

# Every Dog Needs a Number

by Charlotte Schwartz

Once upon a time there were two dogs, a Cocker Spaniel and a German Shepherd Dog, who lived next door to each other. In each of the dogs' houses there also lived a man, a woman and two teenaged children. One day the dogs were talking to each other over the fence in the backyard. The German Shepherd Dog was looking very glum that day, and the Cocker Spaniel asked him what was wrong.

"Oh, I don't know. I just can't figure out my pack. One day the man lets me sleep on his bed and tells me how handsome I look lying there with my head on his pillow. The very next day, when I lie on his bed, he comes into the bedroom and screams his head off at me. The next thing I know, he grabs me and when I growl at him, he thrashes me. Yet sometimes, I growl at the woman and she just leaves me alone -- says I'm becoming mean. I'm confused," lamented the German Shepherd Dog.

"Do you ever get confused in your house?" he asked his friend.

"My goodness, no!" said the Spaniel. "What's your number anyway?"

"What do you mean what's my number?" asked the Shepherd.

"You know, your number. For example, my man is Number One, the woman is Number Two, the children are Numbers Three and Four and I'M NUMBER FIVE," explained the Spaniel, emphasizing the "number five." "Isn't that great? It's wonderful to be Number Five!" she added, puffing herself up with pride.

The German Shepherd Dog looked at his small, blonde friend and envied her such an important position in her pack. He wished he had a number and could be as proud as she. But instead, he lowered his head and mumbled ever so softly, "I don't have a number. Nobody ever gave me one. How did you get yours?"

"Oh, I've always had Number Five, ever since I came here. I hardly remember how they gave it to me, but every once in awhile, when I get too excited or noisy or whenever one of my pack thinks I'm being naughty, they remind me of my number. Then they always tell me how wonderful I am to be Number Five."

The little Spaniel lowered her sultry eyelids, wiggled her whole-bottom and, with a self-assured twitch of her stubby tail, she pranced back toward her house. As she left, she said, "I hope you get a number someday."

With that, the handsome Shepherd went over to lie in the shade of a big maple tree and think about the conversation he'd just had with his fiend next-door. He wished he could talk so he could ask his family pack for a special number, too.

This little vignette is, of course, fiction but the message it portrays is a proven fact. Pack animals such as dogs (and man) can only exist and flourish in a social group with a clearly defined hierarchy. And without the harmony, which a hierarchy creates, the species cannot hope to perpetuate. In other words, the structure of an order of dominance in any social group insures its survival.

In the example above, the Cocker Spaniel will live out her life in peace and fulfillment providing she continues to accept her number and is content with it. To her it is not important that she is Number Five: it only matters that she has a number. The only exception to this would be if she were unfortunate enough to live in a household where the humans made her Number

One. In that case, she would fail because she would be incapable of making decisions and being responsible for the welfare of a pack of humans.

The case of her friend, the German Shepherd Dog, is another matter, however. Apparently, the social structure of his household is rather loose. Sometime he's Number One in the hierarchy, sometime he's Number Five, and I bet money that there are also times when he fits somewhere in between.

The fact that he's allowed to lay on his master's bed doesn't necessarily mean he's Number One. Nor does the fact that his master removes him from the bed make him Number Five. But when he growls at his mistress and she walks away from him, he thinks he's dominant over her. That's the crux of the problem. And it creates a very dangerous situation for his entire pack.

When any individual in a social group does not clearly understand and accept a specific place in that society, it can mean trouble. And this "learning one's place" occurs in dogs as early as 12 to 16 weeks of age.

A litter of puppies, for example, begins to interact with each other by the time they are 21 days old. By three months, the puppies have developed a strong tendency to dominate each other. They bite, chew, growl, pounce and play fight. Through play fighting each puppy learns who he can dominate and who it must submit to. There is rarely bloodshed and severe injury, but there is a lot of ritualized behavior as each puppy learns to inhibit its aggressive tendencies and get along with its peers. Frequently, the largest and heaviest dog becomes the leader, Number One, and the others take up positions beneath him.

When a puppy goes to a new home, it needs to re-establish its position in the new pack. It's at this time in the puppy's life that knowledgeable owners help the puppy to make a smooth transition by showing it where it fits in the order of dominance in the new pack. In other words, it needs to be assigned a number.

