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The solution to the problem behind "problem behavior"

It has been my experience from all my many years of "dog problem behavior" consulting that the reason for the problem behavior (separation anxiety, destructive or aggressive behavior) in more than 95% of all the cases was rooted in *boredom*.

I helped the dog owners solve their problems, not by doing anything at all in regards to "correcting" the unwanted behavior - I simply taught these people to teach their dogs to solve problems! Problems that are relevant for a dog to solve.

The driving needs behind all behaviors

The essence is that instead of asking, "My dog does this and that, how do I stop it?" you should ask, "My dog does this and that, what is the reason for that? What can I do to eliminate that reason, so the behavior will naturally disappear - or how can I re-direct this behavior towards something that is more acceptable to me?"

It is almost like treating a fever. You can chose to give the patient some drugs that will reduce the fever. But you could also try to find the reason for the fever (probably an infection) and then help the body eliminate that reason (giving antibiotics to fight the infection).

A dog example: Many dogs will jump up at people to greet them. Muddy paws on nice dresses are not necessarily everybody's favorite, so many dog trainers suggest that you "correct" the unwanted behavior by doing something safe, yet unpleasant to the dog, so you discourage this "problem".

Another example: When the dog is left alone, it always destroys *something*. You might never know what it is going to be next, and it really doesn't matter. You could, of course choose to just deal with the symptom and simply crate the dog when you leave it. This might save your home - but certainly not the dog's sanity...

It is important that you comprehend that there always is a reason for a behavior, and you cannot eliminate the behavior without dealing with that reason!

Why "correcting the bad behavior" cannot work

By trying to "block" or "eliminate" a behavior the dog feels a natural need for, you are doomed to create problems, both for yourself and for your dog. You cannot stop a natural behavior by "not allowing it", regardless what kind of training method you use. For every time you try and think you were successful, the dog will find another way of satisfying the need behind the behavior - and you can start over with your training...

The only way you can hope to have success is by dealing with the fundamental needs behind the obnoxious behaviors. If you can satisfy the need under circumstances you can accept, the obnoxious behaviors will disappear!

Think about it: a dog that is just fed will no have much interest in stealing food from your kitchen counter. But a dog that is starved will find a way to get a bite!

Your dog has a strong need to greet its pack members. If you want to be one of them, you better accept taking part in that greeting ceremony!

Also: all dogs are hunters, yet very few "pets" ever get a chance to hunt anything. But dogs are not born to know what they are supposed to hunt - it is all a matter of what you teach! "Hunting" can be as simple as searching for a treat that is hidden in the grass in your yard.

The simple alternative that works...

Now, understanding that the dog jumps at you because it has a strong need to greet you and wants to be polite and do a courteous greeting by making nose-nose contact with you, responding with something like pushing a knee in its chest is outright cruel! If you instead would simply squat down so your nose came within reach, then you would take away the main reason for the jumping. The dog will then quickly learn to greet you without jumping - without your having to "throw a wrench" into the fine machinery that makes your dog happy you.

The better solution to the problem with the dog chewing your furniture is to throw out 20 small treats in the yard and get the dog to search for them. This will make it work its nose for some 10-15 minutes (or more when it get more determined on its "hunting success") - and that will for most dogs be enough to make them relax for several hours!

By giving your dog a meaningful problem to solve (so it will work its brain, not only the body), you will most likely satisfy one of the biggest needs it has - and very likely the one that caused the obnoxious behavior. It takes no genius to figure out that the needs that linked to behaviors most people do not appreciate

or enjoy for their "pets", you also have extremely good odds for hitting exactly those needs that were left unsatisfied. And those would be the ones that drove the dog to the undesirable activities that annoyed you.

So, in conclusion, if you can identify (or guess) the need that causes the unwanted behavior, then you can eliminate the unwanted behavior at times when you don't want it by simply stimulating and encouraging it at other times when you can accept it!

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