



# The WoofGang Wag Rag



Vol. 9 No. 4

APRIL 2009

Free

## *A Question of Dominance*

As dogs and dog behavior have gained popularity in recent years, the topic of dominance has been ubiquitous in these discussions. It leads me to wonder why. Could it be that, with all the demands that we face in the rest of our lives, as employees and tax payers and upstanding citizens, we feel a bit trodden upon? And with the complexities of our other relationships, as family members and friends and lovers, maybe we'd like to attribute a simpler black-and-white characterization to our relationships with our dogs. In any case, if a dog has presumptuously promoted himself in the family structure, it seems justifiable to use retribution and punishment, settling for being our lesser selves, rather than exercising the understanding and patience of our better selves.

A great many dogs have a tendency to jump up on people during greeting. They pull on leash and rush through doors ahead of us. If given the opportunity, they'd happily gobble down their meal before we've even tucked ourselves into our seats. A dominance play? We have no problem assessing a loved one invading our personal space or pushing out the door first as rude, but

give the family member fur and sharp canines and suddenly we see more sinister motives.\*

Whatever our reasons, this wrestling that we're doing with the question of dominance is perhaps the single greatest threat to our relationships with our dogs. The things we do in the name of asserting *our* dominance mar the loving fabric we have woven together with them.



*Eddie sings for his supper*

## **The Wolf Hierarchical Model**

There has been a proliferation of reference to wolf behavior in modern dog behavior circles. The prevailing theories have been that wolves have strict, inflexible hierarchies with one alpha who controls all food sources and commands all pack movement and hunting. However, these theories are based on captive wolf packs;

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## *About the Trainer*

Dog trainer **Laura Garber**, CPDT, is a professional member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) and is certified by the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT), the first national certification for dog trainers.

Laura has authored articles about dogs and dog behavior in dog-centric magazines and on-line resources.

Laura believes strongly in strengthening the bond between human and companion animal. For this reason, she regards training as an exercise in building relationship rather than obedience. Such an approach promises greater understanding and symbiosis within our family packs.

Log on to [www.myWoofGang.com](http://www.myWoofGang.com).



## **\$25 Intro Training Offer**

Get a 30-minute introductory basic training session for \$25 or apply it towards a 4-session package and get the 30-minute session FREE! (Offer details based on location.) Call

**WoofGang at 646.345.5116** to make an appointment.

## ***Pretty Please!***

Consider a "sit" to be your dog's way of saying "please." Before you give her a tasty treat, cross an intersection or open the door -- before virtually any activity she considers wonderful, wait until she's sitting pretty!

Strengthen your relationship with your dog through training; call

**WoofGang at 646.345.5116.**

## ***Territorial Behavior***

Allowing your dog to peer out the window at passers-by can develop into a more dangerous behavior called *territorial aggression*. Your dog may start to think that it's his barking that's keeping the passing people and dogs away. Over time, this can potentially put your guests at risk -- your dog may start to escalate to an aggressive display when people actually enter the home. If your dog shows any aggressive behavior at the door, don't wait for a tragedy... it puts everyone at risk, even your dog!

**WoofGang** can help change your dog's mind, and hence his behavior, about people entering your home. Go to [www.mywoofgang.com](http://www.mywoofgang.com).

## ***A Question of Dominance (cont.)***

in fact, in wild packs, the responsibilities of the adult wolves of the pack are more evenly distributed and the relevance of rank has most to do with social interactions, promoting friendly relations and pack cohesion. Further, in wild packs, when food is scarce, the dominant pair chooses to whom to allot food, and it will usually be preferentially to their pups. But when food is plentiful, all will eat together, and each member has rightful ownership of resources within his "space", beneath his head and between his feet. Though another can try to steal or use intimidation to take the food, every wolf, regardless of rank, can rightfully defend his "stuff".

Still, our misinterpretation of wolf behavior has led us to insist on eating first, going out the door first, and relegating our dogs to the floor rather than the bed. While there are plenty of reasons to decide one practice over another, let's make sure we do it for the *right* reasons!

### **Being A Benevolent Leader to Your Dog**

Mark Rashid, horse trainer and author of several books on the subject, observed social hierarchies and interactions in horse herds and saw two distinct types of leaders emerge. There were those horses who controlled herd movement and behavior through fear and intimidation and those who were chosen by other members of the herd as "passive leaders" because of their peaceful, cooperative practices. He noticed that this second kind of leader was more liked and trusted by the rest of the herd. Rashid teaches riders to emulate this same model of leadership when developing a bond with their horses.

This is a paradigm that we would do well to aspire to in our relationships with our dogs. We need for our dogs to understand that all the things that they value in their

lives are generously granted by *us*. We control everything and will share richly, provided we are shown polite, respectful behavior.

To do this, take stock of the things that your dog considers valuable in his life: food, petting and affection, going for walks, playing with toys, being on the furniture, even chasing after a paper bag blowing in the wind or a squirrel scurrying up a tree. Require polite behavior from your dog in order to earn these life rewards. #



*Koko offers a down*

Our greatest challenge might be to leave the word *dominance* out of our vocabulary entirely. Still, our relationships with our dogs would undoubtedly be the better for it.

\* Though not common, there is a behavior issue, once called dominance aggression but now more commonly referred to as *noncompliance aggression*. This type of aggression is most often directed toward the dog's family members. So if your dog guards his food, possessions or space, such as the couch, and shows aggressive behavior with certain handling, such as collar grabs or when being restrained, enlist the assistance of a certified canine behavior counselor. Management and behavior modification protocols must be employed for the safe treatment of noncompliance aggression.

# *For this article in its entirety, log on to [www.myWoofGang.com](http://www.myWoofGang.com).*



## ***Ask Woofie...***

**Woofie**, my dog Mocha has started to pee in his crate. I know I should make sure the crate small to prevent that, but how small should it be? Do you have any advice? Acme

### **Hiya, Acme!**

*If you haven't taken Mocha to the vet in a while, it might make sense to make a quick visit and confirm that he doesn't have a urinary tract infection, so that you're absolutely sure that his behavior is not medical. Even if it is medical, he may continue to practice the behavior after the infection is treated, since he may now have built the habit.*

*So what seems to be the pattern of Mocha's pottying in the crate? When during the day does it seem to happen? Add an extra walk in there if there's a time he's consistently doing the deed. If possible, try taking him out a little more often in general, so that he doesn't have to hold it as long. The point is for him to have success over a period of time – weeks for instance – so that he gets into a good habit. The problem is that now he's practicing a BAD habit and he'll tend to keep practicing it.*

*Also, where does he tend to potty? Does he then sleep elsewhere in the crate? If so, that tells you he has too much room. You want him to have just enough room to curl up and sleep, and stand comfortably, but not so big that he can go at one end and sleep at the other.*

*Hope that helps! Good luck!*

If you have a question for **Woofie**, email [info@myWoofGang.com](mailto:info@myWoofGang.com), and put "Dear Woofie!" in the subject line.

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