

I2: User Research

Project Description

Our group interview four different dog owners in order to find out what issues they face in caring for their dog, and what the biggest pain points are. On a more basic level, we sought to gain an understanding of what makes a good dog owner, and what habits and behaviors that entails. We realized that there may be unexpected problems or benefits to dog owning, and we hoped to gain insight through this user research.

User Interview

1. How many dogs do you currently have, and how long have you had them?
2. How do you define a good dog owner?
3. What adjectives would you use to describe yourself as a dog owner?
4. How would you describe your dog?
5. Is your dog social? (With humans) (With other dogs)
6. Is your dog well trained?
7. What is the biggest thing you wish you could do as a dog owner?
8. What is one thing you think you do as a dog owner that has the biggest impact on your dog and/or yourself? (in terms of health, social activity, etc)
9. What is your dog like when you aren't around?
10. When do you think your dog is happiest? When do you think your dog is least happy?
11. What toys or tools do you use with your dog?
12. What toys or tools do you wish you had for your dog?
13. How has your life changed (positively or negatively) since having a dog?
14. What is the thing that you regret about the dogs as a dog owner?

User Responses

I interviewed a 21-year-old male UW student who grew up in the Seattle area.

DK: How many dogs do you currently have, and how long have you had them?

PS: I have one right now and he's a puppy. He's four months old so I've had him for 3 months now.

DK: And what's his breed and name?

PS: He's a poodle bernese mountain dog mix named Buddy.

DK: How do you define being a good dog owner?

PS: I guess being attentive and caring to your dogs needs because they can't talk so they're kind of like babies. You have to figure stuff out for yourself in terms of what they mean. I think just giving your dog attention is the biggest thing. Most dog owners that aren't great dog owners aren't being mean to their dog or anything, they're just don't give them enough exercise or something so then they act out and they get angry at their dog for acting out. But they just have a lot of energy and they haven't been able to get it out.

DK: So what's the biggest obstacle for you for being able to give your dog attention?

PS: I think with Buddy especially, just because at his age he has to go out so often- like every two hours or so. Now he's getting a little older so less so, but it's pretty hard to stay on top of puppies' bathroom needs.

DK: How would you describe your dog personality-wise?

PS: Well, his personality is just starting to come out because he's still a puppy. But he's pretty energetic like most puppies. And he can be kind of mischievous and he's pretty smart. He only does bad things when you're not looking really. But he's very sweet and caring, very cuddly. Sweet dog.

DK Is your dog social with dogs or other people?

PS: He's pretty social with people. He gets a little excited I think so it takes a while for him to calm down enough for you to pet him. With dogs it has to be the right environment. But he's pretty friendly, mostly.

DK: Would you say he's pretty well trained at this point?

PS: For a four-month old puppy yeah, I would say he's pretty well trained. He's actually pretty obedient for his age. But definitely has a lot more training to go still.

DK: What's the biggest thing you wish you could do or do more of as a dog owner?

PS: Especially with Buddy, since he's kind of small right now and unneutered, just to socialize him with other dogs more because it can be kinda hard. Neutered dogs will kind of be aggressive with unneutered dogs, so that can be a little rough. Most dogs are kind of aggressive toward puppies because they like to pick on the little guys. I just wish Buddy could have more friends to play with.

DK: Are you guys planning to get him neutered?

PS: We will eventually but we have to wait until he's a little older. I think with larger breeds it's definitely a good idea to wait until they're older.

DK: What is one thing you think you do as a dog owner that has the biggest impact on Buddy or yourself? In terms of health or social activity, that sort

PS: Like I said earlier, just giving him enough exercise because it makes him a lot calmer and more at home. We cuddle up and have fun, he's pretty sweet. And I get to go out to, go on a

walk so it's pretty nice. Good for me as well. I can't quite run with him- I used to like to run with my other dog but Buddy's too little.

DK: Do you know how big he's going to get?

PS: About 70 [pounds], so he's not going to be little forever. A little on the bigger side.

DK: What is your dog like when you aren't around?

PS: As far as I know, he can be a little more mischievous, especially when me or my mom aren't around because we do most of the training so he's a little more obedient with us. He kind of tries to push my dad's buttons a little bit.

DK: What does he do?

He'll just grab socks or shoes. He doesn't really tear them up but he'll just move them around the house. He's kind of barky; that's probably his biggest problem right now. He's kind of just recently found his voice so he's barking all the time like when he's excited or sometimes when he's scared but for all sorts of reasons.

DK: Do you think it might be a problem or is it just because he's young?

PS: He's a little more barky than other dogs his age I would say, so definitely something we have to work on. Still a little tricky.

DK: When do you think he's happiest?

PS: He's happiest probably when he's gotten enough exercise and when he's just cuddling with my mom, because he's pretty snuggly and he really just likes my mom.

DK: When do you think your dog is least happy?

PS: When he's left alone. He really does not like being alone.

DK: How long have you guys left him alone for?

PS: Not very long. I mean, even just being without anyone in my family, even not necessarily "alone", he starts to kind of whimper. The longest we've left him alone is probably like a couple hours and he's just not happy about it.

DK: What toys or tools do you use for training?

PS: We use a clicker, which is pretty good. So you give them a treat and you click. At the beginning of training you give them a few treats and you click every time, and then they start to associate it together. So that's pretty useful for training. And then these things called bully sticks, which are actually, it's bull pizzle. Which is, uh, the shaft of a bull penis- dried out and cured. It's a pretty common dog chew.

DK: Have you been teaching him any tricks yet?

Yeah, we've definitely been doing a lot of training. My mom's been pretty adamant about it so yeah, he knows how to sit and stay. He does little tricks like touch and stuff like, but we're still trying to get him to do the basic stuff.

DK: Is there anything you wish you had or have during the training process?

PS: It can be a little tricky to find out which treats they like the most, that are high-value treats. Because then you know which ones to use for little stuff, and which ones to use for things that are a little trickier- having that information would be the best thing. And having the opportunity to go to more training classes, because even going once or twice a week starts to get a little pricey.

DK: What is the thing that you regret about the dogs as a dog owner if anything?

PS: Maybe just the timing, because my parents were originally planning on waiting for the summer to get a dog, and then my dad got kinda antsy. So we kinda just got a dog now. But me and my mom would've been content to wait till the summer, and then going through this whole puppy phase would be a lot easier with me at home.

DK: Last question, how has your life changed, either positively or negatively, since having a dog?

PS: Since having a dog, very positively. My first dog was named Wookie, and she was huge- a 115 pound beast- she was giant and it was just awesome to come home every day to this massive, massive dog. And she would smile and show all her teeth, which was terrifying to everyone else but I knew it was just her smiling. Just the companionship and having a dog is a pretty magical feeling. It's pretty weird, like the idea of just having a dog is kind of mind boggling to me sometimes. I just love the companionship and it's made me more aware of animal behavior and more perceptive to their feelings.