

# An Ounce of Prevention

## *The importance of Management in Raising a Well-behaved Dog*

Actions taken every day form habits. This is as true for dogs as it is for humans. The more we practice a behavior, the more habitual it becomes. Your puppy will not grow out of the things he is doing now. Instead, he will get better at it and do it more as he matures. That is why management is a critical piece in the puzzle of training a puppy to grow into a well-behaved dog. The same is true if you have an adult dog with already formed habits. Management will prevent further practice of unwanted behaviors while helping her form new, good behaviors.

## **What Is Management?**

Management put simply is setting up the environment in a way that prevents your puppy or dog from doing anything you don't want. He cannot jump on your counter if he can't get into the kitchen. She can't use the bathroom on the carpet if she doesn't have access to the carpet. He can't jump on your guests if he can't reach them.

## **Is Management "Training"?**

Most definitely! Done well, management can set up your dog for "errorless learning". That is, instead of learning correct behavior through trial and error, usually with a lot of error and frustration, your dog learns the correct behavior because it is his only choice. Actions taken every day form habits. If the only possible actions to take are the "right" ones, then a well-managed dog will only form "right" behaviors!

Many people are resistant to Management as a dog training method, even though it is THE most effective tool to have in your toolbox. It is how professional dog trainers have such well-mannered dogs. I'll let you in on a secret – we don't spend hours and hours training our dogs. We work smarter and not harder by making the environment do the work for us!

A dog owner once contacted me for help with stopping her dog's counter surfing habit. She had previously hired another trainer who told her to block the dog's access to the kitchen when she couldn't watch him and keep the counter clear of temptations. In other words, manage the environment to make the behavior impossible. She wanted a different answer because remembering to close gates and clear the counter required too much time and effort. The other answer, though, requires much more time and effort. You can either take the time to boundary train your dog to either not enter the kitchen or not jump on the counter, or take the time to block your dog's access to them.

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The beauty of the management approach is that a dog who has been prevented from doing a behavior (counter surfing, using the bathroom on the carpet, chewing shoes, jumping on guests, etc.) during puppyhood and adolescence will not develop the habit. At maturity, management will no longer be required to stop them from these activities because they have developed appropriate habits through daily practice! Actions taken every day form habits. The dog who has daily practiced staying out of the kitchen will form the habit of not going into the kitchen. The dog who has daily practiced using the bathroom outside will form the habit of using the bathroom outside. The dog who has daily practiced chewing on their own toys will develop the habit of chewing on their own toys. The dog who has practiced greeting guests without jumping will develop the habit of greeting guests that way.

It is possible to raise a puppy with nearly zero potty accidents in the house and to lose nearly zero shoes, remotes, cushions, or food using Management. The easiest way to accomplish this is with proper crate training. A crate is the best way to not only keep your dog safe from things that might seriously injure or even kill him, like chewing electrical wires, but also keep him from practicing the wrong things in your absence. You cannot train when you are not there. A crate

trained dog or puppy will not use the bathroom on the carpet, steal things off the counter, or chew your expensive couch when you're not looking. Click [here](#) for a guide on how to crate train.

If you didn't see it happen, it's too late to train. If you come home from work and see poop on the floor, it is too late to tell your dog that it's "wrong" to poop there. Shoving your dog's nose in their poop or pee, smacking them with a newspaper, and yelling at them will cause your dog to not trust you. They have no idea that you're telling them that it's not ok to potty there. They only know that you are angry and behaving aggressively. They may start to become anxious when you leave for fear that you will come home angry and aggressive. Dogs chew when they are anxious because chewing releases serotonin and helps calm them down. The next time you come home, they have chewed a couch cushion because of their anxiety. You become angry and yell at them, maybe shake the cushion at them. They don't know that you're telling them it's not ok to chew that. They only know that you are angry and behaving aggressively, so they become more anxious and chew more things. They may think that you become irrationally angry at the sight of pee or poop and refuse to do it in front of you when you take them outside. They still have to use the bathroom, so they find a hiding place somewhere inside the house when you're not looking. Now that it's hidden, you have a harder time finding it to clean it up. You are often angry at your dog, and your dog does not trust you. It's a vicious cycle that we see far too often, and it doesn't have to be that way.

Crating is not cruel. Setting up your dog to fail and then getting angry at them for failing is cruel. So, you had a dozen dogs before who didn't need a crate, and they never chewed things or used the bathroom inside? Great! You got lucky with them. Most dogs need temporary crating until they learn better habits. We don't sit toddlers in the floor and say, "be good. See you in a couple of hours!" We put them in cribs or play pens or bouncy seats for their safety and well-being. Dogs are mentally on the same level as a 2-3 year old child, yet we often treat them as furry adult humans who "should know better".

