**Norwich Terriers, 5-19**

Title: Norwich Terrier Temperament and Training Tips

Above all else, Norwich Terriers are appreciated for their temperament. It was their spirited, determined and friendly disposition that first attracted me to the breed. I especially like the wording of an early breed standard (1961) that asked for “a perfect demon yet not quarrelsome and of a lovable disposition.” Marjorie Bunting, in her book *The Norwich Terrier* (1997) mentions that “the Norwich should be a real ratting terrier but with a non-quarrelsome loveable temperament, seldom likely to start a quarrel but quite prepared to give as good as he gets should he be provoked into one.”

Potential puppy buyers often ask if Norwich are easy to train? In my experience, Norwich Terriers are highly trainable, as long as the human side of the partnership is amenable. If nothing else, training a Norwich will bring a smile to your face. My dog training experience is very limited and pertains to just a few breeds, and formal training (competitive obedience) is limited to one Poodle and two Pembroke Welsh Corgis. In stark contrast to these earlier breeds, my Norwich Terriers lack the desire for collaboration.

Understanding canine behavior and the terrier personality helps to devise successful training methods. My Norwich Terriers have a “what’s in it for me?” view of the world. Because a Norwich is likely to be more interested in pleasing himself, we need to make doing what we want them to do worth their while. Our “command” may be realized as an “invitation”, to be declined by the Norwich who has a conflicting agenda (e.g., busy digging up your spring perennials). The key is to convince the terrier that it's more fun doing things on your schedule. Rewards-based training works, and the rewards most desirable to my Norwich Terriers are food treats and toys, usually in that order! Verbal praise alone isn’t especially inspiring. Varying the rewards keeps their attention. Mine have a low boredom threshold for toys, and treats are used in moderation. The surprise element (intermittent reinforcement) is effective –that is, withholding the reward from time to time.

We know that dogs respond to reinforcement and will devise tactics based on the greatest likelihood of reinforcement. People often mistakenly apply human values to a dog when analyzing behavior. I don’t see evidence that my Norwich plan ahead or make conscious choices. They learn best by operant conditioning. A dog will use a successful behavior again, in the same way that a wolf learning to hunt prey will try a strategy again if the result (food) was successful.

A word of caution: Not all training philosophies based on wolf behavior are supported by scientific evidence. Some methods have perpetuated widely, presumably based on observations of wild wolves, despite being refuted by wildlife biologists. For example, training methods based on the dominance hierarchy model are outdated and based on a misunderstanding of the wolf pack structure. Evidence is lacking to support the premise that dogs wrangle for supremacy over other canines and over their human family. The notion that wolves seek high positions over the pack has been refuted. An alpha wolf rarely initiates a dominance behavior, such as pinning another wolf to the ground. In fact, wolf behavior experts describe the role of the wolf leaders as parents in a family. When traveling, the wolf leaders are not usually in front, but rather surveying from the back. The longstanding alpha dog theory is more myth than fact, and not true for wolves or domesticated dogs. Ian Dunbar (1979) noted that even pack formation in domestic dogs seems to be an exception rather than the rule. "The notion of hierarchies has been much overplayed. For the most part, dogs seem to live in relative harmony with each member of the group, each generation going about its business with an apparent disinterest in the affairs of others.”

Dog trainers who advise the dog owner to take charge by eating first, walking through doors first, etc. are using incorrect models and methods. Pinning dogs into submission is unnecessary and misunderstood by the dog. Another example of training based on the dominance model relates to physically elevated positions. I’ve been asked about allowing Norwich on the furniture or in the bed. Whether you want your dog on the furniture is simply your preference. Dogs like comfortable places, and I doubt that it confers any elevated status or social meaning.

Dogs probably understand us better than we understand them. Their intra-species relationship with their human family is remarkable. Their behaviors are likely driven by a mix of motivations, including learning, socialization, fear, and genetics. They study our behavior and draw conclusions based on our actions. Training methods based on punishment, submission and fear will not result in a mentally, emotionally and behaviorally sound dog. Newer methods based on socialization and clear, positive reinforcement of desired behavior, will foster the desired results. A parent-family model is a better model for a well-functioning family group.

Although bred to work independently hunting small vermin, today’s Norwich is attached to his human family. I’ve never known one to dig out burrowed animals, but digging for the joy of digging is to be expected, and when not on leash, secure fencing is a must. Many Norwich terriers enjoy agility, lure crossing and other doggy sports. These activities provide exercise, tap into the terrier’s ability to problem-solve, and are motivated by positive incentives. Norwich Terriers are, as the official breed standard says, “Gay, fearless, loyal and affectionate. Adaptable and sporting, they make ideal companions.”

Jane R. Schubart, AKC Gazette Breed Columnist ascot.js@gmail.com; The Norwich Terrier Club of America website: www.norwichterrierclub.org (717) 635-8464