WRITTEN BY DEBORAH ROSEN
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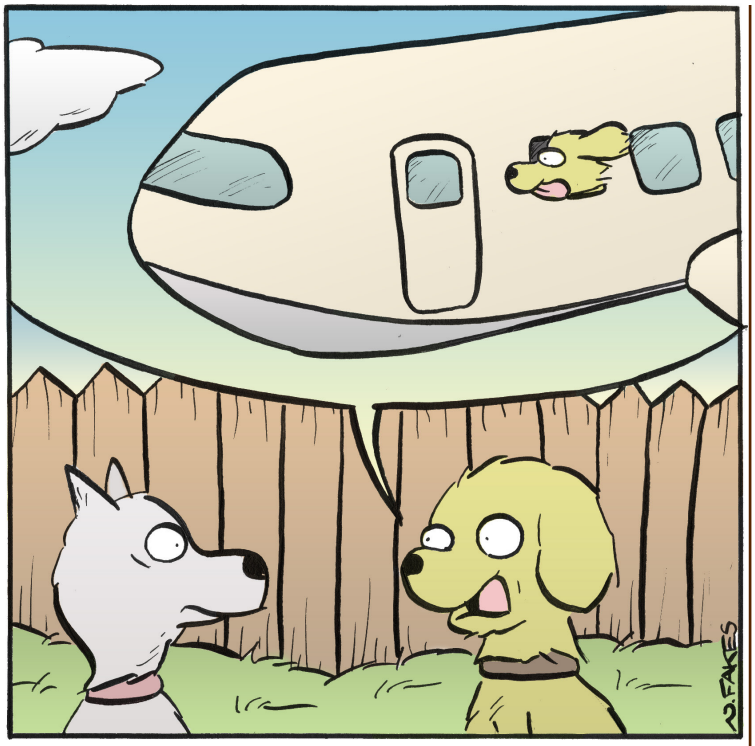

▲ *Rex talks about his life goals.*

DOGS DO JUMP

People will ask me, "What is the most common behavior problem in dogs?" It's jumping up—on people, on furniture when they are not invited, onto countertops to help themselves to whatever is there and the list goes on. Dogs are physically and behaviorally hardwired to jump—it's what they do. The greatest challenge to dog owners is how to get their four-legged friends to keep "four paws on the floor." In this article, I'll show you how.

Jumping is a behavior that is difficult to attend to simply because it is so easy to mistakenly reward dogs when they do it. By letting them touch us, by talking to them as they do it, we are (inadvertently) rewarding the behavior. And, since this is an equal opportunity behavior that occurs in all dogs, big and small, male and female and in most breeds, it must be dealt with early and intensively, so that it can be corrected, or at the very least, mitigated.

A Jumping Dog Can Be SO Embarrassing

My own dog Justice was and, at times still is, a terrible jumper. As a rescued one-year-old Lab mix, he came without training and had absolutely no impulse control. Unlike most rescue dogs, he also came with the "glass half full," meaning that he simply loved everyone he met and seemed to think his job in life was to jump up on everyone and everything. OMG! What a nightmare for a dog trainer with clients to impress. Working with my dog is still an everyday requirement for me. And it may well be for you too. That's the bad news. The good news is that is may take only a couple of minutes each day.

I'm So Happy to See You

The process of correcting or reversing chronic jumping is actually very simple. If your dog jumps as you approach, either turn around or actually walk away with a dismissive, "too bad." It is crucial to avoid reinforcing the wrong behavior by allowing the dog to touch you. By allowing the dog physical contact you are actually giving her the attention she is seeking.

If your dog jumps for attention when greeting you or someone new, it is important to give her an option to behave differently. This is called a "redirected behavior," since you replace one behavior with another more preferred one. In this case, instead of allowing the dog to jump, you ask him to "sit" in front of his subject and then make any attention he receives contingent upon the maintaining the "sit."

After enough practice you will start to see a gradual shift. Eventually, you may catch the dog beginning to jump and actually decide to sit instead. You can almost see her brain working. At this moment you know the shift in behavior is beginning to take hold. The other thing to wait and watch for is to see if the dog sits down when greeting someone without being asked to do so. If this does happen, you know the dog has started the process of being conditioned to sit almost automatically.