Dogs do not chew your stuff or use the bathroom in the house to spite you any more than a toddler wets his diaper to spite you. Dogs do not have a sense of morality and right versus wrong. They don't have original sin or the ability to ask forgiveness of a higher power. They do what works, plain and simple. Make the behavior you want to see work for your dog, and you will have a well-behaved dog for a lifetime!

## **A Pound of Cure**

The saying is true, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It is so much easier to prevent a habit from forming than to break an established habit. A 24 hour "no smoking" challenge will be a lot easier for someone who has never smoked a cigarette in her life than for someone with a 2 pack a day habit. If your dog has already developed an unwanted behavior habit, it will require more effort and more management to stop it than it would have to prevent it in the first place. That is why it is so important to be proactive. Don't wait to see if your dog will chew your baseboards or use your favorite rug as a litterbox. Just don't give them the chance in the first place!

For dogs who do have bad habits, management is even more critical. Recovering addicts first spend time in a rehab facility so they do not have access to their drug of choice. This is MANAGEMENT. Management prevents the habit from being practiced while at the same time teaching new habits to replace the old ones. Counselors know it does not work to wait until the addict uses a drug and then punish them after the fact. It may stop them in the moment, but the next chance they get they will do it again. Dogs are the same way. If you knee them in the chest for jumping on you, they may stop in that moment. But, the next time they are excited to see you, they will jump on you again. It is not a permanent solution.

The permanent solution for fixing unwanted habits is to prevent the dog from practicing them while teaching better ones to replace them. Teach your dog how to greet properly instead of jumping, and practice it often so that it becomes habit. Actions taken every day form habits. The more chances your dog has to practice the new GOOD behavior, the more quickly it will become his new habit.

A good rule of thumb is this. If you would not bet \$100 that your dog will not chew something he shouldn't, use the bathroom somewhere he shouldn't, or otherwise do anything inappropriate, then he should be crated or otherwise confined. That is not only when you aren't home. You can't watch your dog while you're in the shower or cooking dinner. Make sure they get plenty of activity to offset the time in the crate, and remember that it is temporary. The less chance they have to make mistakes, the faster they will earn the freedom to be unsupervised out of the crate.

# Real-World Examples for using Management

## 1. Pulling on Leash

Dogs do what works. If pulling on leash works to get them where they want to go, they will develop a strong habit of pulling on leash. This class focuses heavily on teaching your dog to walk nice on a leash, but it takes a lot of practice. In the meantime, use management to prevent your dog from practicing the habit of pulling on leash.

- Properly fit the collar so that there are no gaps. It should fit snugly like a safety harness so that all points of pressure are evenly distributed.
- Keep your leash hand close to your body and don't hold your arm out in front of you. Holding your arm out gives your dog more control and makes it easier for him to pull you off your feet. Keeping your arm close to your body gives you more control and better leverage.
- If the leash tightens, stop walking. Don't let your dog drag you or try to walk faster.
- Hold your dog close to you when in close quarters such as vet clinic lobbies, pet stores, and class.

## 2. House Training

Most dogs will not soil their beds. Go outside with them to make sure they use the bathroom, then crate them before you leave. Note that young puppies cannot hold it all day while you are at work. They either need a chance to go outside in the middle of the day, or a suitable potty area. If coming home or having someone let them out isn't an option for you, set up a crate connected to an x-pen with a pee pad down so that your puppy can sleep in the crate and use the pee pad for a toilet.

## 3. Chewing

Crate your dog when you can't watch her with a safe chew toy. Some toys can be chewed up and swallowed and therefore are not safe to give your dog unsupervised. Kongs, especially black ones, are generally safe. However, every dog is different, and yours may be an exception. Close the door to kid's rooms so your dog cannot sneak in and steal their toys. If you see your dog thinking about grabbing your shoe, interrupt and redirect to their toys.

## 4. Jumping on People

Crate your dog when guests first arrive. Let him out after he calms down. Or, keep him on leash until he calms down, and then let him say hello.

## 5. Car Chasing

Dogs should never have an opportunity to chase a car. Fences (physical ones, not invisible ones) and leashes stop car chasing.

## 6. Door Dashing

If your dog is always trying to run out the door when it opens, crate him or put him behind a baby gate before opening the door.

Management is not a substitute for training, but it is a necessary component of it. It's not possible to let your dog practice bad habits for 9+ hours a day while you are at work and then expect to teach him good behaviors in the afternoons between making and eating dinner and other chores. **Good management makes good dogs!**

Management can fail, though. Collars come off, someone forgets to close a door, a utility worker leaves the gate open, etc. Training is the best way to keep your dog safe. The more you train, the less management you will have to do and the more freedom your dog AND you have! The cues you and your dog will learn in this class will give your dog more freedom. If a door is left open and your dog gets out, the cue "COME!" will get him safely back inside. The cue "Sit" will help her politely greet a guest. The cue "Leave It" will tell her your shoe is off limits. **Good training makes excellent dogs!**