

A Radical Regime
for Recalcitrant Rovers
(RRRR)
by Job Michael Evans
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Written in 1986, in spite of the many advances in holistic training, this piece remains excellent.

I have tweaked it just a bit to incorporate the idiosyncrasies of Lhasa Apsos.

Debby Rothman

Presiding over every wolf pack there is a leader, or Alpha-wolf, which keeps order within the pack. This wolf informs other wolves about their status on a particular day -- about how well they are doing, and about how poorly they are doing. Depending on the Alpha's style of leadership, the role might be that of a dictator or a guide, or the Alpha might adopt either of these roles at different times. All subordinate wolves look to this Alpha for leadership and direction.

Domestication has not nullified in the dog this ardent need to lead or be led. While dogs are light years distant from wolves in some respects, in other matters they still mimic wolves closely -- especially in their need for an Alpha figure to guide them -- and failing the presence of such a guide, the chance to assume the position themselves. For your dog, there should be absolutely no question as to who is the Alpha-figure in its life. You are; or more accurately, you'd better be!

Trainers often express the above theories to their classes and private clients in crude ways that accentuate the "control" the owner must gain to be the "boss." Trainers will often say "Let him know who's boss!" and then hand out a few folklore corrections to whatever problem is at hand. Trouble is, just applying those few corrections--even if they do seem to address the behavior problem at hand--will not, by itself, elevate the wimpy owner to anything approximating Alpha-status in the naughty dog's mind. In fact, the dog might rebel fiercely, getting into a dominance fight with the owner. Or it might correct itself on one set of problems (say, destructive chewing) and substitute another (marking in the house instead of chewing). A few folklore corrections down the pike and the owner is still not Alpha.

Often a more holistic approach to bad behavior is called for--a literal "hit-list" of changes that are imposed on the dog in order to rattle its brains, disturb the status- quo and slot the owner in the starring role as Ms. or Mr. Alpha once and for all. Little things add up--and just as it was probably a plethora of little infractions, little slips, little forms of naughtiness that allowed the situation between dog and owner to deteriorate, it will be a series of little changes and renovations that will bring the relationship back into sync and stop the problem behavior.

No Quick Fixes

If you are the owner of a problem dog, please reflect on the above comments before reading on. You probably would prefer a "quick-fix" solution in this article--just one or two techniques that will cancel whatever behavior problem you are now putting up with from your dog. I must say to you: it's not that easy or that simple. Your problems with your dog, at root, are relational. The dog probably fancies himself the Alpha. Or he doesn't know who is. Or doesn't care. Or doesn't want to know. Whatever the case, you're not it. You might be regarded as a friend, as a companion, as a littermate, as a lover, or as all of the above, but you're not regarded, at least not fully, as the Alpha. To grab that role, you have to take a radical approach to your problem dog. I am going to suggest different ruses you can pull to convince your pushy dog that you are the boss.

This more holistic approach is rather new in dealing with dog behavior problems -- but not totally new. Until

rather recently, trainers tended to hand out 1-2-3 remedies to behavioral inquiries, without addressing the underlying malaise that affects the owner/dog relationship. Lately, there have been some heartening efforts toward a more all-encompassing approach that helps owners to identify problems and solve them, and restructure their relationship with the dog. Carol Lea Benjamin's "Alpha Primer" (AKC Gazette, September 1985) is an excellent example of this, as is the chapter on behavior problems in Training Your Dog by Joachim Volhard and Gail Fisher, (Howell Book House, 1984). Both programs are designed to help you up your Alpha-status. My RRRR program (Radical Regime for Recalcitrant Rovers) is simply, with my own personal flourishes--gathered from too many years of experience with too many problem dogs and too many problem owners. I offer my RRRR program to you with my sympathy and support.

Some final tips before the hit-list: don't modify the program, and keep it up until the behavior problem stops. Obviously, act on the behavior problem itself using sensible and humane methods, but add the RRRR program if you are experiencing any of the following:

- housetraining problems
- destructive chewing
- digging
- chasing people
- chasing cars
- jumping up
- over-barking
- growling/biting
- fighting with other dogs
- not coming when called
- predation

These are all major behavioral problems and they call for a radical approach. Besides specific corrections for the problem, apply the following program for the dog which is exhibiting any of the above problems and apply it today.

