

DOG STAR DAILY

Dialogue With Omaha Beagle

Ian Dunbar PhD, MRCVS

ID: Why do dogs misbehave?

OB: Who's to say we misbehave. We dogs hold that our behavior is quite exemplary.

ID: Okay. We, the people, think dogs misbehave. Let's be a little more precise then and ask; why do dogs chase, chew, dig, snarl, snap, bark and bite?

OB: Largely because we're dogs, I suppose. Surely you'd be a mite surprised if we flew, did crosswords, kept bones in the fridge, mooed, miaowed, and urged lawyers to sue our adversaries?

ID: Okay, okay! Granted, all dogs' activities are quite normal and necessary ingredients of the natural canine behavior repertoire. So, it's not so much that the behaviors are abnormal in themselves but rather the behaviors are simply inappropriate in the domestic setting.

OB: Well, yes and no – I guess it depends on your perspective. We dogs do not necessarily consider our behavior inappropriate even. On the contrary, a Yorkie friend of mine considers deep-pile carpet the cutting edge in domestic toilets — quite the most perfect place to pee in the entire household. You don't get your feet wet when you pee on carpets. And old Jack Russell willingly admits that a freshly tilled annual border offers ideal terra softa for excavations (considering the delicate nature of his paws, softened from years of domestic living).

ID: So, correct me if I'm wrong. What you're saying is that dog behaviors are perfectly normal and natural...

OB: And necessary!

ID: ...and necessary in the wild...

OB: And in the domestic setting!

ID: ...and in the domestic setting.

OB: And so the onus lies with the owner to provide and indicate mutually acceptable and appropriate outlets for our necessary doggy activities, otherwise...

ID: "Otherwise?"

OB: ...otherwise we are forced to improvise in our quest for occupational therapy to pass the time of day.

ID: And no doubt you'll get it wrong. Right?

OB: Right! And then we get punished for breaking rules that we didn't even know existed.

ID: That's not fair.

OB: Well, it hardly makes us happy.

(As a breed, Malamutes are renowned for their biting, litotic sarcasm.)

ID: Hmmmm! Have you ever tried explaining to your owners that you are unaware of any wrongdoing?
OB: Sure – Every time they come home.
ID: And what happens?
OB: They punish us when we run to greet them at the door.
ID: Perhaps they don't like the exuberant goosing, pawing, licking and jumping-up. Why don't you sit...
OB: That's a good idea! Never thought of that... But they loved all the attention and physical affection when we were puppies. I guess our only crime is that we grew.
ID: What I meant to say was, why don't you sit down and talk it out with your owners?
OB: Oh, they never listen. Whenever we sit, they just say "Heel, Sit, Heel, Sit..," and after going round in squares, we come back to where we started. It all seems so pointless.
ID: Have you tried pleading with your owners?
OB: All the time. But it's always worse if we act obsequiously. Then they assume we misbehaved on purpose and punish us all the more severely.
ID: Don't you ever get angry?
OB: If we get angry, they kill us.
ID: That's terrible! What can I possibly do to help the plight of pet dogs?
OB: Well for starters, you might consider publishing a Puppy Training Manual for People.
ID: Consider it done!

This dialogue between Dr. Ian Dunbar and his Alaskan Malamute puppy, Omaha Beagle, prompted Dr. Dunbar to write the book *How To Teach A New Dogs Old Tricks*. (James & Kenneth Publishers, 1991 & 1996.) First published in 1982, as *Dialogue Between The Doctor & The Dog*, the dialogue was based on the Malamute's musings of other dogs' troubled lives with their owners. Omaha's musings bore no reflection to his wonderful life with his owner — The Doctor.

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