

Taking It To The "Mat"

by Wayne Dorman

The doorbell rings and your guests arrive for coffee. Charlie, the yellow lab and Digger, the Welsh terrier race for the door in full bark. Trying to open the door and holding the dogs back is no easy feat and Charlie manages to jump all over your guests. You're relieved to finally get the guests inside and the dogs outside.

Does this sound like a familiar scenario to you? Is this dog behavior acceptable? From my point of view, absolutely not! Even dog-loving guests draw the line at being clawed and/or licked and thrown off balance.

Our dogs must not be in control! We train owners to be in control of their dogs. As a canine behaviourist I have recently introduced a basic word concept for keeping dogs controlled in any situation. It is a short word, which combines the two familiar commands of "down" and "stay". The word is "MAT" and it actually involves a small mat of the correct size for your dog. This mat travels with you and him so that the command can be used anywhere, any time, and gives him a place to call his own at home or away. Learning the "MAT" concept is easy for both you and your pet.

Our purpose is to get your dog to respond to the command "MAT". His response is to go to his mat and lie down until you allow him to "break".

1. Find a suitable rug or mat and place it where you wish your dog to retire to on command.
2. Walk him on leash to the mat, put him in a "down" position by stepping

on the leash close to his collar and pressuring him down. Repeat this until he goes down without using the leash.

3. Praise the dog by saying "GOOD MAT" and then walk him away. Repeat the whole procedure until he goes down without prompting.

4. Now release the leash after saying "GOOD MAT" and walk away without looking at him. If he breaks from position, immediately return and repeat the whole action. Your dog will learn quickly that he is to stay on the mat.

5. NO treats are necessary. Your dog is learning polite behaviour and his reward is the praise of "GOOD MAT". When you want him to break from the mat, simply call his name; clap your hands and say "Come".

Once you feel confident that your pet will retire to the mat when he is told, ask a friend or family member to act as a guest by ringing the doorbell a few times. This will serve as practice and will reinforce your dog's lesson. Practice the MAT training in a variety of social situations. The key to best results is repetition and practice.

Those dog owners who have achieved success with MAT training tell us that it has improved their relationships with their dogs and consequently, changed their lives for the better. Have a nice dog.

Wayne Dorman is an Okanagan Dog Behaviour Specialist and the owner of Dogzies. Wayne can be reached by calling 250.762.3649 Remember - Dogzies is just a bark away!

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