

“I Bought a Trained Dog.”

By Sandra Kruczek

Buying or adopting a “trained” dog in the hopes that all of the work is done for you is a nice idea. My experience sometimes tells a different story.

One family I worked with told just such a story. They’d never trained a dog themselves and adopted a “trained” dog from a program that places dogs in need of a home with families.

Because of necessity, the puppy was placed in a training program at four weeks of age. We know that it’s really important to have the litter stay together as much as possible until about eight weeks of age. Puppies learn a lot about dog/dog interactions and the mother helps teach them some rules of life. He was behind the curve from the start.

This puppy was eight months old when they adopted him. He had seen a limited number of people and had learned some basic cues such as sit, down and stay. These are some of the foundation behaviors we like all puppies to know. However he had missed much of the relationship building work that goes into raising a family friendly dog.

The owners thought they had the perfect puppy when they got home, but soon things began to fall apart. The pup was in a new environment with new humans. He was not getting any reinforcement for what few skills he had. He was left to his own understanding to figure out how to live in this house. After all, “he was already trained.”

Training does not stick like glue. It has to be practiced repeatedly in many different locations. It needs to be made relevant to your dog’s everyday life. This dog is now three years old. He has a lot to learn but more than that, his family has a lot to learn. Fortunately they are committed to him and are willing to embark on their journey together. It’s a life time commitment for them both.

One of the hardest phone calls I ever took at our clinic was from an angry man who wanted to know where to buy a shock collar. He said he had just purchased a very expensive trained guard dog and it was not working for him. He said the dog was being stubborn and he needed to show him whose boss. I tried to buy some time to help the man understand that the dog may not recognize his body language yet or the inflection in his voice when he gave his commands. The man was not offered the opportunity to learn how to reinforce the skills this dog was taught. The man slammed the phone down in my ear.

Both of these stories express a common misunderstanding about a dog’s learning and ability to function in a human world. I wonder how I might thrive under similar circumstances.

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