Without the opportunity to interact with its own species when it is very young (before 16 weeks of age) and with man as it gets older (from 7 to 20 weeks of age), the puppy may grow up to be hyper-aggressive. It seems the puppy that's been denied the opportunity to learn about social order at an early stage finds accepting a position in any hierarchy later in life difficult if not impossible. These findings have been proven by many scientists and behaviorists over the last 40 or so years.

Finally, when a puppy enters the developmental stage of sexual maturity, he usually exhibits a resurgence of social dominance. In short, he attempts once more to climb the hierarchy ladders and dominate all those in his pack. If the owners are not aware of this behavior and the reasons for it, the dog can reach the top, or leadership level, with disastrous consequences. For example, an overindulged dog may assume a dominant role in the household. And the dog, which is confused about its position in the hierarchy -- one day he's "top dog" and the next he's "low man on the totempole" will become frustrated. Then the owners must deal with another problem, that of frustration-aggression.

However, knowledgeable dog owners are not only aware of the sexual maturity stage in the dog's life, but they know how to handle him so the dog will remain in his rightful position. Providing the dog is a normal individual and the maturity development stage proceeds without complications, the dog will remain a stable member of the social pack in which he lives. How can a person tell, short of being bitten, if a dog is acting in a submissive or dominant manner? In his book "Understanding Your Dog," Dr. Michael W. Fox presents a list of

behaviors, which indicates dominance and submission by dogs. Here are some of the most common behaviors:

### **DOMINANT BEHAVIORS**

- Stalking
- Growling, Snapping, Biting
- Baring teeth to reveal incisors and canine teeth
- Assumes "T" position with head over submissive dog's neck
- Pushing with shoulder or hip
- Walks around dog, stiff-legged, head and tail held erect
- Stands on subject's back
- Pushes dog down and stands over submissive dog

### **SUBMISSIVE BEHAVIORS**

- Lowers front part of body, tail tucked under
- Allows dominant dog to place feet on its back
- Retracts lips horizontally -- raises forepaw
- Licks face area of dominant individual
- Tail between legs, ears back, directs gaze away from dominant dog
- Rolls onto back, remains still
- Urinates, defecates
- Sits or lies down and flexes one hip to expose inguinal (groin) area

These behaviors are ways in which dogs, using their bodies, speak to each other. We call it "body language." And for dog owners to live in harmony with canines, we should become familiar with and learn to use it.

The best examples of this Dominance-Submissive sequence can be found between a dam and her puppies. Whenever a puppy behaves in a manner which is unacceptable to her (for instance, the puppy wanders away from the nest), she will go over to him, put her mouth over his head and her paw on his back. When he's down, and possibly screaming as though he were being murdered, he will eventually relax under her paw. When the puppy no longer resists, the dam will remove her paw and walk away, sometimes eliciting a period of play from him. Once an owner understands that his own body language speaks more clearly to his dog than any verbal language (dogs aren't born knowing how to understand words), then the owner can let the dog know he loves him, will assume responsibility for his welfare (dogs want a leader), and what position the dog must assume in the owner's pack (Remember, man has brought canines into his domicile -- dogs did not bring man into their dens!)

It seems only common sense, then, to use one of the behaviors from the Dominance List to communicate to the dog that his place is beneath that of all the humans in the household. Doing that will achieve two objectives. It will let the dog know who's the boss and it will give the dog a number of his own (remember the unfortunate German Shepherd Dog that didn't have a number?)

Making the dog lay down on its side with its head and hips touching the floor, is an ideal way of communicating to the dog what his position is in the pack. We call this exercise the "Dominance Down."

The easiest way to accomplish a "Dominance Down" is to get down on your knees. Have the dog stand sideways in front of you. Place both your arms over the dog's back. Now, take your two hands and reach over and through the center of the dog's body so that you can take his inside front leg in one hand and his inside back leg in the other hand.

Grasping both front and rear legs (the ones next to your body), firmly, but gently, pull the dog close to you and slide him down the front of your thighs until he comes to rest on the floor in front of you with his legs facing away from your body.

