

Training My Dog

Never having had a dog until about 9 months ago, I was totally unprepared for the rigors involved in being a pet owner. What I knew about dogs was this: you feed them, you pet them, you may bathe them, and occasionally you clean up after them. And then the dog: fetches your slippers and newspaper, sits at your feet and is your friend forever. I thought: this is cool – this is *way cool*. Please believe me when I tell you that I bought the Purina pet owners dog ownership story – lock stock and leash.

Life is full of surprises, and Jake is one of them. He is a rescue dog and came to us at about age 2. (Unlike trees, there are no rings on dogs to tell us their true age.) He is primarily (but probably not exclusively) a Belgian Malinois. This is a medium sized breed (about 50 -55 lbs) that is a short-haired cousin to the German Shepherd. Jake has many fine characteristics: he is very sweet and is just wonderful around our grandchildren. He is also extremely athletic and is able to jump over our 4-foot fence from a sitting position. He also has an infinite capacity to bark, and being deep chested, emits a sound that is, to say the least, deafening. He is also a very fast runner and has a singular determination to greet every dog within his line of vision.

Now what, you may ask has this story to do with a coaching article? The answer will reveal itself, but I will tell you that my idea of owning a dog did not include building a \$4500 fence to keep him within bounds. Nor did it include having to hire a dog trainer at \$60 per hour, nor did it include my having to revisit my concept of dog ownership.

But we did build the fence; we did hire the trainer; and I did reevaluate my concept of dog ownership. There are, of course, similarities to my experience in all walks of life.

The first is that *it's important to check your perception of your current reality*. Are you seeing what's really happening? Whether in sales or management, you can't make sound decisions without accurate information. Actually being in relationship with Jake, I came to realize that my expectations of dog ownership were way off the mark.

Next, ask: *what should I do in light of a new reality?* With Jake, we had to build a fence, hire a trainer, and I had to revise my expectations and goals. I also have had to retrain myself, because the mark of a well-trained dog is a well-trained dog owner. I needed to be very clear about what training means – and I have had to be very consistent. Without consistency, Jake would not know that we really mean business when we give a command. Consistency only comes when you've got a clear vision of where you want to be and how to get there.

I've also had to *check the results* – is Jake barking less (*he is*); following commands better (*he is*); and am I a better and more disciplined owner (*I am*).

So the next time you find your reality out of line with your expectations follow these steps:

1. Are you seeing reality clearly – are your methods yielding the results you desire?
2. If the answer is no, refocus on your goal – work for greater clarity as to what is really important to you.
3. Change the patterns and systems that are needed to head yourself in the right direction.
4. Check the results. If good – keep it up; if not – review and clarify what you really want, and begin the cycle again.

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