

Help! My Dog Needs Better Manners – Leadership

Trudi Waller ~ Clever Paw's Dog Training Services

Ph. 8554 2849 or 0414 812 540

Or

Trudi is available to discuss any problems on Wednesdays and Fridays at the Goolwa Veterinary Centre, 19 Oliver St. Goolwa

Ph. 8555 1666

The principles outlined in this handout are intended as a general guide only. If your dog has shown aggressive behaviour toward you, your family or other people, you should speak with the instructor listed at the top of this handout.

Humans domesticated the dog (lets call him Deefer) and in doing so, assumed responsibility for his well-being. For Deefer to survive happily in our world we need to teach him what our rules are, otherwise he will not be able to understand our world and consequently may be very hard to live with!

The best way for us to do this is to take on a leadership/guardianship role. In this role we must prove to be trustworthy, proactive in protecting him from harm, tolerant and consistent in the reinforcement of our rules.

So what is 'Leadership'?

For harmony and survival in any social group – be it wolves, bees, or humans – the members of that group need to follow certain 'social rules'. Each group tends to have leaders who ensure that these rules are properly upheld by everyone within the group.

We as humans depend on leadership for successful harmony in the family and the community. Here in Australia for instance we tend to have family groups comprised of parent(s), children, perhaps an older relative, and pets. The parents would generally be considered to be the leaders of the family with others in the family cooperating and contributing to the overall welfare of the group. On a wider community basis and in every situation it is essential we have leaders, be it in the home or school, the local fire brigade or major corporations.

Those in a leadership position are there primarily because they display both the leadership and guardianship skills necessary to ensure survival of the group. These skills include inspiring trust, setting guidelines and limits, teaching skills, asking for and getting polite and cooperative behaviour, being consistent and acting in ways that deserve respect.

Does Deefer understand Leadership?

If we think about it, there is not much difference between raising Deefer and raising our own children, even though dogs are not children. Both need to be loved, wanted and understood and both need to be taught how to behave appropriately and respect others. For us all to live harmoniously together, Deefer, like the children, must follow simple social rules – good manners if you like. We can help him to understand our rules by providing boundaries, tolerance, clear consistent instruction and a predictable routine to his life.

Deefer determines his relationship to others in his family group in a manner not too different to us: Whoever manages the resources, is in control. In his eyes the leaders are those who control resources and therefore have the right to direct, control or inhibit his behaviour. Leadership is primarily about control of resources – resources being simply what Deefer wants or needs.

How do we implement good Leadership?

Each family will have their own requirements and it is better to use a program individually customized for your situation. Firstly, identify the resources that Deefer considers to be important in order of priority. Next, identify what you consider to be a problem. Now you will have a clearer picture of the rules that are relevant and necessary for Deefer: his needs: and what you are both willing to tolerate. Now you can put a requirement eg: ‘SIT’ (just like saying please) on everything Deefer considers to be a resource.

It is not necessary to apply every leadership principle with all dogs – some are easy going, compliant and anxious to please and do not need the degree of control necessary for some more pushy or unruly dogs. Be careful not to introduce all these principles at once – introduce them one at a time and if you strike trouble or resistance contact the instructor listed at the top of this handout.

So how can we use these resources to teach Deefer about good behaviour?

In our world we control all Deefer’s essential survival resources:

- Food
- Water
- Shelter

We also control other resources that he enjoys (life rewards)

- Exercise
- Play
- Praise
- Affection
- Interaction with other dogs
- Freedom

It makes sense then for us to demonstrate leadership and communicate effectively with Deefer in a manner he will understand – that is, by teaching him that appropriate behaviour will be of benefit in gaining access to resources he desires (eg: food, toys etc)

We can use all of these resources to reinforce good manners. Lets have a look at a few of these areas and how we can use them in making Deefer easier to live with. Remember, not all of these areas will be a problem for every family – if Deefer is already following your rules in some of these areas then you may not need to implement all of these measures.

Winning games and possession of toys or resources:

The leaders of the family group control when games start and when they finish, as well as being the owners of all the toys – Deefer only gets to borrow the leaders’ toys and the leaders share only on their terms.

