

Canine Attitudes And Actions That Are Defined And Driven By A Dog's Genetics.

[The information contained in this document is compiled from resources studied by David R. Dee. This information is also compiled in respect to my lifetime of working with hundreds of different dogs and their variety of temperaments!]

Every canine purchaser, owner, or rescuer wants to know what kind of dog obedience and behavior they can expect to get out of their puppy or adult dog! While physical environments and human personalities play a role in the development of a canine's personality, ultimately a dog's "*inherent temperament*" determines the kind of overall character and conduct of the canine that will be generally experienced by the human during the dog's whole lifetime!

What are, what will be, the "*attitudes and actions*" of your puppy and/or adult dog? It has much, very much, to do with the end result of a dog's "*breeding!*" The many attributes or faults of any and every *breed*, or *mix-breed* of dog, are a result from *the mating of a sire and dam* and their *combined genetics*. The *offspring* will be born with an "*inherent temperament*" most like that of its *parents*. The intelligence, the different dog drives, the physicality, the appearance and the general health of a dog are all aspects of a dog's "*genetic code.*" The pup or the adult dog that is being trained and conditioned for obedience and social skills, and other advanced skills related to therapy, search and rescue, and/or service dog work, these things will all be specifically dependent on, and related to, a dog's "*inherent temperament.*" A human trainer, handler and owner of a dog can only bring out of a dog the kind of "*temperament,*" and *its composite parts*, that the dog *inherently possesses!* If a specific puppy or adult dog is tested and evaluated properly, its "*inherent temperament*" can be generally discovered to be "SOFT, MEDIUM or HARD!" The dog *bred and born* with anyone of these differing levels of *temperament* will possess that respective "SOFT, MEDIUM or HARD TEMPERAMENT" during its *whole lifetime!* Training, Controls and Conditioning, *applied by a human*, can give shape and structure to any dog's "*temperament*" for working towards having a positive or functional canine to live with and enjoy, but, nothing a human can do with a dog can or will change a dog's "*inherent temperament!*"

WHAT IS TEMPERAMENT?

Temperament, is a collection of drives, thresholds, traits and instincts that are inherited and innate to each and every breed or mixed-breed of dog. *Temperament is the resulting function of genetics.* It is inherited, by the *pup(pies)*, from its male and female *dog parents*. No dog develops a temperament. A dog's basic temperament never changes. Some behaviors, caused by temperament can be modified through training and conditioning, but the temperament of the dog never changes. An extremely high-energy dog, with wild tendencies will never learn to be an easygoing dog, or become a low energy dog. Controls can be exercised over the dog to keep its high energy from being a constant manifestation, but that is all that can be achieved.

The DRIVES of a Dog:

Drives are internal mechanisms that push the dog into *instinctive attitudes and actions.*
All dogs have certain basic drives. The differences among dogs are a matter of varying degrees.

The Dog's Rank Drive

Each and every dog is basically an inherently dominant or submissive dog. Each dog acts with an attitude to advance and/or maintain its social status, both among other dogs, and among its human pack. The dog possessing a STRONG RANK DRIVE will behave in whatever manner it can to obtain the ALPHA POSITION in both the K9 and the Human pack. A PASSIVE RANK DRIVE inherent in a dog will cause that K9 to remain respectful of other K9's and Human's, accepting leadership from one or both sources.

HARD VS. SOFT natures are the opposite ends of the spectrum of a dog's *Rank Drive.*
A *hard* dog will not fall apart under stress. A *soft* dog will cower at the slightest correction.

The Dog's Defense Drive

This drive speaks to the dog's instinct to defend itself. It is part of the instinct of self-preservation. It is to a fault to any dog to have zero "defensiveness" in its attitude or action when face with a genuine threat. The dog's defensive drive becomes a problem if it is too easily aroused because the dog has a LOW THRESHOLD to pain, a noise, or motion, etc. such that the dog overreacts to a life situation unnecessarily. Then there will be aggressive behaviors. Barking, lunging, snapping, snarling and growling are part of such a Defense Drive gone too far. The dog's hackles may be up. The dog's attitude and actions reveal that he senses he must fight for his life. A dog in defense drive is under extreme stress. Given the opportunity, such a stressed dog will flee instead of fight if it has the option. This is not a protective dog; this is a dog in full panic mode. The only positive thing in a dog is when its Defensive Drive goes into gear under real reasons for the dog to defend itself against an actual danger from something or someone! If a dog goes into a Defensive mode unnecessarily, it is not an act of protection that K9 is absolutely out of control, with fear from an unsound genetically developed weak character. This is a dangerous dog!

