

DOGS NEED A "JOB"

IDLE PAWS ARE A DOG'S WORKSHOP

Condensed, with permission, from an article by Deb Duncan from her Ebook and website: <http://www.thedogspeaks.com>

All dogs need a job that provides appropriate releases for their mental and physical energies. Even before domestication, dogs "worked to survive". They formed stable packs for survival. This meant the pack members worked to define, protect, and retain their territory. Additionally, pack members worked together to provide resources that allowed their "pack" to survive. After many years, dog and man came together to serve each other. Archeology and paleontology has allowed us to follow the work and responsibilities dogs contributed to the development and evolution of man/dog relationships. When man recognized the significance of certain canine traits and characteristics, man began selectively breeding to enhance, develop, propagate, and take advantage of the most valuable of these traits and characteristics. Through the subsequent years, dogs truly came to "serve" man. I believe there is strong evidence that the dogs played a key role in the survival of man and the development of communities and societies throughout the ages. While this is an extremely simplistic representation of early human/dog relationships, I do think it reflects how integral "having a job" has been to the propagation of the canine species.

I think we can say that the dogs have an innate and instinctual NEED to work, to have a job. Even today, all around the world there are dogs who still work for their keep. The scope and depth of the canine work force that is "in service" to man around the world is truly endless. There is one job that ALL dogs are eminently qualified for and this area also has the largest number of canine workers. Our dogs love us unconditionally as members of our families. I think this is arguably one of the most important ways that dogs serve man. However, if you understand that the dogs innately and instinctually NEED a job, you will recognize how important it is for you to provide your dog with specific job responsibilities. Our dogs are mentally, physically, and emotionally healthier and happier when they fulfill a "sense of purpose". Even your couch potato will benefit from having defined jobs in your home. We recognize this need for people in our lives and we need to come to that same realization with our dogs.

Having job responsibilities provide mental stimulation, emotional stability, and better physical health for our dogs. Additionally, channeling their mental, emotional, and physical energies into an activity we select and/or design for them, can prevent the dogs from devising their own. More times than not, the jobs our dogs come up with for themselves is not to our liking! Canine jobs in our home can be as simplistic or complex as is feasible for an individual dog. You will be amazed at the difference you will see in your dog when they have "purpose" beyond just living with you. The more simplistic end of the job scale can include having your dog "sit" for food, treats, to go outside, to be petted, to be allowed on your lap, your chair, the bed, or couch. Teaching the "down" behavior is also valuable in these scenarios. This may not seem like "a job", but for the dog it is because it requires they do something you ask of them. Having your dog sit or down in various situations has many benefits, including accommodating your alpha communication. Moreover, something as simple as requiring a sit or down for certain situations provides your dog with the foundation of pack rules and structure which all dogs need and want in their pack. In dog speak, your dog is "earning" their keep in the pack.

If you have a precocious dog who seems to always find new and inventive ways to get into trouble or engage in a behavior you do not want, give them a job! This channels their energies and precociousness into productive and purposeful behaviors. Dogs who have certain anxieties and/or confidence issues will become more relaxed and gain confidence as the pack rules and their role in the pack becomes more defined. If your dog seems to have a super short attention span, this can be due to not having the structure they need to help them learn how to focus. Do keep in mind that all pups have super short attention spans. Giving them a job like "learning" different behaviors will develop their thought processes and this will directly affect their ability to focus as adults. Also, a dog's attention span and focus will wane IF you are boring or if their job does not "pay off".

ALL DOGS WANT TO PLEASE THEIR PACK LEADER!! Use this to your advantage by creating a job for your dog that allows them the opportunity to "please" you. Be creative and make sure your dog knows when they DO please you. Their paycheck can be treats, their favorite toy, praise, petting, or some other emotional reward. Be sure your dog's "pay scale" is reasonable and clearly communicates they did please you and "earned" their paycheck. Canine jobs can be modified for the individual dog and specific situations. Most of these will have to be taught and some are behaviors that I feel should be a part of a dog's normal daily life. Hopefully, some of these examples will spark other ideas for you and your dog(s). Be creative and remember that the basic concept is to provide structure and purpose for your dog within his "pack". Observe your dog for behaviors or activities that they do naturally or have developed on their own, and enjoy. Use those as a foundation to build on when designing a job for your dog. Some jobs should be a part of your daily routine as you interact with your dog. Other jobs will need to be "set up" by you.

[NOTE: When designing jobs for your dog, DO NOT select behaviors that in any way relate to a behavior your dog has an issue with or that would be unacceptable in other situations. For example, if your dog has a propensity for shoes, socks, or clothing you would not want their job to involve picking up those items in their mouth. If your dog periodically shreds paper, do not have them fetch the paper or help you bring in the mail.]

Keep in mind that "jobs, responsibilities" for the dogs can vary from the seemingly inconsequential or mundane to the more complex which can often truly "serve" us. Regardless of which end of this spectrum the job(s) you assign your dog falls, the job is valuable and viable to them by providing a "sense of purpose". This is important to the dogs and enriches the quality of their lives.

EXAMPLES OF DOG JOBS

- ** Having to sit or down in various situations. Once your dog is performing this most simplistic of jobs, you can be creative and modify their job requirements. Some dogs can be taught to "sit up" or to turn in a circle before they sit. You could teach your dog to rollover from the down position.
- ** Bring the leash to you for their walk.
- ** Teach your dog to unload the clothes dryer or load the washing machine.
- ** Carry a small bag or box for you when you take out the trash.
- ** Fetch the newspaper for you (on leash).
- ** Go with you to get the mail and carry back an item that will not be harmed by a wet mouth. You may want to take a card or something with you in case there is no mail or none that can be carried by a wet mouth.
- ** Carry in a small bag or box from the car. You may want to keep a "spare" in the car so they always have something to carry for you.
- ** When folding laundry, have your dog hand you items to be folded.
- ** When putting clothes away, have your dog carry one item for you.
- ** Have your dog "open or close" cabinet doors for you.
- ** Have your dog pick up and place their toys in a toy box or basket.
- ** When playing ball with your dog, have them place the ball in your hand. You can require this to have the ball tossed again and/or to end the play session.
- ** When going for a walk or jog, have your dog sit or down before exiting the door, re-entering the house, at all curbs, and greeting other people.
- ** Have your dog shake hands or "give you five" for their treats or whatever you want them to ask for or to say "please" or really for any number of other situations.
- ** Have your dog "wait" before exiting a door or their crate. Have your dog go to their crate or a special place on command.
- ** Have your dog hand you things you drop.