



The Non-Compliant Client

How to mitigate training that has become resistant rather than rewarding

By Melissa McMath Hatfield, M.S., CBCC-KA, CDBC

Do you have clients who are causing you frustration? Do you wonder why did they hire your services only to disregard or not follow through with your advice, or fail to incorporate your training protocol into their dogs' daily routine? If there has been little to no improvement in the dogs' behavior, why continue this uphill battle? Is anyone really enjoying this process?

If what is supposed to be positive and rewarding has turned into a slog for everyone concerned, especially the dogs, it's time to reevaluate. Why does this happen and how to mitigate the situation? First, let us analyze the different types of clients. I am sure you have experienced some of the following:

- The “know it all.”
- The “Yes, but”...

- The client in “denial” that there are serious issues that need addressing.
- The “every excuse in the world” client.
- The “my other trainer did”...
- The “guy on TV” says...
- My “husband does not agree”...
- The “just one more question;” never accepting your first explanation.
- The client who filters every piece of advice to “fit” what they want to hear or were told before.
- The client who “rationalizes” behavior due to the dog's past abuse.
- The “enabler” who is unaware that they are maintaining the problem behavior.

The list goes on. *Which one is giving you the most trouble?*

TYPES OF DOG HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

To help our clients and their dogs, we must first understand what type of relationship they have and their reason for having dogs, (this does not apply to dogs who are abused or neglected as that is a different topic for discussion). Is their goal more for function or is it emotional; of course it can be both, but generally there is a primary goal. Learning this early in the training process can assist you in understanding their expectations and their canine companion relationship.

Ownership

These are individuals who speak in terms of ownership. Generally, the dogs are used for utilitarian purposes, such as working on a farm, or hunting dogs kept in a professional kennel. Of course, these dogs can have a strong relationship with their humans, but their sole purpose is primarily utilitarian. The owner believes in “one command,” period. This relationship is based on a utilitarian function.

Ego

Sometimes the primary reason for having a dog is mainly ego driven, as dogs can be a projection of one’s ego. It is helpful to know if this is the driving force in the relationship and analyze how best to communicate with these clients.

The Traditional Pet

For these dog owners, their dogs are considered pets, and sometimes included in daily activities. The dogs’ general needs are met, but there is no strong emotional attachment or sacrifice of resources. This family or individual may or may not choose to get another “pet” after this one, and generally needs help coping with specific behaviors that are usually the result of minimal to no socialization or training.

Sentient Parent

These individuals treat their dogs like a member of the family but also as sentient beings, who have individual rights that require respect. For example, they do not believe in issuing commands, but establish themselves in the role of a parent; providing safety, meeting the dogs’ physical as well as emotional needs, and giving the dogs choices when appropriate. They believe that dogs have emotions and individual personalities that should be honored, if at all possible. Their interactions are positive, gentle, and patient. They

have a relationship with their dogs built on trust and respect with a strong emotional bond.

So, unless and until you know what type of client you are dealing with, everyone is likely headed for a frustrating experience. There can be conflict if your perception of the human-dog relationship is different than your clients. Understanding this difference will aide you in communicating more effectively. Not all clients need or want to evolve to the level of a Sentient Parent; but providing education certainly can increase the clients’ perspective and provide insight into their dogs’ relationship. Teaching how dogs communicate, their emotional reactions, and dealing with specific personality traits can help them understand what the best way is to solve a behavior or training issue. Understanding your client’s expectations can be a natural first step in rehabilitating behavior issues and the human dog relationship. Most people do not understand that a relationship with a dog is a two-way street. Are any of your clients driving one way on this journey?

THE SEVEN PERCENT RULE

There is a gold standard in communication that divides human communication into the following percentages:

- 55 percent body language
- 38 percent tone of voice
- 7 percent verbal

Think how helpful this information could be when teaching your clients how to communicate with their dogs?

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Conversely, dogs are masters at observing and understanding human non-verbal behavior. Unfortunately, humans are not as sophisticated, aware, or as sensitive as dogs are to us. This is where miscommunication between the two species can occur, which may result in conflict and possible harm to the dog, either physical or

emotional. The more we can teach our clients about how dogs communicate with us and with each other, the more enriching their human-dog relationship will become. Your clients' increased awareness can result in a more effective outcome in the training process. Teaching your clients to become fluent in canine body language requires them to "listen with their eyes." They can gain an insight and greater understanding regarding exactly what their dogs are communicating.

INFLUENCE OF CLIENT'S ATTITUDES ON BEHAVIOR

According to Steven Lindsay in his book "Applied Dog Behavior and Training," the "owner's degree of attachment for a dog has a direct bearing on how satisfied or dissatisfied the person will be with the dog's behavior." The family with a stronger attachment is more tolerant than those who are not as attached.

If your client is not committed or motivated in following through with your protocol, perhaps you need to ask, "What is their level of attachment?" Have they given up on their dogs? Have they passed into the critical judgment phase? Some relationships are bound to fail if the humans' expectations of their dogs are different than what the dogs can actually deliver. If so, can these relationships be rehabilitated?

UMWELT

If clients are unhappy or frustrated, for whatever reason with the behavior or performance of their dogs, helping them to understand the umwelt can help. Umwelt is how animals perceive the world from their biological, physical, cognitive and emotional perspectives. What does the world look like based on the perspective of your clients' dogs? If they could describe their environment, relationships and life in general, what would they say? Asking clients to explore the answer to this question could be a real eye opener, for all concerned. Training from the humans' perspective can cause miscommunication, problems, and potential conflict. Training from the animals' perspective can be rewarding indeed, for both the humans and their dogs.

In any human-animal relationship, the first step must be based on trust. This is built in small increments before any change of behavior can begin, i.e., training. This begins by understanding the animals' umwelt. Because we have the higher cognitive abilities and environmental resources, we have the responsibility for the emotional as well as the physical health of the animals in our care. Unfortunately, for a great many humans this translates into "control," which can lead to a break in trust, frustration, confusion and often times pain and suffering on part of the animals. If we don't understand the species we are encountering, trust and empathy will be difficult to establish; these are two key components needed in establishing a working relationship.

Helping clients understand the umwelt concept can give them insight into what is really going on in their dogs' world and teach them how to be more effective in their communication. Dogs do not perceive the world or respond the way we may anticipate. This can cause frustration in the human-dog relationship and affect the outcome of training. How many times have you heard clients say, "My dog knows what I want, he just doesn't do it?" Encourage your clients to ask themselves, "How is Fido perceiving their interactions or requests?" "What is Fido's perspective?" Education and awareness of the dog's umwelt can help the non-complaint clients experience their dogs in a more positive light; remember, the greater the attachment, the greater the satisfaction and hopefully more compliance in training!

SUMMARY

For non-compliant clients, having them revisit their reasons for getting Fido and reinforcing those decisions can help them "fall in love again" with dog ownership. Seeing how smart and willing Fido is to please can strengthen the family's commitment and attachment. Sometimes, it just takes watching Fido accomplish small tasks to restore their relationship and jump-start your training protocol!



Melissa McMath Hatfield, M.S., CBCC-KA, CDBC, earned a master's in counseling psychology and is a retired licensed psychological examiner. Her mission is to enhance the human-dog relationship through understanding, knowledge, and empathy. Melissa has been an APDT conference speaker and her articles are featured often in APDT's *Chronicle of the Dog*. Those articles have received numerous nominations in the Dog Writers Association of America's writing competition. Currently, she has a private behavior consulting practice where her main focus is performing temperament assessments and behavior evaluations of dogs who are exhibiting mental health issues. For further information please go to her website at <http://www.lovingdogs.net>.