So family members should initiate and end most play sessions, and should also retain possession of toys after most play sessions. This becomes an indicator to Deefer that you control his resources and that you will play only

on your terms. Ensure to begin with you win the majority of the games played, but don't win all the games, or Deefer will give up wanting to play with you!

Use play sessions to reinforce good manners: request a polite "sit" before throwing a ball, or perhaps a 'drop' and 'stay' while toys are swapped – play is a reward for good behaviour.

Where Deefer sleeps and for whom he vacates territory:

Deefer views his sleeping area as a special place. In Deefer's view, a high, comfortable place to rest, from which territory can be surveyed – such as your bed or lounge – can be the ultimate resource!

This can cause problems, particularly with children or visitors for whom Deefer may be reluctant to vacate his space. This is not to say the Deefer must never be allowed on the furniture, however you must ensure that he will always vacate it on request and will allow all family members to utilise these spaces.

Deefer should also be taught that he must move from any place in the family's territory (your household and yard) when requested to. Deefer should always yield to his family members. In the early stages of reinforcing leadership with Deefer make sure his access to high value areas such as lounges and beds is restricted until he is invited to use them.

If you have any problems getting Deefer to move on request, then ensure he doesn't gain access to your sleeping quarters, or other areas he may see as important territory, until you are able to establish your leadership more effectively. Speak with your instructor for more information about this.

Food Management

Deefer views food as a major resource – it is necessary for survival! In doggy lore the leaders of the group control access to food. So if you are in control of his food, Deefer will see you as leadership material.

Do not leave food lying around for Deefer – this means no bowls of dog biscuits left out! Deefer should be offered his food when *you* decide – he will not starve as long as he is fed regularly and given adequate time to eat

his portion before his bowl is removed. Any bones you give to Deefer should be removed once he has finished with them, not left lying around the yard.

Make it obvious to Deefer that all food is provided by you – he should not see himself as being self-sufficient. We find that this is one of the easiest leadership exercises to implement, as all you need to do is offer food at your convenience and according to your conditions (eg: Sit). Even better, break his meals into smaller portions and use these as training rewards. He'll then see you as the primary provider and you'll be reinforcing behaviours you want him to learn!

Attention and affection received from family members:

The leaders of a group give attention to other members only if attention is asked for politely. Sometimes the other group members will try to gain the leaders' attention by exhibiting what we call 'attention seeking behaviour'. Children do this by whinging, climbing onto laps, touching items they are not allowed to, etc. We have listed below some attention seeking behaviours that Deefer may display. We have also listed the usual human response in brackets – Deefer sees any of these responses as attention:

- Barking at you or visitors (*you look in his direction and chastise him*)
- Leaning on you (*you absent-mindedly pat or rub him*)
- Jumping up on you (*you either cuddle him, pick him up, or chastise*)

- Nudging his nose under your arm (*you pat him or talk to him*)
- Pulling clothes off the lone (*you chastise him and sometimes chase him*)
- Grabbing your belongings (*you yell and chase him trying to get them back*)

There are many other behaviours Deeper may try as well. So, it may look cute when Deeper comes up wagging his tail and rubbing against you, however if you always pay attention to him when he does this he will begin to demand your attention more often. If this is a problem and if you keep complying with his demands for attention he may eventually feel he should be guaranteed your attention, regardless of the situation.

This does not mean that you should deprive Deeper of attention – you can actually give him more attention – but on your terms. So, ask Deeper to sit or lie down before patting him, or wait until he settle down before talking to him. By doing this, Deeper will learn that he must be well mannered in order to gain your affection and attention.

Other Ideas:

It can be a mistake to include Deeper in every activity of the household as this can lead to Deeper becoming very dependent on you and not being able to cope without you around. As much as you want to reinforce your leadership, Deeper must still have confidence in himself and an ability to cope when on his own – just as our children must learn to do. Including Deeper in everything could also cause him to feel frustrated if he is left out of an activity and he could become pushy with his demands to be included.

The reality is that there are times when Deeper will not be able to accompany you on your trips away from the house. There are times when Deeper will not be able to join a game you are playing – perhaps when you have small children visiting and Deeper doesn't understand the rules of toddler play. Or time when you are busy with maintenance activities in which Deeper really cannot participate.

