



Banbury-Bedrock Bull Terriers

Raising your well-mannered companion: The Cs for SuCCess

The Choice is Yours

- Do you want your dog to sleep in your bed?
- Where will your dog be when you are eating?
- How will you want your dog to greet your guests?
- Will your dog be allowed to recline on the couch?
- How will your dog walk on the leash?
- Where will your dog relieve itself?
- Do you want your house to be your dog's playground or will your yard be the playground?
- Where will your dog sit when riding in the car?
- Do you want your dog to bark when someone rings the bell?

Manners and Boundaries

Many people if asked what they want from their adult dogs might answer "good manners". These may include greeting people without jumping, not pulling on the leash when out for a walk and coming when called. Children are taught manners and boundaries beginning at an early age. For example, teaching children to say "please" is a life skill that is socially beneficial and therefore is encouraged from a very young age. Puppies also need to learn early on, but the difference with puppies is there is much less time. Puppies develop very quickly, having a much shorter window of opportunity to learn life skills. The latest research indicates that the first year of a puppy's life is equivalent to 12-15 human years. Learning socially polite behaviors at an early age and reinforcing these behaviors throughout your dog's lifetime will enable your dog to fully participate in your family's lifestyle. It is the choices you make and the clarity and consistency used in carrying out these choices that will make learning life's do's and don'ts easy for your dog.

Choices

Life is full of choices. If the goal behavior is to have Spot be quiet and settled in his crate, then that is the behavior that should be rewarded and reinforced. On the other hand, choosing to give Spot attention or freedom for whining or barking in the crate will result in persistent whining or barking while Spot is crated. Consequently, crate behavior that will become stressful for him and annoying to the family. Choosing to ignore Spot's barking and whining he will quickly come to learn that whining and crying are not of benefit to him and that the crate is a place for him to be quiet and settled. Choosing to reward the behavior of being quiet and settled with occasional treats or freedom will reinforce your desired crate behavior.

Many times we make choices for baby puppies that work in the moment because puppies are small, cute and cuddly. The consequence of these choices can cause hardship for both family and dog in the future. Spot will not understand why it was okay for him to sleep on the couch when he was a baby, but now that Spot is bigger and shedding the family has decided it is not okay and consequently has relegated Spot to the floor. Implementing this choice now becomes more difficult, as well as frustrating for both family and Spot, because we are changing an established behavior.

Clarity and Consistency

Once a choice has been made, the next step is to implementing the decision with clarity. For instance, if you decide that Spot should ride in the back seat of your car, securing him there will underscore his understanding that this is where he rides in the car. The backseat provides a natural physical and visual boundary for your dog. There is a clear separation between what is the back seat, Spot's riding position, and what is the front seat, off limits. Puppies and dogs learn by association, therefore once Spot has made the clear association that riding in the car means being in the back seat it will easily become a learned behavior. The backseat becomes his permanent position for riding in the car.

Spot will have an easier time learning to ride in the chosen location if you are consistent about his being in that location on every ride. Consistency supports and overlaps clarity. It is important to be consistent with how you carry out all your choices. Once the choice is made that a particular room in the house is off limits to Spot, he can quickly learn not to go there. Allowing Spot in this room occasionally will make it extremely difficult for Spot to know when he is and when he is not allowed in the room. Similarly, by consistently taking Spot to the same location to do his business, he will learn that is where he should relieve himself. However, only taking Spot to the location sometimes, while also permitting him to relieve himself in other locations will lead to his making the choice about where to relieve himself. Choices are defined with clarity and consistency supports the clarity.

Chaos

If the choices you make are not clear and enforced with consistency the consequence is the less than desired fourth C; CHAOS. For example, if your family does not want Spot hanging around and begging at the table it has been decided that Spot will not be given food from the table. For the most part this rule is adhered to by everyone, but every once in a while when Spot is being particularly charming he is given a little tid bit "just this once, for being so cute". "Just this once" can quickly multiply and soon Spot will become a certified beggar. Keeping in mind that random rewards strengthen behaviors, Spot's success at getting a morsel periodically will result in his choosing to beg at the table consistently. You now have chaos. Retraining will have to occur if the decision is made not to have Spot beg at the table. This is a much more challenging endeavor than staying committed to consistency with the original choice.

What happens when the best laid plans go awry? Even when clear choices have been made and supported with appropriate management skills there are bound to be setbacks. Maybe you have decided that the dining room is off limits to Spot. You have been managing the behavior by making sure the gates are up and/or a leash is on, to prevent Spot from gaining access to the off limits room. In this way you are being clear and consistent with both your training and your management tools. Whoops! Somebody leaves the gate open with a sandwich on the table. Spot, being the opportunistic guy that he is, is quickly enjoying a picnic. Don't panic, it is not the end of the world. Go back to using your management tools and stay clear and consistent with implementing your choice.

In closing, your dog is like an unmolded piece of clay waiting to be made into a masterpiece. The tools you have to successfully create your canine companion are the choices you make and the clear, consistent manner in which you follow through.