

You're Hired!

“You're Hired! The new canine version of *The Apprentice* hosted by Donald Trump's dog, Ivan.” Are you kidding me? Well, yes, I am! But, instead of a television show, let's think of “You're Hired!” as a unique training concept that serves as a good alternative to sending your sometimes trouble-making pooch back to wherever he came from.

BY DEBORAH ROSEN

SURVIVAL: IT WAS A FULL-TIME JOB

Dogs in the wild had only one real job—to survive! Even before they evolved to be companion pets (aka couch potatoes), dogs were bred to do specific jobs: herding, hunting, tracking, rapping and so on. Dogs were workers and had jobs that occupied most of their days. They tirelessly completed their assigned tasks, after which they collapsed and happily slept the night away. The next morning they would awaken rested and ready to start the routine all over again. Today's domesticated dogs are, quite simply, bored out of their heads. They have nothing to do to “allow them to be dogs” in the way that nature intended.

Labrador retrievers, for example, bred for tracking and hunting, can be overwhelmed by compelling and competing smells and sights with no bird to track and retrieve.

Jack Russell terriers, accomplished and tenacious ratters, are instead focused on the squirrels in the park.

Schnauzers, bred to work and guard, are no longer needed to do either and instead, left to their own devices, become unwanted guards against their owner's friends and friendly strangers. Is it surprising that they don't win too many friends?!

Is it time to refer to the classified section under, “Ratters Needed?” Probably not!



Above: Agility training is a great way to keep dogs focused on a task and burn off energy. An idle dog may become anxiety-ridden and neurotic—barking, chewing, nipping, or worse.



Right: Murphy, a highly energetic chocolate Lab, has several jobs including bringing in the morning newspaper (photo by Carolyn Schneider).

HELP WANTED: ONLY HARD WORKING DOGS NEED APPLY

It's time to find something constructive, meaningful and fun for your dog to do to channel his energy and instinctive behaviors. Good dog owners understand the need to physically exercise their dog. Unfortunately, most people are unaware of the need to mentally stimulate dogs as well in order to keep them satisfied, well adjusted and happy.

A dog's mind left idle will start looking for things to do. Most of these are destructive behaviors, like chewing your expensive furniture, digging up the new landscaping, and counter diving for unattended food. An idle dog may also become anxiety-ridden and neurotic, barking at every noise or distraction, lunging and snarling at the postal carrier, or becoming protective and antisocial with other leashed dogs. Sound familiar? Generally, my remedy for all such negative behaviors starts out with a seemingly simplistic formula—put the dog to work—give her a job.

NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE (FOR YOUR DOG)

The first place to start if you're looking for a job for your dog is to adopt the adage “Nothing in Life is Free” (NLIF) and apply it to your dog. Each day, you and your dog engage in activities that he or she enjoys immensely as a normal part of your life together: your dog is fed, walked, petted, played with and so on. Each of these activities can be used, to one degree or another, as a motivational tool for the



dog. The premise behind NLIF is that your dog needs a job and needs to be useful – why not make her work for the things she enjoys?

Before you take your dog for her daily walk, why not ask her to sit calmly and wait for three seconds? Not only are you training her to sit quietly, which will enable you to put on her leash easily, she now knows that in order to accomplish her goal (a walk) she must do a certain thing (sit still) – this becomes her job.

If sitting still as you get the leash is already a routine practice for your dog, then he might have gotten bored with the routine. (Dogs really are much smarter than we give them credit for.) So let's take this routine and step up the difficulty a little. If your dog enjoys retrieving, make him get his leash and bring

it to you, then when he arrives with the leash he must sit calmly and wait three seconds. If your dog is really smart, start to hide the leash and give the dog hints without telling him exactly where it is. Your dog's vocabulary is probably more extensive than you know. Say, "kitchen," "bed" or something else then hide the leash in that place so it's visible (at first).



Above: Taurus, a cattle dog/shepherd/boxer mix, enjoys the jungle gym at Hughes Playground in West Seattle (photo courtesy of *CityDog* reader John Wallace III). **Left: Labs do great in events like Puget Sound DockDogs** (photo courtesy of Gail Howard). **Below: Chewy, a retriever/basset mix (yes, her legs are only six inches long), goes to the veterinary clinic every day where her owner works, helping to "train" new staff** (photo courtesy of *CityDog* reader Hethir Pharr).

