



## Leader of the Pack

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Perfect Pooch perfects dog behavior.  
By Brenda Lange

Those who count a dog as one of their family members know that dog ownership can be a double-edged sword.

On one side is the unconditional love showered on the human of the household. You can go out to get the mail and return to a greeting that says, "You've been gone so long. I love you!" as your dog's tail wags itself nearly off his body.

On the other side is the stranger-dog who jumps up on visitors, barks at the paper boy, acts aggressively toward other dogs when out for walks or urinates on the new hardwood floor.

Do you just grin and bear the bad behavior because the good is so very good? Do you get exasperated and yell and punish?

According to Dave Cugno, owner and founder of Perfect Pooch of King of Prussia, you do neither, rather you learn that dogs have reasons for doing the things they do, and you act accordingly.

"You can't get angry at your dog, because owners unknowingly encourage the very behavior they're trying to correct. He doesn't understand the instability implicit in your anger. If you get frustrated, accept that fact and walk away until you calm down."

Cugno has trained hundreds of humans and their dogs at Perfect Pooch, building life-long, loving connections between them.

"We don't deal with specific issues, so much as we help owners build, stable, well-balanced relationships with the dogs that last a lifetime," he explains.

Cugno and his staff of six full-timers don't just work with the four-legged. Most of his work is with his two-legged clients, because if the human doesn't follow through after they return home with their dog, it will all have been pointless.

"Owners create issues because they're human. I teach the human how to understand how the dog thinks and effectively communicate with their dog," he says. "There is no magic formula; no one way to do things. You just need to be consistent with what you're doing."

#### Avoid role confusion

If the human is unsure about dealing with his dog, she can sense that insecurity and becomes confused. She assumes you need help, and that it is her obligation to protect the pack. But that's not the dog's role; it's the human's.

"When someone has a dog for a while and brings in another dog, they can create an instability in the pack by treating them differently, even subtly," he explains. "You destabilize the pack. Dogs like to feel they are contributing to the overall benefit of the pack, even if it's just something simple you enforce, such as 'don't sit next to me when I'm eating' or 'go get the paper.'"

Sue Kaslow of Berwyn didn't know why her formerly calm household began to feel overwhelming and chaotic. Her three normally nice, friendly dogs gradually became unruly and turned life upside down—chewing on furniture, urinating in the house and "dominating me, being pushy."

She was at the end of her rope when she found Perfect Pooch and raves about the training that restored her sanity.

"When Dave told me his approach would have the dogs begin to see me as the pack leader, making the negatives go away, I was skeptical, but figured I had nothing to lose," she remembers.

For about a week, her dogs lived at the facility, learning some basic commands and socializing. When she and her husband, Dave, returned to pick them up, they got their training.

"I got a set of basic house rules, such as the dogs could no longer sit on the couch with us when we ate dinner. If the dogs are on the couch and we want to sit down, they have to move, and wait to be invited back on," she says. "These little rules have made a tremendous difference. We became their leaders, and they treat us differently."

Even though specific negative behavior isn't targeted, the dog learns how the pack leader (the human) wants things done on a daily basis.

“I could feel the energy shift, and everything became more comfortable in the house,” she says.

Cugno’s staff doesn’t work with treats or clickers or use harsh means. He advocates striking an “indifferent” attitude. “Don’t get angry. Don’t feel guilty,” he says. “Your dog can feel what you’re saying, they’re very intuitive.”

Perfect Pooch, a member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers, also offers grooming, boarding and daycare. They are located at 385 S. Gulph Road, King of Prussia, PA 19406. For more information, call (610) 337-7698 or visit [www.perfect-pooch.com](http://www.perfect-pooch.com).

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