

With Patience, Persistence, and Perception, Dogs Have the Upper Paw

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Some day, my berries will be ready ... Regardless of how many years they have lived with dogs, almost all dog-owned humans wish that the dogs were better behaved. Some dogs continue to bark, despite repeated human attempts to stop the noise. Some dig or raid the garden or sleep on the sofa —despite physical barriers and human reprimands. Others act out when their people are most hoping that they won't. The sad truth is that the problem is less about human incompetence than it is an indication of canine superiority. Dogs consistently outperform their human companions in three vital areas: Patience. Persistence. Perception.

Patience is the ability to wait for you want and hold on to a goal despite distraction. How many people would have the patience to wait at home for hours while their companions went off to work or play? Or even have the patience to wait for minutes outside of a store, tied to a

pole, with no phone to keep them amused? Dogs, who love dependable routines, wait and wait and wait for their people to remember that it is time to play, to walk, or even to feed them dinner close to the usual hour.

Persistence is the ability to continue working toward a goal despite difficulty or opposition. Some dogs bark persistently. Some continually nudge their person's hand to get petted. Persistently. And others beg at the dining table. Persistently. There is a reason that the term for working tenaciously is "dogged." People give up and give in long before dogs will. People **also** reward the dog's persistence, "just this once," — maybe to stop the dog's annoying behavior. At that point, the dog has succeeded at creating the desired human behavior. In most families, the dog will soon have the people well-trained in responding to canine direction.

Perception is the ability to use one's sensory abilities to take in information in and make it meaningful. Dogs read people — our vocal tone and pitch in addition to our words; our facial expressions and body language. In comparison, most people can barely tell the difference between a dog barking in joy and one barking in warning or in anger. Dogs learn how they should react and what they can get away with by reading their people. Much dog anxiety can be attributed to what the dog reads from their primary person. "If my person is sending signals that he is nervous," the dog reasons, "I guess I better be worried too."

Patience, persistence, and perception come together in a trifecta of superior intelligence that sometimes overwhelms the most dog-savvy of humans. In last week's Thinking Dog Blog, Pam wrote about Cali eating tomatoes from the garden just before Pam would have picked the tomato for human consumption.

The sequence of events illustrates how these concepts come together in dognition: Cali waited patiently for weeks while the lettuce, raspberries, and tomatoes each reached what she considered their peak readiness. When faced with an obstacle, she was **persistent** enough to figure out new ways to reach the garden treats, getting around the bird netting that Pam had wrapped around the plants. When Cali decided that it was time to eat the tomato she had been eyeing, she reached through the netting to pluck the tomato and let it fall beneath the plant. Then Cali could reach the tomato by burrowing under the netting. Which she did. There she lay, chomping her freshly harvested tomato, while Pam mowed the grass just a few feet away. Cali **perceived** that Pam was focused on the lawn and not on the dog.

Dogs consistently outperform humans because their PQ (Patience, persistence, perception) is off the scale compared to their human companions. That seems to be a fair trade-off for people getting opposable thumbs to use in our far more primitive way of manipulating the environment we share.