The Dog's Prey Drive

This is an essential drive. Certain breeds with a low prey drive are a crime against nature. Prey drive has to do with the dog's natural desire to chase, capture and kill prey. It is completely natural and forms the foundation for a wide variety of dog jobs, like Schutzhund, police K9, SAR, and many others. Untold numbers of dogs are needlessly euthanized every year because no one around understood the nature of prey drive. Humans often insist that if the dog killed a cat or rabbit, he will kill bigger prey and start killing toddlers next, but this is not the case. High prey drive dogs will not attack and kill humans unless there is some other pathological dynamic at work or the dog has no ability to exercise sound discrimination between animals and humans. Most dogs can do this naturally, if given proper socialization in puppyhood. A dog will not consider as a prey object any living creature to which he is exposed in early puppyhood. The job of the breeder is so important for this and other reasons! Breeders absolutely must have their pups exposed to babies and small children. An under-socialized, high prey drive dog can easily mistake a crying baby for wounded prey. Prey drive is also the foundation for good protection training. Prey work is fun for dogs. Prey driven dogs are not growling and snarling. They may bark, with a higher pitched, playful kind of bark. What you're hearing is actually a prey flushing bark. The dog is trying get the prey moving so he can chase it.

Prey drive, is good and valuable, but it will not, in and of itself, make a true protection dog. A dog working only in prey lacks seriousness. They focus on equipment, instead of their handler. The problem with an over worked dog in prey drive is that it is subject to exhaustion and boredom. The dog will simply quit working if he's being worked only in prey drive mode. Defense drive, however is always accessible. No dog is too tired to defend himself. It's defense that adds the serious edge to the protection work of a dog.

The Pack Drive

Dogs are highly social animals, just like their wolf ancestors. They naturally want to be part of a group or pack. Different dogs vary greatly as to degree of pack drive. A dog that is independent and aloof with his own family would be considered to be low in pack drive. A social dog that can't stand to be left out of anything its humans are doing would be higher in pack drive. Extremes of either kind do not make good working prospects. A dog with very low pack drive will not bond well with his human partner and will be more difficult to motivate in training. Some breeds are supposed to be independent and aloof. I.E. German Shepherd Dogs bond very deeply to their handlers.

The other extreme is the dog that manifests separation anxiety. This kind of dog always over-stresses when left alone. Such a dog will act crazy and vocalize itself loudly and engage in destructive behavior if the owner goes into another room and closes the door. Dogs with this condition are not good prospects for any type of work. The degree of pack drive is a personal preference. Do you want a dog that is really attentive to you or one who is able to amuse himself on his own? The higher pack drive dog is easier to train in obedience than the more aloof dog. Too much pack drive can be a handicap in other types of work, however. Consider the dog sent to do an area search. This dog must be willing to leave his handler, and stay in drive. The overly dependent dog is going be preoccupied with where its handler is, and fall out of drive.

THRESHOLDS

Dog's with too much defense drive are a menace to all society. A dog's level of defense drive is determined by its natural, or innate threshold. A dog's drive threshold determines how quickly a dog perceives a threat and responds to it. A highly defensive dog with a low threshold for stimulation is a very dangerous dog! This is a dog that is quick to perceive a threat where none exists and it reacts aggressively. Threshold is not a word for nerves; threshold is a function of nerve strength. The stronger the dog's nerves, the less it will panic over nothing and more stimulation will be required to get the dog to react. Some dogs react to absolutely everything in the environment. The sounds of the machines, motors, a phone ringing, sets them off into a barking, and into an out of control frenzy. The low threshold dog reacts to nearly everything and often overreacts. It is very easy to over stimulate these dogs. The opposite would be laid back dog at sleep, which barely lifts his head when a car door slams. That would be the high threshold dog.

The Dog That Is Clearheaded

The term *clear headed* is used a lot in working dog circles. A dog with a clear head is related to both the issues of the dog's threshold levels and its strong or weak nerves. A *clearheaded* dog does not panic easily because it lives in a sound frame of mind that is in good contact with reality. The dog may have seemingly unlimited drive, but it also has a built in ability to control its own drive when the need arises.

The dog that acts crazy when a stranger walks down the street, or another dog goes past the house in the dog's view through a window, that dog is not *clearheaded*! In some situations its owner can approach the dog and it will bite them. This kind of *cloudy-headed* dog loses contact with reality, and feels threatened when and where there is no threat at all. A *cloudy-headed* dog can get self-agitated, or work itself up into a frenzy over nothing because it has too low of a tolerance level. This kind of dog is all too common. There are trainers who will tell you this is a normal temperament for a high drive dog. But, this is absolutely a falsehood. The dog that is too easily stressed loses contact with reality. Such a dog is genetically unsound or mentally insane. Dog's in this condition will tell their handler loud and clear that its tolerance for stress is inadequate to face the realities of life. Biting the handler instead of the other person or thing that triggered the dog's aggressive behavior, is called *displacement aggression*. A well-balanced dog doesn't lose his grip on reality that easily. This has nothing to do with drives, it's about a threshold that is dangerously low, such a dog will either need constant monitoring from its handler or owner, or, it will need to be euthanized.

