NILF – Nothing in life for free

Sometimes the canine/human relationship can go wrong. It may not be horribly out of whack but something just doesn’t seem right. At some point your dog may have gotten the wrong idea about who the boss of the household is. I know a lot of humans who do not want to tell their dog what to do. They want their dog to decide what they do and don’t do. For some not so pushy type dogs this may be fine but for others, not so much. If you think that you have lost control of your home and life, read on.

The concept is simple, the implementation may be difficult. Basically NILF means that your dog is not going to make any decisions concerning you and your property. Does your dog stare longingly at a cookie jar and you quickly jump up and reward them? Do you lavish affection on your dog when they demandingly nudge your arm? Are you quick to respond to your dog’s demands to throw their ball once it is dropped at your feet? If your answers are yes, yes, and yes then things may need to change.

When a dog demands a behavior; whether it is a well meaning demand or an aggressive immediate demand, the result is the same if you comply. Your dog is running the show and this can quickly become your life in the hands or should I say paws of your dog? Dogs are either leaders or followers; we want our dogs to be followers in our homes. If you fail to be your dog’s leader then you become a follower and your dog makes the rules.

Often during a new training session; I will watch a dog and guardian interact. As their interactions unfold it is easy to see how the dog slowly but very purposefully manipulates the guardian. When I see this behavior and enlighten the guardian to it, they are typically shocked to find out what is going on. They hadn’t realized that they were acting as their dog’s follower. Giving your dog control of daily decisions can turn bad very quickly. So how do you take back control of your life?
The easiest way to take back your life is to simply make and enforce rules in your home. You will not give your dog affection when they are nudging for it; you will offer attention or affection to your dog when you decide to pet your dog. Your dog will eat when you decide; go out when you say so, play ball when you decide it is time to play and receive a cookie when you say so. By implementing these simple rules you take the lead; you make the rules.

No more handing out food for free; your dog has to work for food. A simple sit for a meal is easy but a rule nonetheless. They want to play ball? They will have to wait until you are in the mood and initiate a game. Pack members who are not the leader; do not make any rules. You would never see a lower pack member demand attention from an Alpha Wolf. If and when the Alpha wolf feels like giving attention, that is when the lower pack members receive their attention and not before.

Making the rules takes only one thing away from your dog; and that is control. They will still receive attention, treats, playing, walking and mealtime but when you say; not when they demand it from you. One big thing to be aware of is that implementing NILF on a dog that is accustom to getting what they demand; typically results in the behavior becoming worse before it gets better. When a simple stare at the cookie cupboard has always resulted in a cookie; but now all of a sudden it does not, your dog may up their game. This may cause your dog to stare longer and even start to bark. But hold strong and do not give in; it will soon start to diminish.

Any type of attention can be perceived as a good thing for a dog. If you push your dog away when they are nudging you; you are actually interacting with them and they may see that as a good thing. You need to ignore attempts to control you; and with consistency they will start to go away. Depending on how severe the behavior is and how long it has been going on will factor in on length of time to get rid of a behavior. You can do this; you can have your home back.

I often give my clients a “whose house is this anyway?” peptalk. After which they feel empowered to take back their home and the great relationship that they had hoped they’d have with their dog.

Each and every dog is an individual, like we are. The degree of rules and regulations needed to become your dog’s leader will differ with each. Dogs need leaders, that’s you, are you up for it?