

Genius Dog Newsletter

GENIUS DOG TRAINING

"Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole." Roger Caras

What's Up With That?

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I apologize for the title of this article, but I didn't know how to describe the issue I wanted to discuss in just a few words. Then I remembered what my first thought was when I noticed Sydney's quirky behavior -- hence the title.

For those of you who are familiar with how I describe my dogs to others, may remember me referring to Sydney as my "problem child." I've tried not to do that anymore because I think "labeling" (even jokingly) can sometimes set you (in this case me) up to think the behavior is just part of him or her and cannot be changed. As a trainer, I can tell you this is usually not the case.

Problem behaviors that may seem to have appeared out of nowhere, probably started developing a while ago.

Here are a few reasons why pet owners may not address a problem behavior when they first notice it:

1. The person believes it's a unique situation that will probably never happen again.
2. Initially the behavior is not considered to be a problem.
3. He or she thinks the puppy or dog will grow out of the behavior.
4. The person or others around him or her think the behavior is cute or funny.

In my case, it was #2.

So let me tell you about a situation that happened with Sydney:

My dogs eat their meals in the hallway next to the laundry room, one at each end. For five years, Sydney would eat her food within a few minutes with absolutely no problems.

About a year ago, every now and then Sydney would wait by her food bowl and not eat until I would walk by. The first time I noticed this I thought to myself, "What's up with that?" and didn't give it another thought. This went on for about two to three months.

Then Sydney wouldn't eat unless I stood right next to her until she finished her entire meal. I thought it was strange that she wanted company while she ate, but again, I really didn't give it much thought. After all, it wasn't like she did this all the time, and I didn't think it was a big deal to stand by her for a few minutes while she ate.

After a couple more months, I started to realize I was spending more and more time standing next to Sydney while she ate. Eventually I got tired of it, so I stopped.

True to form, she wouldn't eat unless I was standing right by her. She would just sit or lie down by her food bowl and

wait for me. One time, I think I found her there almost an hour later. Ultimately she would eat, so again I thought no real problem. It's not like she is going to starve herself to death.

After ignoring her for a few days, she started whining and barking.

So what did I do? Listen to the advice I would have given to my clients? Of course not!

I started moving her food bowl to wherever I was so she would eat and be quiet. I moved it to the family room, kitchen, and master bedroom. I moved it so much I forgot where it was sometimes.

What happens to many pet owners, happened to me. The behavior change was so gradual I didn't take action until the situation had gotten out of hand.

I finally got into "trainer mode" and set out to correct MY reaction to her behavior.

I would consistently ignore her whenever she would start to whine or bark by her food bowl. However, if she ate her meal by herself, I would reward her with a treat (consider it dessert). It took almost two weeks, but Sydney's behavior finally returned to "normal."

Footnote: Although it may be helpful to know what triggered a behavior, it isn't always necessary to know the cause in order to treat the problem.

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Wylie's Corner

Just a quick note to my furry friends out there... humans like to celebrate – a lot! This time of year they can really get carried away.

First, they have a special day in November when they stuff themselves with tons of food until they all fall asleep on the sofa. Why do they need a special day to do that? Don't they know dogs would do that every day if they would let us?

Oh, and they watch something called football on TV for hours. They get so excited and cheer whenever someone manages to catch the ball. Seriously? I want them to try leaping in the air and catching the football in their mouth, after outrunning 15 other dogs while gracefully

dodging ten humans texting on their smartphones at the dog park... then I'll be impressed.

Then there's Christmas. My human is usually good about not embarrassing me at Halloween by dressing me up as *Hello Kitty* or a *Superhero*.

But as soon as December rolls around, she goes into the closet and starts pulling out all this weird stuff (e.g., antlers, red & white jingle bell collars and cuffs) and tries to put it on Sydney and me. At least now, I can share the embarrassment.

On a positive note...at least she hasn't made us wear *Ugly Christmas Sweaters* and do the *Mannequin Challenge*...yet.

**HAPPY
HOLIDAYS**

**Wishing everyone a Happy
Holiday Season!
From Genius Dog Training**



*"The opinions, beliefs and viewpoints expressed in this article are my own and do not necessarily reflect that of **Genius Dog Training**." – Wylie, CEO*