

# Workin' like a dog

..... by Lori Danello Roberts

"About one-third (31 percent) of employed adults have difficulty managing work and family responsibilities," according to the American Psychological Association, and "35 percent cite jobs interfering with their family or personal time as a significant source of stress." I know it is for me, and for virtually all my cohorts. Stress has become so commonplace, particularly for working moms, that many of us just accept it as a fact of life. But, experts warn that remaining in a constant state of stress causes significant damage to our health. And that's not the only consequence. Just like how animals react in stressful situations, stressed-out moms have a tendency to lash out at those around us, namely our kids.

Ironically, when I find myself stressed and barking at the kids, research shows that the best thing I can do is take 5 minutes out to pet my dogs. Dogs and cats have been found to be quite an effective way to reduce stress. "Pets can buffer reactivity to acute stress as well as diminish perceptions of stress," says Karen Allen, Ph.D., State University of New York at Buffalo. According to her study, "When conducting a task that's stressful, people actually experienced less stress when their pets were with them than when a supportive friend or even their spouse was present."

Of course, for moms who work from home, dogs (my dogs in particular) can also be a great source of stress. If not properly trained, our furry friends can be hugely disruptive in a work environment. My professional credibility plummets when I am conducting a phone interview and my dog, Scout, sees a squirrel outside the window. I sink deeper into my chair with every bark. Clearly, Scout's behavior must be curbed, but I am ill-equipped.

Enter Leigh Ann Falconer, dog behavioral therapist and trainer

with Bark Busters, a dog behavioral training program known throughout the world as using dog-friendly, natural methods to instruct. She comes to our house for a personal training session, and it doesn't take long for me to realize I am the one in training—not my barking dog.

## Give your dog a job

"Dogs were bred to work," Falconer says, "and now that our dogs live the life of luxury, where their most important job is one of companionship, it's easy for them to get into mischief." Dogs need to have jobs that stimulate their brains to keep them happy, healthy, and out of trouble. "But," she adds, "they need to know that you are the boss." Dogs crave good leadership, "and if they don't get it from you, they'll take charge." Bad behaviors such as barking, jumping, aggression, and pulling on the leash are all examples of the dog taking charge. "Dogs will challenge for leadership in the home, just as a wolf does in the wild."

It is amazing how quickly dogs learn what is acceptable and what is not when we consistently define parameters, she warmly counsels us. At first,

many of Falconer's suggestions for establishing proper pecking order seem to have no correlation to Scout's barking problem. "It's a matter of establishing dominance," she explains, "and to do so, you must relate to them on a level they understand. We can easily control them by 'speaking their language.'"

To get Scout's barking problem under control, Falconer suggests we establish a series of seemingly unrelated ground rules:

- No dogs on the furniture
- Always walk ahead of your dog, including through doorways
- Dogs must wait for express permission before eating
- All requests from your dog (like nudges to be petted) must be granted on your terms

## Dogs are life-long learners

An obedient dog knows how to behave, but he still needs stimulation to keep him on the straight and narrow. "Dogs are naturally intelligent and want to have a helpful role in the pack," Falconer says. "The more opportunities we give our dogs to think and work, the more healthy and content they'll be."



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Falconer also recommends giving dogs an assignment: challenge them with treat-dispensing, puzzle toys like Buster® Cubes, Kongs®, and Canine Genius Leos. These stimulate a dog's desire to hunt and forage so he can eat. Of course, getting food from the toy is a great reward, but the act of working on the toy to problem solve is its own stimulation, and a highly satisfying way to encourage your dog to 'work' for his rewards.

## A reassignment for Scout

After my management training with Bark Busters, Scout and I began implementing our new plan. She is doing so well that she has had a promotion. During my work day, she is no longer in charge of perimeter security—her new title is VP of Moral, where her sole job is to sit at my feet and be a calming influence on upper management. ☘

For more information about Bark Busters training approach, call 877-500-BARK (2275) or visit [www.BarkBusters.com](http://www.BarkBusters.com).

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