

## **Charm School for Dogs: Obedience training**

I am always impressed when people can control their dogs in public. Dogs that can behave despite distractions tell me a lot about their owners. Those owners value their pet enough to put a substantial amount of time in on training. The owners also value their family life and want it to be enhanced by the pet instead of being chaotic. If your pet brings more hassle than enjoyment to your life, step back and evaluate why.

The easiest way to have a well mannered dog is to take classes with the dog. Not pottery or golf classes: Obedience classes! Before you sign up, write down the things you would like to accomplish through training. Be realistic. Getting Fido to fold your laundry might not happen. Getting Fido to not tackle visitors at the front door is reasonable. After six or so classes, read over your list again. I bet some of your wish list items are happening! Something about dog training classes helps owners and dogs get their acts together. Progress comes quickly with a good trainer.

The advantages of a class setting are many. Obedience training on your own is a bit boring. In organized classes there are other dogs and owners to entertain you. By week two, it is quite obvious who is practicing 10 minutes, twice a day on their own and who isn't!

There are other social aspects to classes, too. Some people get so hooked on training, their dogs are enrolled in all the new classes that come along! Others get a second dog so they have somebody to train. Maybe they start with puppy parties, go onto obedience, agility, Rally-O, flyball, tracking or cart pulling. Any training challenges your pet mentally and can benefit any age dog. Dogs actually get excited to attend...especially with positive training methods. Treats are a powerful tool for food-motivated dogs. For some, a squeaky toy or tennis ball is all the motivation they need. All this training leads to another benefit; most pets are tired, calm and content after class.

As a humane officer, I get the bulk of my "business" from owners and pets that do not have obedience classes under their belts or collars. Most of my bite case quarantines are pets that get away with running off, barking excessively, and jumping on people. These owners make the mistake of allowing borderline bad behavior from their pets. Letting pets bend the rules undermines the owner's authority. It is downhill from there, especially with a more dominant breed or high drive dog. Do not be discouraged if this describes your situation. Dogs live in the moment, and any dog can improve with work. Make today the day you commit to your pet and sign up for organized training classes. Most breeds of dogs live ten or more years. That is a long time to live with chaos! Train your pet and you will enjoy those years instead of getting fed up and frustrated with a badly behaved pet.

Most communities have dog training classes. Haws has classes at several skill levels. Ask dog-owning friends and neighbors if they have been to a good class. One size does not fit all, so if you find you're applying yourself in a class and not making progress, try a different class or trainer. Watch out though...you may never want to stop!