

## UNDERSTANDING HUMANS



Before you can truly train your humans, you need to understand them. This is no small task. Throughout the book, I will try to provide helpful insights.

For example, we see things sooooo differently. Ours is a flavorful, scent-filled, excitement-packed, zig-zag world. Theirs is more controlled. Straight lines are important, and they miss way too much of the fun, way too often. One of our major responsibilities is helping our humans to live more fully and enjoyably. Thankfully, for canines this comes naturally.



To add insight, consider this description of one of my recent simple, daily adventures. I head out the back door into the wilds of the deep, dark forest that lies beyond the lawn. At the far edge of the grass, I pause for a moment to look back at my house...my last vestige of security. Sigh. My human is standing in the open doorway watching me. I quietly hope this will not be the last time I see her face. But Life is uncertain, at best. Who knows what lies just ahead of me?

Undaunted, I head out on the dangerous trek through the landscaping rocks and plants. I pause briefly to sniff each one, making certain that my territory has not been compromised. Then my wilderness adventure truly begins. (Uh, cue the dramatic music, please.)

I enter the deep, dark woods and listen to the mournful whine of the many salivating predators watching me. I am big. I am bold. I am invincible! (Okay, okay... I am seven pounds of fun, fur and fury, but I'm in the middle of a story here.)

Suddenly, a giant, cranky serpent leaps up in my path. Woah! I instinctively dart to one side, averting sure destruction. That was close, but I'm not out of danger yet. The trees tower over me, looming, leering, and laughing, stretching their "craggly" arms and fingers in all directions, trying to snag me. Some crazy, prehistoric bird swoops over me, and I deftly duck out of the way, cleverly eluding capture yet again. Crazy!

I stealthily press onward. (Okay, okay... I scamper.) I stoop to slip under a massive fallen tree trunk and then curve cautiously around a giant stump, pausing to admire a delirious butterfly, obviously sent to distract me from my vital mission of exploration. I zig. I zag. I cavort. I am big. I am HUGE! I am brave. I... am... invincible!!

Boom – boom - boom – boom. (Uh, I've added a little timpani to the orchestration here... just to muffle the pounding of my heart.)

Half a dozen leaf-like monsters simultaneously leap and swirl about me. They are trying to bewilder and confuse me. I will not have my mission thwarted by these beasts. I am focused on finding the lions and tigers and bears, after all.

First, I must cross this mighty ocean that looms now before me. It stretches further than the eye can see in all directions. This could be my greatest challenge.

In the far distance behind me, I hear the human calling to me. Oh, no. Not now. I am so close to the center of adventure, I must not be distracted or diverted from my task. I remain on point. I pretend I hear nothing. I sniff. I mark. I move on.

I must conquer these uncharted territories for all canines and creatures large and small. I am big. I am brave. I am INVINCIBLE!

"Cookie!"

Oops! I heard the magic word from my human. Conquering the world will have to wait. As a dog I must miss no opportunity to score a treat. I zoom in as straight a line as canine-ly possible. A cookie awaits me!!

Now... what I have just told you is what really happened. Yet, I heard my human telling the tale, and I could hardly believe my ears. Let me share with you how little she remembered of my great adventure. And she is my best eye witness? Good grief.

“Bandit went out the back door, as usual. He crossed the lawn and did his business in the border garden. Then, he turned back to see if I was really watching. I told him to come, but he ignored me and headed into the trees. I watched him step on a little twig on the ground, and he got totally startled as it flipped up toward him. A tiny chickadee almost landed right beside him, but his jumping scared it. Then Bandit batted at a couple of leaves that a breeze picked up and swirled around his head. I gave up calling his name. As he approached the big puddle of collected rain water, I simply called out the word “cookie.” Bandit did an immediate about face and raced straight up the 20 feet to the lawn. He leapt up onto the deck, skipping the steps completely. Anything for a cookie.”

Well, she got the “anything for a cookie” part right.



We all must teach our humans that simple commands like “Come” are way less effective than “Cookie.” With training, your human can learn to kick it up to that most wonderful of 2-syllable words, too.

Anyway, here’s the point. Humans just don’t see the world the way we do, so we must be persistent and patient while training them. Don’t miss any opportunities for reinforcement either.

For instance, even when I’m just a tiny distance apart from her on the lawn, and she calls to me, I immediately recognize a training or reinforcement opportunity. She says, “Bandit. Come.” I dutifully stop, turn around, and look at her. She repeats, “Bandit. Come.”

If you are doing this, pay attention: Your next action is verrrry important. Do NOT move. Again, this is the most vital step. Do not move even one muscle.

Look at your human with love and encouragement. No matter how many times they command, clap their hands or even whistle, simply sit and look at them. You can tilt your head to the side, of course. This lets them know that you are paying close attention and trying to understand their feeble attempt at communication.

The moment they offer the treat by calling out, "Cookie," run as fast as possible to them. Wear your most gleeful face. Then sit dutifully by their feet or by your food dish and grin until they deliver the hard-earned treat. You are teaching them. And they did well.

See, it's all about attitude. And patience. Your human can do this... and more! Give them a big kiss when they do it right!

Okay, let's move on... we have so many lessons and so little time. Zoom zoom!