

# FIVE GIFTS TO GIVE YOUR DOG

By Julia Maclachlan

## 1. TIME

In this day and age, a person's most valuable commodity is time. The workweek stretches into 60 hours, after school is a crammed schedule of organized activities, and too often the weekend becomes a harried "catch-up" on chores and errands. Meanwhile, our Dobes, bereft of Daytimers and cell phones, nose around us as we rush from one obligation to another, sometimes with a tennis ball and a hopeful expression or a longing glance at their lead and collar. Take time to slow down and take a good look into those soulful brown eyes; put off the dry cleaner or the gossip phone call and have some serious quality time with your pal. Even if it's as simple as a five-minute game of fetch or a quick walk to the corner store, a daily one-on-one with your dog is priceless. It will remind you why you chose to adopt him in the first place and will remind him that you're not just the guy (or gal) with the food dish.

## 2. CONSISTENCY

Take a good look at your dog's house rules. Are you slacking off in your consistency? Has your couch potato recently been banned from the new sofa even though he's still allowed on the one in the den? Is it okay for him to play tug-o-war with that fancy new rope bone but not with your socks? Do you let him welcome you home with "hugs and kisses" (i.e. jumping up) when you're coming in from the garden but not when you're coming home from the office? Can he get table scraps at your elbow but not when there's company? If you can say "yes" to any of these questions, then you might want to make a resolution to be more decisive in your expectations. Contrary to what wishful pet owners insist, your Dobe really doesn't have the brain power to "know" the difference between very similar shades of gray behaviorally. Expecting him to bend to your mood or to human social rules (no jumping on Grandma, but Cousin Bubba the quarterback is fair game...) is simply unfair. Spend time with your whole household to make sure everyone is using the same rules regarding Rover and then watch him respond with even more respect and good behavior.

## 3. PRIVACY

Does your Dobe have a crate or a special sleeping spot? If not, create a private "den" for him or her. When things are hectic in your home, your dog deserves his own space and the right to retreat to it. Special consideration should be given to our rescued Dobes, many of whom are slow to trust strangers in their new home. Although socialization is important for all dogs, there is a time when the old adage about sleeping dogs applies. If you are too preoccupied with entertaining guests to keep an eye on how your Dobe interacts with them, it's better for him to retire to his spot. Also, an ill or older dog will treasure his privacy much of the time. Give your dog this gift and watch him become better adjusted and secure in your home.

#### 4. SILENCE

I must be joking, right? Like every other Dobe lover, I enjoy my "conversations" with my dogs and like the way they respond and warm to my voice. But just like people, dogs need some downtime, too. Owners who keep up a constant patter with their dogs can create nervous behavior and can even bring on separation anxiety when they aren't there to constantly reassure their pets. Over talking can make it more difficult for your dog to focus on good obedience training, with its concise commands and results-based praise. A dog that in daily close contact hears less of his owner's voice is a dog that will understand more when it really matters. So try to observe some "Quite Times" with your dog. Don't talk with him, just sit back and enjoy his quiet company. Study his face, learn the sound and cadence of his breathing, watch him and learn what he really listens to when your voice isn't there. After just a few periods like this, you will likely see that he is more attentive and responsive as a companion - you will no longer be having a one way conversation with him, you will actually be communing with him instead.

#### 5. A JOB

Well, take a look at ol' paws n' jaws down there and that's your answer. As a trainer of course I think every dog deserves some type of formal training but I also live in the real world and understand that most people don't have the time or desire. But this doesn't mean that you can't offer your Dobe some meaningful work! My own dogs are required to sit and wait while their meals are prepared. When I have one with me on lead, he must sit and stay until I go through any open door before him; no biscuit or treat is given without at least a sit or a down to earn it. To anthropomorphic pet owners this all sounds a little too harsh, but to any knowledgeable dog person it makes perfect sense. Our pack-driven Dobes expect to have a specific place in our homes, even when that home belongs to just one person and one dog. By giving your dog these little jobs you reassure him of that place and your praise and attention is that much worthier to him. A well-trained dog is a pleasure to have around, and is welcome in places that his undisciplined littermate isn't. By putting forth just a little bit of effort and structure you reward your dog with security and well being. It's too bad we humans are so much harder to buy for!

If you and your family can get into the habit of giving your Dobe these five gifts all year long, you'll find that he will return your generosity with an even stronger bond based on love, respect and mutual understanding.