



FOR DOG OWNERS WHO WORK

The fact that you work outside the home doesn't mean you have to deprive yourself of the love and companionship of a dog. Today, more than 50% of the nation's dog owners make room in their lives for both a job and a canine companion.

If you have a dog, you know how good it feels to be greeted by a four-legged pal at the end of a day. You also know that caring for a dog takes more time than caring for a cat or a bird. And perhaps you feel guilty because your pet must stay at home alone while you are at work.

Given his druthers, your pet probably wouldn't trade places with any other dog in the neighborhood, even if it meant having an owner who was always with him. Playing, training and relaxing with your devoted pooch can provide both of you with exercise, and intensify the bond between you.

UNDERSTANDING SEPARATION ANXIETY

Anxiety, not spite, is what makes your dog misbehave while you're gone. Dogs are creatures of habit that appreciate consistency and predictability, explains Dr. Philip Lehner, an animal behavior specialist based in Colorado.

"When his owner leaves, a dog isn't quite sure what might happen or when his owner's going to come back," says Lehner. That's why most dogs misbehavior begins within an hour of the owner's departure. You can help your dog become accustomed to daily separation by following these guidelines:

WHEN YOU GO TO WORK leave the house in a calm, positive manner. Don't act unhappy or upset at the fact that you must leave your pet.

PRACTICE DEPARTING. Pick up your keys, put on your coat, and say goodbye to the dog, then return two or three minutes later. Be cheerful when you greet your pet, but don't make a big production of it. Gradually increase the length of your absences until you can stay away for an hour or more without causing your dog to whine or chew on things. Repetitions of this sequence will help the dog get used to seeing you leave and make him understand that you'll be back.

HOME SWEET HOME

Dogs are homebodies that enjoy a secure, predictable environment. You can ease your pet's anxiety by leaving him in a comfortable, familiar atmosphere while you're away. If you often play the radio or television in the evening, for instance, leave it on during the day while you're gone.

When you're at work, keep your dog in a part of the house where he feels secure. If he likes to sleep in the bedroom, consider letting him stay there from nine to five. Or, if your yard is fenced, install a "doggy door", so he's able to go outside.

Make your home a safe haven for your pet, as you would for a child, by keeping laundry detergents, chemicals, medicines, insecticides, and other potentially toxic items in closed cabinets. Also, keep electrical cords taped against the wall. Store sharp objects such as sewing needles and nails out of your pet's reach. And remember, your shoes, gloves, and clothes are like prime rib to a dog that like to chew or is bored. Store them in closed drawers or closets. Brighten your pet's day by providing hard nylon chews and plenty of safe toys for him to play with while you're away.

"Sometimes providing a piece of clothing that has the owner's odor on it can be a comfort," adds Lehner. Try leaving an old T-Shirt for your dog to snuggle up next to.

Finally, consider paying someone you know and trust -- perhaps a neighbor or college student to drop by once a day to visit your pet and let him out. This idea is an especially good one if you work long hours. Seeing a familiar face during the long day and having a chance to relieve himself will greatly improve the quality of your dog's life.