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**Are You the Pack–Leader? How to Communicate Effectively With Your Dog for a Harmonious Relationship**

**By Justine Kay**

As dogs are pack animals, it is important to understand that they are always aware of their position

in the pack. This pack will encompass you, your family, other pets and of course all the dogs in the household. The Alpha dog or pack leader is seen by your dog as the leader and protector of the whole pack, and it is therefore crucial that you take on this role. Your dog will be healthier and happier if it feels secure in it's pack, knowing that his leader is doing their job and keeping everyone safe.

The first step to doing this is to know which signals your dog will understand. You will need to consistently communicate  $\frac{1}{2}$ alpha signals  $\frac{1}{2}$  to your dog in a compassionate and respectful way. This does not entail being aggressive, overbearing or bullying your dog! It is simply a matter of learning the language that a dog understands and using the correct signals. Mixed signals and inconsistency will confuse your dog, making him think that the pack leader is not effective. Your dog will be stressed and feel that it is encumbered upon him to try to take over as alpha to stabilise the pack. If he does this, it is not because he is being  $\frac{1}{2}$ bad  $\frac{1}{2}$ , but that you have given him the wrong signals.

So what are these signals and how do you communicate them effectively? Firstly, the pack leader always eats before the other pack members, so you MUST eat your dinner completely and clear the table before giving your dog his bowl of food. He should see you eating and understand clearly that he can only eat once you have completely finished. Then make him sit before placing his bowl down for him and allowing him to eat. If you have been in the habit of feeding your dog before your dinner, or even during, this may take a while for your dog to become accustomed to. Be aware that any fuss he makes while you're eating is part of his learning process. You are giving him new signals, new information about the pack and you must let him understand this. He may need time to assimilate this new information, so be firm but patient.

Secondly, you should always lead your dog, especially through doorways and narrow passages. NEVER let your dog push past you or in front of you. The pack leader in a dog pack would never allow a subordinate dog to push past or  $\frac{1}{2}$ lead  $\frac{1}{2}$  the pack, and therefore neither should you. Use a leash if need be, but always ensure you enter doors, rooms, gates etc. in front of your dog. Neither should

you let your dog run up stairs in front of you. This allows him to run to the top and look down on you, displaying classic dominant behaviour. The key to this is NOT to punish the wrong behaviour; it is too late to do that but to not allow him to exhibit alpha behaviour in the first place. Use a leash, close doors, give a short, sharp shout, whatever your dog responds to, but remember to be firm, kind and respectful. You are talking to your dog, not trying to bully him into submission. The key for all these techniques is repetition, consistency and patience.

Justine Kay is an experienced dog owner and trainer. She is the webmistress at

Dog Training Tips

where she writes dog training articles and discusses the intricacies of dog psychology.

### **Spitting In Your Dog's Food To Build Dominance – Revisited**

**By Adam Katz**

I was having dinner last week with Jeff and Michelle—two of my first dog training clients, when I branched out on my own and started South Bay K–9 Academy in Southern California, back in 1994.

[I'm now actively retired from working with the general public... I love working with dogs, but the dog owners (Jeff and Michelle not withstanding) drove me absolutely nuts!]

Anyway, Jeff and Michelle still have their Dalmatian, "Dotty," who's now close to 11 years–old.

I've always thought it was funny that the one thing people seem to remember from my 324 page dog training book, "Secrets of a Professional Dog Trainer!" is that I recommend spitting in your dog's food.

As if this were the magic key to getting a well behaved dog.

Regardless, it seems to be the one thing that almost everybody remembers—from literally hundreds of dog training tips I present in the book, on our web site Dogproblems.com, and in our discussion forum.

Why do I recommend spitting in your dog's food?

Because you're marking the dog food with your scent. And because the Alpha dog in the pack always eats first.

This is a subtle way to communicate to your dog that you are the pack leader. But this alone won't do it. You need to be acting like a pack leader in every other aspect of your dog's life, too. Such as being the first to walk through a door. Or telling your dog where to lay down, and when he's allowed to eat. And making sure you follow through and enforce any and every command that you give.

I take a lot of guff from people—especially other dog trainers—who misinterpret my advice and think that spitting in your dog's food is the only thing you need to do to make you the Alpha dog. It's not.

Well, not any more than the 100 other subtle things you must do to communicate that you are the pack leader. I always stress to new dog owners that the more things you're doing to reinforce that you are the pack leader for your dog, will make your dog view you as the pack leader, faster. Spitting in your dog's food is just one more thing to do that helps.

So anyway, back to my dinner with Jeff and Michelle:

When I asked how Dotty was doing, Jeff responded that Dotty was absolutely fantastic. The best dog they'd ever had, due in no small part to their diligence and consistency in applying the dog training techniques I showed them.

But then Jeff said something very interesting: "I'm still spitting in her food. In fact, she won't even touch the food until after I spit in it." (Remember: The Alpha dog always eats first!).

So there you go: Further proof that some of my more outlandish dog training techniques really work!

Even if you may feel silly doing it.

That's all for now, folks! Adam Dogproblems.com

P.S. Jeff and Michelle are able to take Dotty anywhere—off leash—and know that she'll respond to commands, immediately. They even take her camping quite frequently..., which Dotty absolutely loves!

Adam G. Katz is the author of the book, "Secrets of a Professional Dog Trainer: An Insider's Guide To The Most Jealously Guarded Dog Training Secrets In History." Get a free copy of his report "Games To Play With Your Dog" when you sign up for his free weekly dog training tips e-zine at:

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