Teach Deeper that sometimes he is expected to be happy with his own company by providing 'quiet times' at irregular intervals throughout every day and deliberately leaving him out of some activities. These are good times to reinforce Deeper for relaxing in a crate or pen with a Kong, other chew toy, or a bone.

It is important to teach Deeper that not every interaction with you will be exciting. Sometimes leaders and followers can be together in the same area, without having to interact. For example, teach Deeper to lie quietly at a distance from you instead of drooling on your lap when you are sitting having cake and coffee in the courtyard. Always make your departures and home comings calm and low key so that Deeper doesn't feel the need to become anxious when you leave, or over excited when you arrive.

Important Training Tips to Make Life Easier:

- Focus on teaching Deeper what you do want – not complaining about what you don't want. He cannot be expected to understand what is expected of him if you do teach him.
- Deal with the 'intent' whenever possible. Don't wait for the actual action ie: if you think Deeper is going to chase something, refocus him back onto you before he commits to that action.
- Set rules that are absolute – no matter what. Be consistent.
- Practise pro-active intervention – Plan ahead to avoid problems.. If you are, leaving Deeper home alone, give him something to do. Give him a Kong filled with food, a frozen iceblock with treats in it, a bone, scatter some dry food over the lawn for him to find etc to keep him entertained and out of trouble.

- Set Deefer up for success – manage situations/environments so he cannot make a mistake when he can't be supervised. Don't expect him to know not to pull clothes off the line – make sure he does not have access to the clothesline unless supervised.
- Whenever Deefer is with you, you are training whether you are aware of it or not. Be sure you train what you want – not what you don't want.
- If Deefer does not respond to you when asking for the polite behaviour, simply quietly and calmly remove the resources he desires.

Important management principles:

- Decide on your house rules/management in advance – every household will have different requirements for Deefer to comply with. It is important that these things are identified and agreed on at the outset of your leadership program.
- Identify what is, or is not, acceptable behaviour – eg: getting up on the couch, sleeping in the bedroom, pinching food from the table, coming inside etc.
- Identify and be tolerant of the small things that will not be an issue to the household eg: sleeping on the mat in front of the fire, getting excited when you pick up the car keys.
- Be decisive and pro-active on the big issues – those that affect Deefer's welfare (running out on the road), the family (food guarding, playing roughly) and the wider community (roaming, barking, soiling footpaths, local parks)
- Ensure all members of the family are clear on the above and equally committed to reinforcing these new rules – without consistent guidelines from the whole household, inappropriate behaviours will continue or possibly become worse and Deefer may start to set his own rules.
- Be absolutely consistent in enforcing these rules – consistency is the single kindest thing you can do for Deefer. Inconsistency leads to confusion, frustration, loss of respect, and finally rebellion.
- Set boundaries and limits to behaviour and territory if appropriate eg: Deefer not allowed in kitchen while preparing meals, must lie on his mat in the lounge, sleep in his designated place not the bedrooms etc. Deefer, just like children, derives much security and confidence from knowing these consistent boundaries and limits.
- Limit access to only certain parts of the house. This gives Deefer a sense of boundaries and restraint – it also gives the family opportunities to reinforce rules and good behaviour.
- Don't allow Deefer to set his own boundaries – think carefully about what boundaries you wish to set beforehand and take steps to ensure he complies with these rules.
- Control access to desired objects – sometimes Deefer will use backs, toys etc to demand attention/interaction. If this is a problem put them away and only make them available when you choose to play/interact.
- Put conditions (eg: sit) on access to desired environments (local park, beach, back yard etc) and activities (going for a walk, playing with another dog).
- Control is simply the manipulation of something of importance to Deefer – a desired object, activity or environment. **If you control this – you control Deefer.**
- **Always reward** in some way desired behaviour and do not reward in any way, even inadvertently, undesirable or inappropriate behaviour.

Ensuring that the above areas are under control will help you to establish your leadership and help Deefer to understand his relationship with the members of his family. Remember that to be good leaders you must be kind and consistent so that Deefer will trust in your leadership. You do not need a large stick to get your point across!