

"The Language of Dog: An Oath of Fealty for Your Best Friend."

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Here we are in the Dog Days of Summer so this month's Blog is about dogs. People read books, watch TV shows and do all sorts of things to try and bridge the gap to the world of dogs. Yet every day I encounter people frustrated with their dog's behavior, at a loss how to bring harmony to the home, and dogs who've long ago learned to tune out their people.

It's not like there's consensus among the "experts" how to navigate the canine sea, from those who still recommend "alpha rolls"... that might be telling your dog you're still in the middle of the pack... to those who suggest flooding your dog with your personality and more words than a Senate filibuster.

So how do you help set the tone for an easy, balanced relationship with your dog?

While there's no one sure approach that works with every dog, I often suggest the following exercise to help establish a calm, secure connection early on. It's surprisingly simple and fits well with most other training techniques.

Remember High School History class, learning about the Middle Ages and the Oath of Fealty? The King offered something in return to those who pledged to him. Let's try adapting this to your dog's natural instincts and update it with compassion and understanding.

A dog's hard wiring is to belong. A dog's hard wiring is to feel the assurance of safety and permanence. To have a purpose. A dog's hard wiring, even with breed differences, is to know you're "the rock" when there's uncertainty in the environment.

When you have five minutes, find a quiet spot. Stand to the right of your dog, facing the same direction. Your feet slightly forward of his front paws. Gently drop your left hand to rest lightly on his left shoulder (for small breed dogs you'll need to adjust!) As you touch his shoulder, keep your feet firm on the ground and your eyes forward. Take a moment to appreciate him for who he is.

Say with confidence, in a low and even voice, "I'm here for you, forever. Anything out there needs to get past me. I promise you safety. I promise to take care of you. I will stand by you forever. You are good, good dog, and I'm glad you're here. I love you just the way you are. You're safe here, with me. Thank you for being here." [Continued on page 2]



Say it like you mean it. Don't worry about the words; just convey the essence. Let the moment run but be understated, un-dramatic. Don't ask for anything in return. Not now. This has nothing to do with behavior training, and everything to do with it. Your dog will "get" this with his hard wiring. Be sincere, but don't flood your dog with emotion or high pitched, fast words. Try saying the words in different settings; before bed, in the yard.

With this exercise, you are doing a modern day King's Oath of Fealty: You are promising protection, safety, permanence. Dogs can adjust beautifully to new people, but they aren't by nature serial monogamists!

Practice this when you have a few minutes, especially if your dog came from a rescue or when he exhibits fears or phobias. Try this instead of reacting to his fears with "poor baby" or worrying about how to "fix it." This shift balances our emotion-dominant culture with a timeless, heart-full connection. Carry this energy to your other time together; try sending it down your leash like a telephone line during obedience work. This shift might take some practice, but dogs are a forgiving lot so have patience with yourself.

Try this exercise often enough that you both believe it in your heart. You'll be watering the seeds of loyalty, confidence and trust, traveling the calm sea between the species with your own sure, forever heart as a compass. Good luck!

