**For Our K9’s – Rules should not be the exception**

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After 15 plus years training, showing, competing with dogs and working with rescue animals, I have a huge awareness that it is very difficult to find dog owners, prospective adopters, and people who understand the important of general discipline, rules, and acceptable behavior when it comes to our canines.

I feel because of this, more and more dogs are failing in their homes, are being placed in the rescue system, and are unable to enjoy the perks of being a family member and dog because of the band aids put on them by their owners.

We live in a structured society with rules and discipline, why not our canines? There are laws and codes that we must abide by, or accept the consequence, why not our canines? There are reasons why offices have code of conduct, there are reasons why children have curfews, and restrictions on what they can or cannot eat, there are reasons why we do not break the law. All of these rules are not meant to make our lives unhappy (sometimes it may seem that way). However, it would be hard to maintain our society without them. So, why is it so difficult for the “average” dog owner to bestow the same level of discipline onto our dogs?

How can you expect someone to not desire to rob a bank, unless you explain to them the ramifications of that action? Jumping, mouthing, biting, growling, counter surfing, and barking are all common behaviors in the canine world. So, don’t expect your dog to abide by human etiquette unless you first teach the behavior to be incorrect, then implement the discipline where they are reminded that if the rules are broken, then there are consequences.

Clients like to add the “human factor” when explaining what negative behavior their dog is doing. They humanize the dog’s behavior, when in fact, it is simply a dog behavior that must be adapted to the human environment. Try to avoid rationalizing your dog’s negative behavior into emotions, but rather, dissect the problem based on actions, environment, and stimulus.

For example, when you correct or dog for jumping on Grandma, and the dog backs away from you…he is not “resenting” YOU but rather the correction and the modification of behavior. Additionally, when you come in the house and find that your dog chewed the couch and you yell and scream, the Human Factor says, the dog knew what he did wrong because he cowered away from me when I came home…In actuality, the dog knew you were upset, by your tone of voice, because past behavior from you dictated this past behavior to the dog.

If you keep this basic theory in mind, and try to be very clear on your obedience expectations of the dog, your dog will have a better understanding of what is expected of him. Rules should be initiated by all family members and followed by your Canines. When they are broken, accountability must take place.

As a follow up to this article, please watch for “Mixed Signals” – If they don’t work in relationships, then they definitely don’t work in dog training.