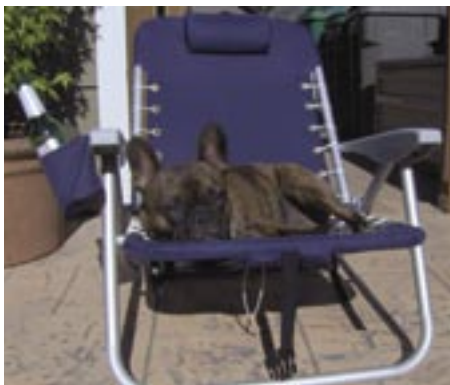
Once the dog gets the knack of this new routine, make him sniff out the leash: use and develop his sense of smell and tracking instincts to make the game even more challenging. Not only are you giving your dog a task, you're now requiring him to think and problem-solve to complete the task. You've made his job more difficult, but you've also made his life more interesting by satisfying his natural instinct to find and retrieve!

I have a client who gave Murphy, his highly energetic chocolate Lab, several jobs, including bringing in the morning newspaper. The owner gets more pleasure telling stories about his talented pooch than he did telling about the mattresses Murphy destroyed before he found "gainful employment."

MAKE ME WORK FOR MY DINNER

Some basic "jobs" for dogs can be as easy as asking for a "down" and a "leave it" when you place the food bowl on the floor. Instinctively, dogs are not equipped with impulse control. (This behavior would not have worked well in the wild if a predator was about to pounce on him.) So, a dog that is asked to control his impulses will burn a great deal more energy than it would take to run around the block ten times. Maintaining a three-minute "down/stay" or a thirty-second "leave it" with a highly coveted item is much more difficult for the dog than we might imagine since such behavior is counter-instinctive.





Above: Herding dogs—border collies, cattle dogs, corgis, shelties—have a strong need to herd. Left: However, the French bulldog, like Salvatore here, really knows how to relax (photo courtesy of *CityDog* reader Rebecca Schwan).

FOOD BOWLS ARE BORING!

Typically, most dogs are highly food motivated, so one of the best ways to make dogs work when you're not around is to stop feeding them out of a food bowl and start stuffing Kongs (or something like it). Many people know what a Kong is and have stuffed it with peanut butter or treats. What people don't realize is that you can actually stuff the large-size ones with the dog's actual food.

From a health standpoint, the Kong slows down the eating process instead of allowing a dog to scarf down his food in seconds. A Kong also rewards a dog for figuring out the puzzle of getting the food out. By the end of the meal, you have a tired and satiated pooch. Many dogs fed this way will refuse to eat out of a bowl. They count on the challenge of a Kong to satisfy their instinctive behavior and need for purposeful activity.

Some people will read this and worry about the time and effort required to stuff Kongs for their dogs. "I don't have time to make myself coffee in the morning, how will I find time to stuff a Kong?" My suggestion is to get a supply of Kongs and stuff them at the beginning of the work week—all at the same time. Put a couple in the fridge and the rest in the freezer. The frozen Kongs will be even more challenging for the dog and, therefore, more satisfying once he has completed the task.

For dogs who have figured out a stuffed Kong and empty out the food in seconds, try tying a filled Kong into an old tee-shirt. At first, tie loose knots around the Kong. After the dog has figured out how to undo the knots, start tying them more tightly. We need to continue to make the task challenging—we can't risk allowing the dog to get bored. Put your working dogs like German shepherds, schnauzers, boxers and pit bulls to work on dissecting a good knot. You'll see how tired and happy they are when you come home to a house that looks exactly like it did when you left.

LET ME HERD YOU, PLEASE!

Herding dogs—border collies, cattle dogs, corgis, shelties, etc.—have a strong need to herd. These dogs' sole purpose was to tend, gather up, protect and (in reality) annoy the heck out of herds of animals "in their charge" as a way to keep them safe and close together. Herding dogs are tireless, and without a pack to care for may start nipping at the legs, ankles and fuzzy slippers of humans or become herders of other household pets. For some of these dogs it's enough to be around other dogs—playing a good game of "chase me" and "keep away" with or without toys channels and satisfies the herding instinct.

Other dogs will need a real herding experience, and for those who have time there is nothing better than a flock of sheep. I know urban areas are not rife with herds of sheep, but places like Ewetopia, www.ewetopia.com in Roy have sheep and different levels of instruction. Generally, one to two ten-minute sessions in the ring with a flock of sheep will do more to satisfy and tire your dog than an all-day hike or running after a ball. There is also Fido's Farm, www.fidosfarm.com, in Olympia which has herding classes (along with the sheep) as well as flyball, agility, rally and other activities.

For most dogs, classes in basic obedience along with a supply of simple daily jobs will be satisfying. For the others, like high-octane Jack Russells or one of the herding dogs, more advanced jobs like dissecting stuffed Kongs, or taking advanced obedience to include impulse control work, agility training or herding are good options.

The most important thing to remember is: find your dog a job! Get her off the couch and off the doggie unemployment line. The next time your dog looks up at you with her tail wagging, asking for work, don't hesitate. Say, "You're hired!"—and put her to work. 🐾

For additional information or comments you may contact Deborah Rosen through her website at www.goodcitizen canine.com.