



Introducing Bob Warren of Mutt Masters

We are here to answer your dog training questions. Please email questions to bob@muttmasters.com and he will pick a couple to answer each month!

People often asked me how I got started in my dog training career. "I was in the right place at the right time," I would reply. Now some 30+ years later, and some 30+ bites later, I often wonder if that wasn't the wrong place at the wrong time.

Actually, I was working at K-9 Command Dogs, the original "Don't Live in Fear!" dog training school as a kennel aide. My bosses, the so-called "Master Trainers," had become remarkably scarce after these police detectives began showing up asking them some very serious crime related questions. (It seemed my bosses may have been one of the last people to see a certain gentleman, and his large cake box filled with cash, before he became a missing person statistic.) This created a massive void in the workings at the training school and kennels, although the resident canines, (they sold trained dogs), did not "fly the coop" with them. There was only David Mirfin, a fifteen-year-old taking a professional dog trainers course, and myself, left to care for the dogs. We were the dogs' caretakers, and even though there was no pay, we came diligently to the kennels for them. Even the "Con Edison" man felt sorry for us. He came to collect a past due balance, or shut off the electricity for nonpayment. I told him, if he shut down our electric service, we would have to take care of the dogs in the dark. As far as getting any money from us, "the company," I told him, "Good Luck!" I hadn't seen a paycheck in three months! He left the service on, and wrote "No Access" on his worksheet. Who said the electric company didn't have a heart?

So, as I was volunteering with my young friend David, cleaning the outdoor kennels of you-know-what, an elderly gentleman shouted something to us from the end of our long driveway. Realizing that we were unable to hear what he was saying, and realizing that we weren't about to walk to him to see what he wanted, he proceeded up the driveway to where David and I were working. He traveled at a pace a tortoise would have had no problem keeping up with. Eventually, we were face-to-face with a really nice old man. He asked us again, "Do you train dogs?" I responded typically, without thinking, and said "Sure!" I turned to David. "Don't we?"

Our minds frantically raced for the next thing to say but luckily the man continued to describe his tale of woe and we were spared the embarrassment. Our client-to-be was a seventyish-year-old man, about five feet something short, and weighed in at a staggering hundred pounds, maybe. His Malamute he explained, was a really wonderful dog, both friendly and calm, except when he became excited on his walks, in which case he pulled on the leash. It was because of this pulling problem that he felt he needed help. As he continued the gentleman proceeded to roll up his sleeves and exposed two arms that were so black-and-blue that I cannot remember seeing any white spots. His bruises ran from just above the wrists into who knows where on his body. NO EXAGGERATION! David and I were speechless. We just looked at his arms, looked at each other, and looked at his arms again. I have seen healthier survivors of violent crimes than this man's physical condition resulting from taking his dog on his daily exercise walk. I had to agree with this battered old man; he really did need help, but my thoughts were with the mental health department! What was he thinking as his dog bludgeoned him?

Anyway, after some dialog, the gentleman hired us to help him with the training of his dog. It was to be our first dog training case—and we were psyched! We were entering the realm of professional dog training and we were looking forward to the task at hand. Then reality slapped. He returned with his dog. And what a dog! Although I cannot remember his name, or even the name of his dog, I will never forget them. My first professional dog training experience was an authentic classic!

For the sake of the story I'll call the old man "Slammed," as in "Slammed against the wall." I'll call the dog "Elvis," as in "the King," and I'll call the story "The Case of the Accidental Assault & Battery." Although Slammed had a house with a fenced-in yard, a really nice large fenced-in yard, he felt Elvis needed to be walked. So religiously Slammed went for a walk with Elvis, and when Elvis wanted to investigate what was in the bushes, Slammed went too. Into the bushes, into the trees, even into parking meters and other objects too numerous to mention. "Ouch!" was our professional diagnosis.

I have since come to learn that most people have no accurate idea about their dogs. Yes, everybody says they know the "real" dog, but very few do. This gentleman knew his dog. He was friendly, calm and large. Very Large! His breeder must have weaned him with steroids. He was almost a hundred-fifty pounds. And he was a "Teddy Bear." I look back now and appreciate the lack of assertiveness of our laid back friendly giant. He was just too big and strong for that man's own good. Of course, if Elvis was more like Kodiak, another Malamute Classic, maybe we wouldn't have stayed in our newfound profession.

Yes, David and I were successful in teaching Elvis not to pull on a walk, even when excited, and it felt good to be successful. And yes, it felt good to help out that old man who really needed help, but it felt even better when he paid us!

That, by the way, is what makes you a professional—not that you're an expert, just the fact that someone pays you!

Bob Warren, master dog trainer for more than 30 years, is opening a new location on Academy Blvd. near Vickers.



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