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To date there is no accurate way of measuring the behaviour of a dog in a kennel environment as a means of predicting its likely behaviour in a new home. The main reason that we cannot guess how a dog will behave when it is rehomed is that to a large extent behavioural changes occur relative to the environment in which the dog finds itself. It is, however, more than possible to obtain an indication as to future behaviour and trainability by carrying out some simple tests which have been carefully designed to highlight particularly strong characteristics.

We must first of all accept that the very reason that many dogs end up in a rescue kennel is because of underlying behavioural problems, many of which are deliberately withheld by the original owner for fear of their dog not being accepted for adoption. A great many potential problems can be exposed by counselling the owner when they offer their pet dog for rehoming. At this time one of the most revealing questions that may be asked is simply to request that the owner grooms their dog in the following manner;

Stand the dog and restrain it on a plain lead and collar. Now hand the owner a brush and ask them to groom it at the rear of its front legs, lifting each one in turn as the grooming proceeds. Next, gently taking the ear between finger and thumb move it forwards and brush behind one and then the other. Now support the dog so that it cannot sit or lie down and brush in between its hind legs and the from the base to the tip of its tail on the top and bottom.

Observe the dog carefully as the grooming proceeds and note any difficulty that the owner has in grooming any particular part. If there is only one area that the dog objects to having groomed then examine this area yourself to establish if there is any soreness or injury that is causing the dog any discomfort. The owner can also be questioned to find out if the dog has an old injury or bad experience that might explain his resistance.

If the dog violently objects to being restrained and groomed / handled by its owner particularly if there are bouts of aggression then you must accept that it may be a liability to rehome. If the owner cannot handle the dog, then it is unlikely that a new owner would be any more successful. This leaves only two options, either take the dog in and have the kennel staff teach it how to be restrained and handled, find an experienced owner who is competent enough to control and handle it or mark the dogs record card as NOT SUITABLE FOR ADOPTION.

OBSERVATIONS OF DOGS IN KENNELS

A great deal of information may be obtained about an individual dog just by observing its behaviour within a kennel and its interactions with other dogs.

It is possible to ascertain the size of the area in which a dog has been kept by measuring the extent of its free movement. This is particularly valid during the first week of kennelling as after that time the dog will adjust its range to suit the new environment. If we imagine a dog kept on a length of chain for any length of time then you can imagine that even if it is given the freedom of a large enclosure or run then its movements will still tend to mimic the former limitations of its

freedom. Thus, we see it exhibiting lots of circular behaviours the radius of which will fairly accurately describe the length of chain on which it was kept. On the other hand a dog displaying largely linear movements in which the dog turns and retraces its steps would indicate that the dog has had the freedom to run a boundary or fence, the distance between turns will indicate the approximate size of the boundary. A dog that has been in a kennel environment for some considerable time will adjust its free ranging movements to suit the amount of space available and may also learn a large repertoire of movements within that specific environment.

Whenever two or more dogs are kennelled together, they will inevitably affect each other's behaviour to a greater or lesser extent. This means that great care must be taken to ensure that dogs exhibiting undesirable behaviour should not be kennelled with dogs that are stressed and therefore more likely to be influenced by the presence of another dog. A good example of this is a dog that is fairly dominant with other dogs but is also nervous and aggressive towards people, kennelled with a young insecure dog. Nervousness of people is largely a learnt behaviour and takes three different forms, each of which are developments of the basic problem. Stage one as I refer to it is where the dog, when confronted by a person, will bark / growl and retreat as far as possible within the confines of its kennel or run. This dog will often try to climb the walls or fences in its efforts to escape and will only present a danger if cornered and denied an escape route. Stage two of the problem is where the dog when confronted will stand its ground and bark looking for a reaction from the person who is worrying it. If they move towards it the dog will move backwards, tucking its hind legs underneath so that it is coiled up like a spring ready to run away if the threat increases. If the person moves away from it as a result of the initial burst of barking the dog will move towards them, being somewhat encouraged by their reaction to the barking and its ability to control the situation. Stage three is where the dog immediately moves towards the person that it feels threatened by and force them into a position where they must immediately back off or run the risk of being bitten.

