

Calistoga Community

DOGS

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animals whose natural tendency is to be a social part of a family and one who enjoys being touched by people. Even those dogs, Wilson warns, as puppies will “put their mouth on you, jump on you, push boundaries and do all the normal things that puppies do...and he is going to, so you had better find the right application...to set boundaries.” Wilson stresses the importance of both mental and physical exercise for the success of animals in human environments. He suggests walk time as a perfect marriage of obedience and play.

Wilson remembers his most challeng-

ing and aggressive dog training experience as one with a golden retriever who “was unbelievably in charge and would bite anyone.” Wilson believes this dog was “unintentionally promoted to that level because there were no boundaries ever set for him.” In order to help the owner in this situation Wilson first “trained” the owner by teaching her why the dog’s behavior had gotten to this level and what she needed to do to “change her behavioral patterns to in turn change the dog’s behavioral patterns. This has to be a smooth transition, and cannot be confrontational because {the dog} already had an aggressive default as his problem solving mechanism.” Interpretively, the dog would bite you if he didn’t like what you were doing, and this is what he had learned from a

lack of boundaries.

Wilson’s training varies from one session, typically at a client’s home in which he gives the client the skills to work with his or her dog through exercises, to multiple sessions in real-world environments, like parks or downtown, with real-world stimulation. He has known some of his clients for more than 10 years and has worked with each new puppy, which is the best time to begin training. While Wilson prefers private sessions to address each dog’s individual needs, group classes can be helpful exercises for puppies (and their owners) who need the basics to prevent the classic mistakes that everyone deals with, from potty training to biting, and the best way to handle those situations. He will be offering a group puppy

class at the Calistoga Pet Clinic in the near future.

But, he points out, “there is not always one definitive way. There is a set of variables that defines every situation, and some dogs are alpha seeking dogs who will always climb that social ladder to see how high they can get, while other dogs are born submissive and want to observe.”

When Wilson goes to people’s homes, he always begins by hearing their story and then observing the situation and making an assessment based on his observations. The dog’s behavior will tell him everything the humans are doing, he says. “Don’t try to cover it up,” says Calistoga’s dog whisperer. “The dog’s behavior always tells me what is really going on.”