it an owner problem or trainer problem? Or is it both?**

In observing many trainers over the years I have witnessed trainers that were just going through the motions, not connecting with their clients; dog or owner. But I've also observed owners that are not connecting with trainers. So who's problem is it really? I think in order to get this answer one needs to be honest with themselves and take a hard look at themselves. If I'm teaching a class and I know that one of my student doesn't have that 'hook up look', it's incumbent upon me to find out why. There are times that people are in class just to say they going to class, I'll give you that. But in my heart of hearts I do believe most people are in class to learn, perhaps they have a problem with their dog, perhaps it's their first dog. The training for a person who is a first time dog owner can be quite different than a person who has had dogs before when relating to them at a training level. I take a great deal of time trying to ferret out which type of person I'm working with at that moment and how to connect with that particular person. If for no other reason than for the sake of the dog.

I was speaking with a friend the other day who deals with the public, and she told me, "if I have somebody that I know is not going to comply with what I'm requesting, I fire them. Then she said, you have a little different situation you worry about the dogs, don't you? I told her yes, and quite often that's the reason that I don't "fire" some of my clients. There are times that I cannot wait for the session to be done, and then I look at myself and ask myself how can I make this better. Firing is a shortcut, an easy way to get out of the situation I don't like. In the long run it doesn't help. My goal is to establish long-term relationships with my owners, their dogs, and their next door neighbor's dog.

The other day I was with a private client, that was having some work done at their house and as I got up to leave one of the workers looked at me to you're Barbara De Groot aren't you, I hesitated, then said yes I was. I said how do you know me, he said do you really want to know, I tentatively said yes. He laughed and said I've been to many of your presentations, we don't have a dog but we keep thinking we're going to get one and when we do we're coming to you. I took that as a lovely compliment and actually I basked in his comment the rest of the day.

If I have a client that is using equipment or methods but I'm not particularly fond of I don't mock them nor do I make them feel less for training with it. However I do offer other solutions. Nine times out of 10 they comply. And the one person that doesn't comply, at least I try to take teach them how to use that equipment judiciously. I had a young man come into class with the cattle dog, a nice little cattle dog however, as cattle dogs can be, was a little standoffish to people. Midway through the class his dog came up to me and touched me. The owner looked at me and laughed he said he never does that. He said all of his coworkers told him put it on electronic collar and punish him when it doesn't go to people. He told me that was not what he wanted to do, I was very happy that he hadn't. His dog was now going up to people, a little shyly, but at least going up to people. The reality was he didn't really want the dog to go up to people, he worked in the trades and his dog was unsupervised for long periods of time in his vehicle and he didn't want him to be overly friendly with people. Basically he had the dog he wanted.

This is something that I try to remember, as much as people will tell me "oh I would love to have one of your dogs", I laugh and say "no you probably wouldn't". They can be quite annoying but they are the dogs that I want, and they are the dogs that do the work that I need for them to do. I couldn't live with some of client dogs because of a particular behavior and they love it. I try not

to be judgmental. However I do want to offer alternatives and make training fun for both the owner and the dog. It's the only way the job will get done.

Our shelters are filled with dogs that people didn't take the time to train, or attempted to train with the method that perhaps didn't work for them, and rather than seek out alternative methods, they chose to give the dog up. As trainers we must remember people learn differently some like to read, some like to see, some like to do. As owners you must remember if you are one of those 'show me' people, rather than the 'reading' people you need to ask the trainer to show you. We all, trainers and owners, must remember we're playing with lives here, it's not selecting a color that we're painting the kitchen. As a trainer who works closely with rescue and shelters as well as the pet dog and competition dogs, I need to fully understand what the owner wants and is willing to do. Years ago a gentleman came in to surrender his dog to the shelter, he had only adopted it a couple of months prior, I asked him why he was turning in the dog? He said because it got into the trash, I asked if you could close the door to the trash. He looked at me and said no the outside trash, I asked if it was possible for him to move the trashcan, he glared at me and said, with gritted teeth, I don't want to! My first inclination was to say something back to him, however I knew it wouldn't do the dog any good and the reality was the dog was probably better at the shelter.

So, again, I ask whose problem is it? Owner or trainer? As the old saying goes; if you're not part of the solution, perhaps you're part of the problem. Good luck with your training program and remember, training should be fun for you and your dog.