1. Give your dog two obedience or trick training sessions a day practicing whatever exercises the dog knows. These sessions should be 5 minutes long. Do not praise physically during this session. Use only verbal praise and keep the session moving. Give the commands quickly--dazzle the dog.
2. Have two formal eye contact sessions with your dogs each day. Problem dogs look at their owners only when they feel like it. Up the eye contact. Practice formally. Put a leash on. Sit the dog. Step around in front and animate the dog saying, "Watch me--I want your attention right now," in a low, growling tone of voice. Do not yell. You want three to five seconds, (not minutes) of locked, sealed eye contact. Once you get this moment, end with light verbal praise.
3. Have your dog hold one 10-minute down each day. This is very important. These downs can be done during TV shows, dinner, reading, etc. Enforce it! If your dog doesn't know the down, teach it immediately, as well as the stay command. For now, sit on the leash and measure out only as much as the dog needs to hit the dust. If the dog jumps up on you, whip the leash down hard with a "No !" If the dog stress-whines, give the dog a slap under the chin and say "No !" If the dog bites on the leash, whip it diagonally out of its mouth. During this time no petting, no toys, no soothing, no nothing. Long downs make you look Alpha.
4. Move your dog into the bedroom for overnight sleeping. Read the chapter "Where is Your Dog This Evening?" in How To Be Your Dog's Best Friend by the Monks of New Skete (Little, Brown and Co.). This simple exercise has tremendous bonding effects. Remember--in the bedroom, problem dogs do not belong on beds. You'll look like littermates--you want to be Alpha, remember? If the dog jumps up

on the bed, tie the dog to the foot of the bed.

5. Exercise is very important. Problem dogs usually don't get enough aerobic, sustained exercise, which is what they need to calm them down. Putting the dog out in the backyard for three hours is no solution--he isn't exercising, he's exercising and resting, or just resting--period. Use a leash and jog or run with your dog. Sometimes a bike can be used. Keep moving. A good guide: for a little dog 1/4 mile with no stopping, four times a week; for a medium-size dog 1/2 mile with no stopping, four times a week; and for a large dog 1 mile with no stopping, four times a week. I'm not even asking you to run with your dog every day. And a mile can go by quite quickly. Obviously, if your veterinarian advises against exercise for your particular dog, you'll have to skip this step.
6. Whenever you leave home, leave the radio on--easy listening music, not rock or talk shows. Stressed tones of voice usually keep dogs on edge--and talk shows feature people who call in with problems and stresses.
7. Feed two times a day, if possible in the early morning and the early afternoon. Place the food down and leave it 10-15 minutes. Leave the dog and the food alone in a quiet room. Then, return and pick up the food even if the dog hasn't finished. Do not make a "thing" out of the dog's not eating--you may be engaging in faulty paralanguage and encouraging the dog not to eat even as you try to get it to eat. This method of feeding keeps food in the dog's stomach during its waking hours, eliminating hunger tension and giving you more of a chance for a calmer dog.
8. Re-evaluate the diet--in my opinion high-quality meat meal-based rations surpass soy-based rations. Drop all "people" food from the dog's diet. The dogs know and it doesn't make you look Alpha. When your dog doesn't have problems, you can slip in some people food but not now. Remember, little things add up -- usually to big problems. And never, ever add anything to the food after you've placed it down--not because you forgot an ingredient, not because you want to encourage the dog to eat. The dog will simply learn to wait until something yummy is added, and again, you won't look Alpha.
9. Give absolutely no food treats for one month. Yes, that's right, zero treats. Zilch. None. Cold turkey. Owners often place themselves in a subordinate position vis- a-vis the dog by giving too many treats or by giving them in the wrong way. Stop for one month. If your dog's problems clear up and the month has passed, give one treat a day only if the dog sits. Never give a free treat carte blanche--make the dog do something for the treat. But nothing for one month.
10. Stop petting, stroking or fondling your problem dog for minutes, not to mention hours, at a time. Get your hands off the dog and pet for only seven to ten seconds and only if you've told the dog to "sit" or "down." I know you love your dog, but love isn't enough. If it were, you wouldn't be having the behavior problem you're having. What your dog needs from you now to help him out of his behavioral jam is scratch-type petting, quick and light, not seductive stroking. It would shock most owners, but problem dogs are often pooped from petting--yet they oblige and stay for it because they're addicted to it.
11. Don't allow the dog to go before you in or out of a door. Make the dog wait by giving the "wait" command, or at least go together. If you allow the dog to barge in or out of the door before you, you're telling him something pretty powerful about who controls the territory. The dog will say, "I do--after all, I always go first and that wimp goes second." If this happens three or four times a day, the dog really gets to stake a claim to the territory he enters first, with ensuing problems. Quick examples: dog is allowed to barge out onto the street and has a problem fighting other dogs. Aren't you setting the stage for the fighting by allowing the barge? Another: dog chews destructively when owner is not home. If you routinely let the dog crash into the house before you, aren't you telegraphing to him that the home is his territory--to chew up, to trash, to "rearrange" at whim? Don't allow the dog to go before you in or out of territory! Again--little things add up, usually to big problems. If that phrase is beginning

