



Grafton Dog Obedience Club Inc.

THE DOMINANCE THEORY

At one time it was fashionable to describe dogs in terms of dominance. There was a belief that all dogs were out to gain control of their owners unless those owners worked hard to establish their position as top dog. The dominance theory decreed that strong measures (usually involving punishment) were needed to keep dogs in their rightful place.

That theory put owners at risk of injury if they challenged their dog's "dominance". Nowadays there are much better and safer ways to manage our dogs and we now aim to provide leadership for our dog using a more subtle psychological approach.

So what to do if your dog is bossy, pushy and sees himself as leader of your pack?

Firstly, take control of his food. Food is a powerful influence in a dog's life as it is essential for his survival. The person who controls the food is a powerful person indeed. Instead of providing your dog with his daily meals dutifully served up when and how he likes, ask your dog to do something to EARN his food - it can be as simple as asking him to sit or come when called. Reward him with a small amount of food from your hand. Have him earn his entire day's ration of food by doing something in exchange for being fed. You have now become a powerful person in your dog's eyes and you will soon notice a more respectful attitude. At this early stage, make sure you reward your dog each and every time he does as you ask (good leaders are benign and generous).

Another subtle way of establishing your position as leader is to teach your dog to always allow you to go first. A great place to practise this is when walking through doorways. If your dog tries to charge past you to be first through the door as you open it, quickly step sideways to block him. Avoid treading on his toes or jamming his head against the doorframe - we aren't trying to punish our dog, simply teach him some basic manners (remember that we are a benign and gracious leader, worthy of respect). At first you may find yourself doing a little dance at the doorway as your dog tries first this way and then that way to get past you. Stay calm, and simply continue stepping side to side to block him. When he eventually stops to figure out what is going on, walk through the doorway yourself and allow your dog to follow. Tell him what a clever dog he is for being so polite!

With just these two simple exercises you are well on your way to establishing yourself as leader of the pack and your dog is well on his way to becoming a polite pack member.

Of course if your dog has become a tyrant and threatens you or other family members, seek the help of a professional trainer.

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