Observations of young, stressed dogs being confined in an area where there is a dog that displays stage two or three nervous aggression towards people can quickly turn it into a stage one candidate. This is because whenever anyone approaches he kennel and the nervous aggressive dog lunges forward, barking out of fear, the other dog will then perceive that the situation has now become threatening and the cause of the stress is clearly linked to the arrival of that particular person. The greater the frequency of exposure the quicker the young dog learns to mimic the behaviour of the nervous aggressive dog.

There are also many situations where a dog can learn to become aggressive towards other dogs by being placed into a situation where dog to dog aggression and intimidation occur on a regular basis. This is particularly noticeable around times of high excitement such as when the dogs are being fed or exercised.

THE TESTS

This series of tests was designed for predicting likely behaviour and trainability and was devised with the selection of service dogs in mind.

When a dog is sought from a rescue shelter with the sole purpose of using it on a service training programme there are several traits that would be considered undesirable that may be highlighted by the tests as well as picking up information on desirable traits and trainability.

If we list out all of the undesirable characteristics that would make a dog unsuitable for inclusion in a training programme, then most organisations would come up with a list similar to this one:

UNDESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS

- 1) Dominant aggression towards people.
- 2) Nervous aggression towards people, either general or specific such as ethnic minorities, children, etc.
- 3) Predatory aggression where the dog is overstimulated by rapid movement.
- 4) Re-directed aggression borne out of frustration.
- 5) Dominant aggression towards other dogs.
- 6) Nervous aggression towards other dogs.
- 7) Predatory aggression towards other dogs or livestock.
- 8) Too independent in nature.
- 9) Overdependent to the point of becoming obsessively bonded to a particular person.
- 10) Difficult to train, lack of concentration / motivation.
- 11) Overprotective of owner.

If we now look at a list of desirable characteristics, then most would appear as follows:

- A) Able to build a strong but not obsessive bond with a new owner / handler.
- B) Submissive enough to be led and directed by the new owner.
- C) Easily trained using the existing training programme.
- D) Sensitive to both touch and voice.
- E) Easily motivated.

These tests can take place in the dog's kennel or in a communal run with or without other dogs present. Sometimes it is advisable to re - test more than once by changing the environment and the other dogs present in order to obtain a more accurate assessment.

TEST 1. Make the initial approach which will bring you close to, and in contact with the wire mesh. Do not make eye contact, speak or gesture and observe how long it takes for the subject to come up to you and try to initiate contact. Also observe how active or passive the attempted contact is. Does the dog whine bark or paw at the wire in order to gain your attention? On the other hand, it is possible that after you have been in position for several minutes the dog has made no attempt even to come up and investigate you. Remember that failure to seek contact can be affected by other dogs that happen to be present and not allowing your subject dog near to you.

This test will highlight dogs who are very independent of people and therefore difficult to build up a bond sufficient to establish a working relationship. It will also reveal those dogs that are capable of building a rapid, almost obsessive relationship if allowed to. If you observe extremes of attention seeking behaviours this would indicate that the dog has expressed these behaviours in its previous home and can expect these to become evident when the dog is subsequently rehomed.

TEST 2. Place the fingers of your hand through the wire and gently stroke and tickle the dog behind the ears and down onto its chest and shoulders. Continue for a minute or two and observe how much the dog enjoys physical contact. For training purposes, the best response is one

where the dog leans into the fingers that are touching it. Disinterest would tend to signify an independent nature whilst the dog that growls or presents you with its hindquarters would suggest a dominant and aggressive nature.

TEST 3 Whilst the dog is enjoying being stroked, withdraw your fingers and move them to a position two feet or so in front of him. Now observe how much the dog is prepared to maintain contact with your fingers by shifting its position.

This will give you some indication as to how much effort that the dog is prepared to go through in order to continue a pleasurable experience. A dog that idly remains in its original position and is unwilling to move a short distance or worse still moves away would be difficult to motivate and therefore difficult to train using positive reinforcement techniques.

