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Setting Pack Dominance

Books and books and books and videos and TV programs and seminars and classes have been devoted to this. Why don't we listen? We just don't understand one basic truth:

We are humans but dogs are canines.

We anthropomorphize our dogs all the time (think they are humans). We dress them in cute clothes because we like it, not them. We attribute their actions to human behavior. We think they follow Maslow's hierarchy the same way we do.

Maslow says humans have certain needs which need to be fulfilled in a certain order, lower order first. The first need to satisfy is physiological, the next safety and security, love/belonging, self esteem, self actualization (personal development). Dogs have a different and more simple hierarchy.

1. First they need discipline/obedience and pack order determination
2. Second they need food and shelter
3. Affection (but not kissing and hugging type—we need that)

Dogs need discipline and pack order first, even before food!! Figure in the wild pack order determines when you eat. Not knowing this can have severe consequences. It is cruel and irresponsible to not train your dog, to not set clear pack order with YOU at the top. They will be anxious, and exhibit aberrant behavior if you don't.

As for affection, just being with you is affection for them. Sure they love a good scratch. But they don't understand a kiss. You may, but they really don't. They won't understand your baby talk, although the tone can be soothing. It can also make your pet overly excited. Just to be with you, to serve you, to get a walk, is satisfying to them.

Not setting pack dominance is probably the issue which leads to most unwanted behavior and 90% of all problems. People just think it is cruel to discipline a dog with a leash correction, when it is cruel not to let them know what their boundaries are.

Some simple starter recommendations for setting pack order:

1. When feeding them, always have them sit calmly before getting to eat. No nudging you and jumping on you to dominant the food.
2. Make them work for it. Train prior to meals.
3. You leave the room/door always before the dog. Human first.

4. When you ask them to do something, ALWAYS follow through.
5. When you walk, they walk either at your left side or behind, but never in front of you. Walking is a superb time for pack order and obedience training.
6. Always correct jumping up.
7. No excessive licking allowed.
8. They should not sleep in your bed with you.
9. Family eats first.
10. Train every single shepherd, pet or competition, in obedience.

We are enthusiastic supporters of getting an obedience title on every shepherd you own. If someone is not willing to put in the time to train their shepherd, maybe they shouldn't own one, or any dog for that matter.

***German Shepherds are amazingly intelligent animals. It is essential that they be trained.