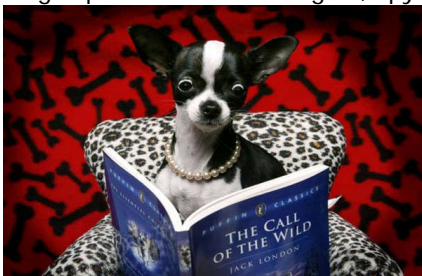


What's Rover Learning Today?



Dogs spend time watching us, spying on us, and learning from us, even when we aren't consciously teaching them. We are creatures of habit so we have routines that we follow. Rover learns these routines, usually very quickly. Dogs will respond to the sequence of events and they will also use the sequence of events to try and shape our behavior. I get up and take Rover outside to relieve himself. I get the newspaper and sit and read the headlines for a few minutes while he does his business. He's watched what I do and when I fold the paper he hears it and knows I'm going back in so he comes back to where I am.



When I put on a certain pair of sneakers there's a very good chance I'm taking a walk. Rover goes over to where his leash is kept and sits and waits for me.

When I close the curtains over the sliders to the pool, I'm getting ready for bed. Rover goes into his crate.

I've never consciously taught Rover any of those things. He's watched me and learned my routines. Sometimes, we teach Rover things we don't want to teach him. If I take Rover outside with me and I dig in the garden, pulling weeds and digging holes for plants. What do you suppose I'm teaching Rover?

If I stop what I'm doing and immediately get up every time Rover indicates that he might have to go out what am I teaching him?

As I said Rover sometimes will try and shape what we do. He'll do this by trying to turn around the situations. Sometimes he wants to stay out longer in the morning so he'll lay down until I fold the paper then he'll get up and go to do his business.

I don't know if I've mentioned that Rover loves to swim. He certainly knows that if I put on a bathing suit most likely we're going swimming. He has, on occasion, brought me my suit from the rack in the bathroom. He's also brought me a towel. He's associated these things with one of his favorite activities. He's telling me that he'd really like it if we went swimming.

He also loves to find the baby, a stuffed toy. Usually we start with Rover sitting and staying in the office while I hide the baby for him to find. He has a few times, brought the baby into the office, dropped it in my lap and then gone and sat facing the wall, which is what we have him do when we play.

What's Rover Learning Today?

These are certainly cute and adorable behaviors and they make me laugh and smile when he does them, but I don't want there to be any confusion in his mind as to who is in charge. If I do what he wants to do when he's asking or telling me to then who's in charge?

Who is responding to who is important to dogs. It's part of how they figure out the relationship. They don't get mad when you don't respond, unless they've been the one calling the shots. If that's the case then we are like disobedient children and Rover may get upset.

Most dogs don't want to be in charge. They are born followers not leaders. They don't want to be in charge and are happiest when we are, but, they will test us to make sure we know the game. They know someone needs to be the leader and if it's not us, it will be them. The easiest way for them to test us is by asking us to do things we like to do. How we respond can make a big difference.

What have you taught your Rover inadvertently? What's he learning today? When you recognize his and your patterns of behavior and use those to teach him you'll be on your way to a happy dog and we all know the rest. . .

Happy Dogs = Happy Families

Jeff Drier, Master Dog Behavioral Therapist and Trainer

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