TEST 4. Gently speak to the dog and note its interest. You can also work through a list of common commands and phrases to find out if the dog is familiar with any of them. continue talking for several minutes and note how easy or difficult it is to keep the dog's attention.

The easiest dogs to work with are the ones that show an interest in being spoken to and are able to maintain concentration and attention for several minutes. If you cannot hold a dog's interest and attention for more than a few seconds by talking to it then this shows a lack of communication skills on the dogs part.

TEST 5. Make eye contact at this stage but stop speaking to and touching the dog. This should be no more than casual eye contact. Observe the dog's general behaviour when being watched. The dog should make the same sort of casual eye contact in return. If the dog goes into the 'freeze' position or growls when being watched this indicates a lack of security, particularly if it is accompanied by general uneasiness and a pacing behaviour.

TEST 6. Stare at the dog by fixing your gaze on his eyes and observe the reaction and how long it takes to obtain a reaction. A normal reaction is where the dog blinks and repeatedly looks away which signifies submission. This can often be accompanied by lip licking or a yawning behaviour. If the dog makes one or two vocalisations and at the same time backs away in a disturbed state, then this would suggest nervousness and possibly aggression. If the dog hardens its stare and emits a low menacing growl, then this suggests dominance and possibly aggression. It should be noted that some dogs will almost close their eyes and expose their teeth in a submissive 'grin', this should not be confused with aggression.

TEST 7. Whilst continuing your hard stare, suddenly either stand up or make a quick movement towards the dog and stand rigid for two or three seconds before relaxing your body posture and facial expression. Note your dog's reaction and recovery time. It would be perfectly normal for a dog to startle and then quickly recover once the initial movement has finished. A dog that takes several minutes to recover and even then, remains mildly disturbed may find difficulty in handling some of the working environments into which they may be placed. A dog that immediately tries to attack you should be discarded as a possible candidate for training.

TEST 8. Assuming the dog shows some desire to be spoken to and stroked, pick any naturally occurring behaviour that the dog exhibits and then stop speaking to, looking at and stroking him. As the dog goes through a range of behaviours to try and gain your attention, immediately re-introduce the three forms of attention as soon as he exhibits your chosen behaviour. Repeat several times for the same behaviour and you should get a measure as to how quickly the dog learns to carry out a behaviour in order to obtain a reward. After several repetitions, the dog should immediately adopt the behaviour when you withdraw the reward.

TEST 9. Work out the total time that you have been interacting with the dog and now move away from the kennel / run so that you are out of sight. Check to see how long it takes for the dog to accept your absence and continue its normal routine. As a guide, the dog should have settled in a time equal to, or less than your total interaction time. If you continue to get attention seeking behaviour (barking, howling, scratching or even chewing bedding) long after you have moved out of sight then this would indicate an over dependency and the likelihood of separation anxiety or extreme attention seeking behaviour when the new owner leaves it by itself for any length of time.

TEST 10. Return to the kennel and continue to interact with the dog by speaking to and touching. Then have someone bring another dog along on lead for you to stroke. It is normal for this dog to become excited, but that excitement should be directed towards you and not the other dog. Displays of aggression or re-directed aggression (where the dog attacks another dog in the kennel / run because it cannot reach the dog that is the cause of the excitement) would indicate a history of aggressive interactions with other dogs.

CONCLUSIONS

By using the above tests, it should be possible to predict how behaviour has developed in the dog's previous environment. It should also be possible to use the tests as an aid to the selection of dogs for the purpose of service training.

The tests themselves have been developed as a result of many hours of observation of dogs within a kennel environment and, although they cannot yet be used as a definitive guide to predicting behaviour they do nonetheless give a fairly accurate picture of behaviour and trainability.

By observations made within a kennel environment and using the tests it should be possible to reduce the number of dogs that are started on a service dog training programme and subsequently discarded as being unsuitable because of behavioural or training reasons.