to sound like a mantra in this article, I'm getting through.

12. Pick up all the dog's toys and leave one, perhaps his favorite, down. That's all he gets for one month. When a month passes and the problems clear up, add one toy a week.
13. Stop playing any and all tug-o-war games. When you let go you look subordinate, and you're teaching the dog to bite down hard while in your presence. You're okaying serious mouth play. A no-no for a problem dog. Play only fetch and if the dog doesn't bring the object back to you and release it, get up and walk away.
14. If you have to have the dog get up and move because he is in the way, make the dog move. Don't refrain from doing something or stepping over the dog because you don't want to bother him. If you're Alpha, you can go where you want when you want. Even if you have to change the channel and your dog is in front of the TV--make him move. Believe me, if you don't, dogs notice. Little things add up.
15. Resolve to stop yelling at your dog and instead speak in a low tone of voice. If you yell, the dog will learn to wait for you to yell. Change your tonality, not your volume. Most problem dogs are yelled and screamed at. Most have tuned their owners out and learn to wait for louder and louder yelling until they finally don't hear their owners at all. You'll probably find you have to couple a physical correction with your lowered tone of voice to get the dog to tune back to your station on the dial -- Radio Station Alpha. So don't hesitate to use a shake, a swat under the chin or a leash correction if necessary. But stop yelling.
16. If your dog knows the "down" command--really knows it--pull a "surprise down" on this problem dog once a week. For instance, you're in the kitchen doing dishes and you hear Rover waltz in. Wheel on him, give both the hand and vocal signal and command for "Down!" Recalcitrant Rover will probably look shocked, and then do it. If not, you'll have to enforce it. The surprise element is the key. Remember, just once a week. Each down is a notch on your Alpha-belt, and combined with your daily long downs you'll look like Eva Peron--which is how your dog needs to see you right now.
17. If your dog is aggressive, immediately employ a qualified private trainer, experienced with the Lhasa Apso, to work with you in your home. Please don't wait. One session can work wonders. The situation could get out of control. It certainly won't get better without training. Your dog is just growling, you say? You're in trouble--big trouble. *A growl is a bite that just hasn't connected yet.* Don't delude yourself. Call a trainer -- yesterday! Institute the RRRR immediately, even before the trainer gets there to tell you what to do specifically for the aggression. You'll make his task easier if the RRRR is on a roll.
18. Whatever the problem is, be sure you understand the corrections that are outlined for you by your trainer or in the books you read. Apply those techniques as well as the RRRR. You'll find that instituting the RRRR rarely interferes with specific corrective techniques and almost always aids them in effect. I've had many clients who did nothing about specific problems such as chewing or aggression (usually because they were too busy, too tired, or too scared to act on the problem itself) but did begin the RRRR program--and the problem lessened and in some cases disappeared. I won't promise you that, but you will find the RRRR will greatly aid your specific corrections for whatever problem plagues your dog.
19. Finally, to balance the harshness of the RRRR program, create a little jingle for your dog. The jingle can be based on a popular television ad, and should be light, lilting and friendly -- sometimes just substituting your dog's name where the product name was in the jingle will achieve the desired effect. Sing the jingle to your dog once a day--even from afar. I've used jingles from McDonald's ads and toothpaste ads. Just sing it out to your dog once a day--and make eye contact--and don't go over 10

seconds.