Next, take the hand that was holding his front leg and place it over his neck. The hand that was holding the rear leg now rests over his top, or outermost, hip. Slowly stroke the groin area inside the top hip and you'll feel him begin to relax. The dog may even lift his topmost leg which is a further sign of submission to you.

It is important when placing the dog on his side to manipulate him smoothly and firmly. Do not slam or throw the dog down -- you could hurt him. Do not be hesitant when you begin -- this gives the dog time to resist you. Simply grasp his legs and, in one fluid motion, lower him to the prone position in front of you. Use your upper thighs as a slide to ease the dog to the floor -- gravity will lower him down.

Now let's go back to Dr. Fox's list. This time we will study the signs of submission and look for one or more of them in your dog. He may lift his upper leg or attempt to roll on his back. He may even urinate. Whatever sign he gives you, he's saying "Ok friend. You're the boss!" Occasionally a person will own a dog, which is naturally very submissive. He may or may not be aware of this. If you do a "Dominance Down" with just such a dog, you will notice almost immediately how submissive the dog really is to you. In this case, it is usually wise and not necessary to repeat it or it may make the dog even more submissive.

The very dominant individual will most likely resist you. The more a dog resists the "Dominance Down," the more determined he is to be the boss. This is, of course, the individual who most needs this exercise because man cannot live harmoniously with a dog, which dominates him and all the other humans in a household. We simply cannot tolerate the dog running a human pack!

If the dog fights the "Dominance Down" by squirming, kicking, even screaming, you must react the same way his mother did. Growl at him. Don't yell, "No! Stop that" or "Lay down!" He won't understand and, furthermore, the panic in your voice will surely tell him he's getting the upper hand.

If you growl with a deep, emphatic voice, he'll get the message. Continue to hold him down with whatever force is necessary to show him (don't tell him!) that you mean what your body is saying.

Just as the puppy responded to his mother's "Dominance Down," your dog will eventually cease his resistance. You'll feel his whole body begin to relax under your hands. When you do, let him lay there for 20 to 30 minutes without moving and without your hands touching him. If he falls asleep, do not wake him until the time is up.

When you do, tell him, "OK, good dog!" and let him get up. Once he's on his feet celebrate with him, praise him, love him up, all the while telling him how wonderful he is. Praise so enthusiastically that he gives you some form of recognition, a lick, a paw, tail wagging. Some behavior which tells you, "I love you and I'm not mad because you made me submit to you." If you've done it correctly, the dog will not only show you signs of affection, but he'll be more attentive, even more willing and eager to be with you. And you'll have opened a door to a deeper, more meaningful relationship with your dog.

For the next week, continue to do the "Dominance Down" every day for 20 to 30 minutes. A dog that is still fighting the exercise at the end of the week should continue for an additional week or whatever time it takes to make him understand. Eventually, however, even the most obstinate individual will give in and accept your leadership through the "Dominance Down".

One thing to keep in mind when you begin this program of establishing your leadership is that you are working with an adult dog which has either been unsure of his position due to a lack of consistency on your part or one which has simply never been shown his correct position in the hierarchy, you will probably find it difficult at first. Occasionally, I've seen older dogs who have been overindulged all their lives and never came to accept a lower position in the pack.

In addition to the initial one week period of the "Dominance Down" exercise, the dog should be made to assume this position whenever his behavior is unacceptable to you. For example, if the dog barks incessantly at the arrival of guests and won't quiet down after you've admitted your friends (and he sees they're friendly people -- not uninvited strangers), you can regain control very quickly by putting him into a "Dominance Down" for a minute or two.

If there are children in the home and dinner hour becomes somewhat chaotic as the kids and dog race around the house, have the children sit quietly with a book (yes, a quiet "down" with children works wonders, too!). Next, put the dog into a "Dominance Down." Within minutes, you'll regain peace and order in the house. In other words, the "Dominance Down" simply says, "Hey, getta hold of yourself and watch your manners!"

By introducing the "Dominance Down" to any dog, particularly a puppy or a young adult dog, you'll be giving the dog the most treasured gift a dog can receive. You'll be giving him a number that both of you can live with all his life. Remember, the dog doesn't care what position he has in the pack providing it isn't Number One: it only matters that every dog needs a number.

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