NERVES

A dog's nerves vary on a scale from strong to weak. The degree of nerve strength will vary among individual dogs. Extremely weak nerved dogs are never acceptable. Breeding which results in extremely weak nerved dogs is unacceptable. No trainer can cure a weak nerved dog. Controls of varying sorts can help a handler embolden the dog to some degree, but it will be a life-long task to, at best, cope with such a weak nerved dog's undesirable behaviors. What is a weak nerved dog? Weak nerved dogs show avoidance or aggressive behaviors in response to non-threatening people, situations or objects. This includes the shy dogs and the fear biters. Nerve problems in a dog will require an owner of such a dog to reform their human lifestyle around the needs of their dog. This is backwards in the human/dog relationship! People go far out of their way to make excuses for their dog's *out-of-control behaviors*. Denying a dog's weak nerved nature does not make it go away. Sirens should go off in your head and red flags should be waving in front of your eyes when you hear a breeder attempting to blame the environment for a dog's "bad" behavior. The shy pup that cringes and runs away from you when you crouch down to pet it is not a normal puppy. The pup is not shy, it is fear ridden due to extremely *weak-natured nerves*. Puppies like this do not grow up out of such a weak nerved nature. They grow up to be *fear-ridden* adult dogs!

A dog's reaction to friendly strangers is always significant. The friendly stranger walking down the street who pays no attention to you or your dog will never have a strong-natured dog run away from them, nor will such a dog act aggressive toward them. Avoidance or aggression are signals of a serious nerve problem. Nerve problems are not fixable. Running away from a scary object or noise is not a *training* problem, it is a *temperament* problem. With enough training, you could teach a dog to inhibit his response to a particular stimulus, but you will not fix the nerve problem. Training can, to an extent, modify specific behaviors, but it cannot change the dog's genetics. Weakness in temperament will always resurface under stress. Stress tests must be used to detect weak nerved puppies and to discover the inherently weak gene pool that comes out of one or both of the parent dogs.

Sound Sensitivity

Sound sensitivity measures a puppy or adult dog's reaction to loud noises. Fear is not a synonym for weak nerves, but is generally a symptom of a lack of overall nerve strength. The best response to a sudden, loud noise is for the dog to basically ignore it. Sound sensitivity that leads to fear responses can be learned rather than genetic. You can tell the difference, however, because if it is learned behavior, it will be specific. The dog that had a bad experience in training when it came to associate a harsh command with a gunshot, may condition the dog to show a fear reaction only to that specific noise, in that specific setting, if the situation is repeated. It takes a lot of work to train a dog out of this negative response, but it can be done, if the dog is generally sound and stable.

Life With a Weak Nerved Dog

Life is hard with weak-nerved dogs! They are unpredictable. *Combine weak nerves with a high defense drive and low threshold and you have a genuinely dangerous dog.* Who knows what is going to set the dog off? Owners are always shocked when their dogs show *fear aggression*. It cannot be excused away, especially by trying to say that their dog is just being *protective*!

Humans who buy or rescue timid or shy puppies and/or adult dogs are only deceiving themselves to think or feel that what such a puppy or dog needs is a loving owner and a nice home. Expecting a good environment to turn the weak-nerved creature around into becoming friendly and confident around people and other animals is never going to cure a weak-natured animal with its nerves always on edge. Potentially such well-intentioned but naïve people can, and usually do, end up with the dog or puppy controlling their life, instead of being in control of the animal as the human being who is supposed to be superior to a creature such as a canine!

Symptoms

Hearing a dog growl for no reason is a bad sign! Confident dogs don't growl at people or objects. When a dog's hackles are raised up it is another sign of a very frightened dog. People are self-deluded who say that they have a good watchdog because every time the dog hears a noise or sees a stranger, it growls and puts its hackles up. The pup or dog that puts on such a display of *out-of-control* behavior is a weak nerved dog, and given the chance to runaway, it will! Fear aggressive dogs only seek to protect themselves, not their human handlers. The only reason they haven't run and hid is because you are there to hide behind.

People Only Want A Nice Dog!

People who are puppy purchasers must understand that if they go to a breeder who breeds "*pets*", they will most likely find themselves stuck with a weak nerved, unstable, untrustworthy pet. Breeders who breed out of their own subjective sense of what kind of dog they like, or if they ego-driven or greedy and do not care about the complexities of a dog's temperament, you are most likely in for a big and long-term problematic pooch. Nerves seem to be especially sensitive to sloppy breeding. A truly strong dog with good nerves is very hard to find. You will not likely come by a sound nerved dog by way of "*pet*" breeders. This is to say nothing of what most people end up with pertaining to temperament in a pup or dog from a rescue, or pound as the source for their adopted pet! Not every pup is going to have the same amount of drive and some will be placed in pet homes, when that pup is not genetically cut out to be a working dog. Even if your only goal is to have a companion dog, you still need a dog with good nerves! A nervous, high-strung dog, that is even afraid of its own shadow, makes a lousy companion. Imagine having to lock up your dog every time company comes over? Or a dog you can't trust with children? How about a dog you can't even obedience train reliably because the dog is too busy freaking out every time you leave your own property? Do not fall for big promises from pet breeders. If their dogs truly are stable, sound, trainable and protective, let them prove it on the field.

Finding the Good Dog

The puppy or dog that has been born with the genetic code for good, solid nerve strength is a joy. It can be trusted to be around *attended* children. This kind of dog will not be mean; it will know how to calmly handle any situation that should arise. Owning only a *well-bred dog* with *solid nerves* is the dog you can safely rely upon.

Personal Notes:
