

# Your Dog, Your Responsibility

As a trainer, sometimes I think people want me to wave my hands and magically make their dog “perfect.” Honestly, if I could do that, I wouldn’t be here. But that doesn’t mean I don’t understand what you’re going through. I wish I could wave my hands and make my dog perfect, too.

You come home from a long day at work, and the last thing you want to do is, well, anything. But your partner, kids, dog, neighbor, and family all want your attention. Sometimes they want to do something you want to do (Taco Tuesday!) and other times not (can you remember what a quadratic equation is?) But, because you love them, you’re willing to do what they ask. But what if they’re not asking?

Your dog might ask you to play ball or feed her, but she’s not going to ask you to show her how to greet people correctly, or what to do when the vacuum cleaner is running. But you need to teach your dog these things and more. Just as having a child means that you have to continually be teaching them, a dog requires constant instruction during their first few years. And if they don’t get that instruction? They make it up themselves. That’s why your dog jumps on people when they come into the house. Or they don’t know how to act at the groomers. Or they chew on your furniture and not their toys.

Dogs are smart, and they want to be part of the pack. As pack leader, your responsibility is to show your dog what you expect from her in every situation. Every situation. Your pup is like a blank canvas and you have to create a masterpiece. Everyone’s masterpiece is different. You might like Vermeer, and your mother may prefer Georgia O’Keefe. That’s why it’s important that you train your dog and show her how to be like a girl with a pearl earring and your mother has to show her dog how to be a giant white flower.

Training is very personal. My dogs know not to talk to me until I’ve had my usual vat of coffee. Your dog might have to learn not to talk to you until you get off the Peleton. How does your dog learn that when you’re sweating on your bike that you’re not interested in playing ball? If you don’t teach her, you can’t get too upset when she keeps dropping a soggy tennis ball on you. If you don’t teach your dog your house rules, she’s not responsible for not knowing them. It’s hard to integrate a dog into your life, but you’re the only one who can do it.

You have a big responsibility when you have a family or a dog. Not teaching your children how to integrate into your family could impact their ability to interact with polite society. Not teaching your dog manners could result in your dog paying for your oversight with his life.

*Written by Sheila of Integral Dog Training in collaboration with Animal Rescue Konnection (c) 2022.*