

Enlisting Aid for Dogs Behaving Badly

By **Betty Liddick**

For Veterinary Practice News

Dogs' behavior problems often surface at veterinary clinics. Shy, trembling dogs Velcro themselves to owners' limbs. Aggressive ones, acting out of fear or dominance, may put up such resistance they must be muzzled.

Rather than a nuisance or threat, however, each act represents an opportunity for veterinarians, said Teoti Anderson, president of the 4,800-member Assn. of Pet Dog Trainers.

"By referring their clients to professional trainers, they help those dogs stay in their homes and help better-behaved dogs who visit their practices," Anderson said.

Veterinarians can realize three rewards for suggesting training:

- They can save the lives of animals that otherwise might be surrendered to shelters and euthanized. Behavior problems were the most frequently cited reason for relinquishment in a study sponsored by the National Council of Pet Population Study and Policy.

- They can improve the owner-dog relationship, replacing mutual frustration with delight.

- They can save income that would be lost when clients depart because they've given up a pet.

The challenge veterinarians face is knowing where to direct clients for training that suits their needs and preferences—whether to classes, DVDs and videotapes, trainers' in-home visits or a combination of these methods.

"There are many different learning styles," said Anderson, who lives in Lexington, S.C.

"Some learn better by listening, some by reading, some by watching and others by practicing. DVDs address several different learning styles, so they can be very helpful for folks who learn best by watching someone demonstrate."

Family members can watch DVDs according to their own schedule and still be consistent in training a puppy, said Linda White of Phoenix, president and founder of PuppySmarts. Her company produces DVDs and CDs on puppy training and dog behavior.

"If a family has a hectic schedule, then puppy training with DVDs gets everybody working on the same page," White said.

Trainers who come to the home can help owners with specific problems arising there, Anderson said.

"Owners will enjoy the undivided attention of an instructor. And if their dog has aggression issues, it is often not safe or practical for it to attend a group class."

In-home trainers can also correct owners as they practice with

their dogs after a session.

The truth is that it takes longer to train owners than dogs, said trainer Liam Crowe, chief operating officer of Bark Busters, an international company providing puppy classes and in-home training through franchises.

"Dogs are literally trainable in a matter of minutes," he said. "We have to train owners how to communicate in ways their dogs can understand. That includes body language and the correct

"It's about more than the trainer making money," she said. "They have to instill knowledge in the owner, so the owners can enjoy that same success."

Don't hesitate to ask about trainers' qualifications, Anderson said. If a trainer claims to be certified, find out exactly what that entailed.

When making recommendations, it's important for veterinarians to make sure trainers are up-to-date on modern, dog-friendly training methods, Anderson said.

Bark Busters Named A Top Franchise

Bark Busters, a worldwide dog training company, has been named one of the top 500 franchises in the United States by Entrepreneur. The print and online magazine bases its annual ratings on those that offer the best franchise opportunities. Bark Busters ranked 278 on this year's listing.

Entrepreneur also ranked the company No. 75 among the top 101 home-based franchises and No. 73 among 140 low-cost franchises.

The key to its growth among franchisees, said Bark Buster Chief Operating Officer Liam Crowe: "People have a passion for dogs and want to feel good about helping people."

The company, which began in Australia in 1989, today has more than 140 franchises in the U.S. and has expanded to New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan. Its therapists provide dog training in clients' homes, using humane techniques.

Bark Busters offers franchisees a training kit, a two-month online course, a three-week training session at its headquarters in Englewood, Colo., and personal mentoring.

The typical one-time dog training session lasts two to three hours at a cost of \$400 to \$500. The mitigating factor in the fee: Clients receive a written guarantee for the life of their dogs for additional training at no cost if problems re-emerge.

The company also offers veterinarians free training for their dogs or their veterinary technicians' dogs to encourage referrals and to prevent dog bites in the clinic, Crowe said.

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tone of voice. Once they learn that, it's really simple."

In some cases, dogs and owners have mismatched personalities.

"Dogs are timid, dominant, passively dominant, middle of the pack. Humans are very similar," Crowe said. "If I'm dealing with a 'soft' owner, I'll slow things down, keep it positive and give feedback."

The No. 1 behavior problem he's seen in dogs has been separation anxiety. In Australia, where the company originated, it was barking.

"We tended to have a lot of outdoor dogs there," he said. "Here, people tend to overindulge their dogs, and it causes stress in them."

"That's a lot of stress from the dog's perspective. He wants to be loved and led in the right way."

If dogs don't have a problem with aggression and owners are able to work it into their schedule, Anderson often recommends group classes. The experience is especially important for puppy socialization, she said.

White also strongly advocates socialization for puppies and, in whatever the type of training, advises veterinarians to watch trainers in action before recommending them.

Note whether they're patient. Do they take time to explain to the owner what they're doing and why?

"Veterinarians go to conferences, read journals, network with other veterinarians—the trainers they recommend should do the same in their profession."

They also should use positive methods—no prong collars, electric shocks or harsh corrections. Punitive methods are ineffective and inhumane, she said.

"It's the last thing we want to do," said Crowe at Bark Busters. "We want to reduce the maltreatment, the abandonment and the euthanasia of dogs."

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Betty Liddick is a freelance writer in Belleair Bluff, Fla.