



Tips for Taking Your Canine Companion to Work

Animal Behavior Service

Margaret Duxbury, DVM, ACVB

Kristi Flynn, DVM

The following are some tips for keeping your take-to-work companion a canine good citizen.

Barking is a biologically important stimulus that most dogs can't ignore. It is scary and intrusive for your dog to be barked at, which can teach him or her to be aggressive too! The best defense is a good offense! If there is more than one canine in your work environment, barking is contagious and the more people who follow these guidelines the easier it will be for everyone.

DOGS IN OFFICES

1. When you leave your office with your dog(s) inside, close the door--even if it will be for 5 minutes or less. This is MUCH better for your dog than rehearsing barking and lunging. This is MUCH better for your colleagues' dogs as they pass through the halls. (**Thorndike's Law of Exercise--repeated (rehearsed) behaviors (like barking) become stronger. Disuse weakens the response.)
2. If your dog tends to bark when other dogs bark when you are in your office, keep dog treats right next to your keyboard. When you hear another dog bark, drop treats onto the floor. You do not need to even look up from your computer screen! Just knock some treats to the floor and keep working. Do this everytime a dog barks no matter what your dog does. Don't worry, you are not rewarding the barking. Over time, your dogs should start turning away from the gate when another dog barks. (**Classical conditioning - bark predicts treats not conflict.)
3. If your dog charges the door when you are inside, set up a double barrier so your dog cannot reach all the way to the door, or keep your door closed.

Note: Scolding or jerking your dog as it walks past another dog can sometimes teach him not to bark back, but does not help him relax or learn another strategy for dealing with the scary or intrusive dog in the office.

5 WAYS TO MAKE HALLWAY ENCOUNTERS WITH DOGS EASIER

1. Keep your dog on a short leash. It may sound obvious, but negative encounters are less likely to occur if dogs are not able to get into each other's personal space. A short leash is one that doesn't allow your dog to get their nose more than one to two feet away from your body.
2. Put your dog on your right side when passing another dog in the hallway. According to convention dogs are taught to heel on the left side. When following another convention, which is to pass each other by staying on the right side of the hallway, we end up with dogs in the center of the hall directly passing each other. We can provide a barrier between dogs with our bodies by simply moving the dog to our right side when we encounter another person with a dog in the hallway.

3. Move briskly. Dogs typically prefer to move at a faster speed and definitely pay attention to fast moving objects. As such, they love it when we move quickly and therefore tend to pay less attention to distractions in the environment.
4. Take an obedience or tricks class with your dog. Even dogs that already have good manners and are well trained can benefit from a refresher course. It is a nice way to spend time with our dogs and can be a lot of fun. You'll have an opportunity to work on having your dog sit for greetings and paying attention to you in a distracting environment with the support of professional dog trainers.
5. Keep your dog's attention on you when walking in close proximity to others. This keeps dogs from staring and eliciting a response from one another. This is a skill that needs to be taught to your dog. Until you have this skill trained, you may use a food or toy lure to keep your dog focused on you rather than his surroundings. There are numerous ways to train this skill. Below is a simple outline of the concept.

TEACHING ATTENTION AS A BEHAVIOR

As with all training it is best to introduce a new concept in a low distraction environment.

1. Take a treat or piece of your dog's food and put it in front of your dog's nose. Then move the treat up to your face and mark the desired behavior (say "good" or better yet use a clicker) which is looking at your face. Do this around five times, two to three times daily.
2. Once your dog is readily looking up at you, lure him once and then wait. At first your dog may bark or lick your hand, but just ignore those behaviors and wait him out. Once he looks at you mark the behavior and give him a treat. If your dog is stuck, and just can't seem to find what you are looking for, go back a step. Lure him to look at you and reward him to decrease his frustration. Then give him another chance to offer the desired behavior. Only this time, you will mark and reward any small movement in the right direction (a tip of the nose upward for example).
3. Once your dog is readily offering this behavior at home, you may gradually work on it increasing the distracting environments.