As a side note, the AKC has "Sitting Politely for Petting" as item #2 in its 10-point Canine Good Citizen (CGC) program. It's very high on the list because it is so important to have control of jumping dogs. It's a terrible thing when a hundred-and-something-pound dog jumps up onto and knocks down a child or a senior citizen. There is also no excuse for a small dog to jump up either. Small dogs are still capable of inflicting harm to unprepared strangers or scaring small children or adults who may be afraid of dogs. Well-behaved dogs come in all shapes and sizes!

Counter Surfing...Just Say No

Since jumping is such an instinctive behavior in dogs it is very difficult to discourage it, especially as they get older. Dogs that counter surf suffer from a deep lack of impulse control. Dogs get bored and, if not watched, they will help themselves to whatever is lying around. It's up to you to install impulse control—to help your dog understand and respect boundaries.

What I like to do is set up a training session using string cheese. The beauty of this food is that you can pull off about a one-inch strip and drape it onto the edge of the counter where the dog can see it. I place about 10 – 15 of these strips in different places around the kitchen and then pretend I'm not paying attention. As soon as the dog approaches one and before she has a chance to take it, I make a very unpleasant sound like a buzzer going off. Assuming the dog leaves the cheese alone you can then call her over and give her a different treat of at least the same value as the cheese. This must be repeated many times before the dog starts to understand that the counter or other surfaces are strictly off-limits to her.

"Time Outs" are Not Just For Kids

If this does not work, it may be time to use your crate for a very short "time out." If done correctly, time-outs for dogs are extremely helpful in achieving quick and lasting results. Owners often wonder if dogs will learn to dislike their crates if used for punishment. The simple answer is that if your dog already enjoys the crate for sleeping and hanging out, putting him in

the crate for short discipline will not change his feelings about the crate. It's equivalent to sending a child to his room for a time out. The child will not dislike his room, but will understand that the consequence for misbehaving is being kept from what he wants most—the reward of human attention.

One caveat of this "time out" technique is that it must happen immediately. If you wait even a few seconds too long, the dog will not understand why he is being crated and will not make the proper association. If this is the case, just wait for the very next opportunity. And, the time out must be no longer than two minutes in total. If left in the crate too long, the dog will forget why he was crated in the first place.

Off the Furniture!

Time outs also work very effectively when your dog chronically jumps on the furniture. In my house, dogs are not allowed on our living room furniture. There is a dog-proof sofa in our kitchen and we invite our dogs, on occasion, to join us. While it can be confusing to be allowed up sometimes and then not at other times, it is possible for dogs to learn to differentiate.

If you have a house that allows having dogs on the furniture, just be certain everyone is in agreement. It will be far more difficult if one family member lets the dogs on the big easy chair and another does not. Just know that it will be more difficult to get them off once they understand how comfy it is up there.

For natural jumpers, it's fun to make a three-ring circus out of your living room furniture. If you've never seen a dog "gone wild" jumping from couch to love seat to easy chair in a matter of seconds it can be both amusing and horrifying in the same instant. The most difficult situation is when a cute little pup is allowed onto the furniture and then grows into great big, dirty, shedding dog. Trying to change your mind and the rules at this point makes it much harder on both you and the dog.

So, the bottom line is that jumping is what dogs do. It's difficult, but by no means impossible to control. Start the moment the dog arrives and, like training any skill, help the dog to succeed with consistent positive reinforcement, timely discouragement and clear communication. And, as trainers enjoy saying, "keep four paws on the floor!"

Deborah Rosen is a certified dog trainer and behavior consultant in Western Washington. For more information visit goodcitizendog.com.

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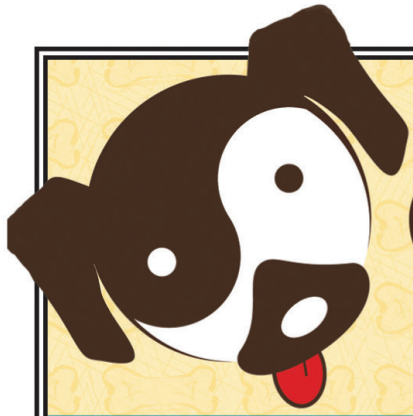

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