

YOU CAN LEARN A LOT FROM YOUR DOG

By: Robert Sher

I recently reconnected with a business coach I had not seen in some time. She was excited about her latest family member – a new mixed breed puppy she adopted from a local animal shelter.

It had been 30 years since my friend had a pet in her home and she couldn't wait to tell me how training the dog, whom she named Oscar, had transformed her life in a way few other things or experiences have done for her.

She assured me that owning and caring for a dog was good training for running a business. I was skeptical at first. How can a dog teach me or anyone else about business success?

There is an old adage I had not considered: A dog at play has the mind of a wise martial arts master, a mind capable of perfect focus. It makes sense. Oscar sits patiently near my friend while she eats at her table. His eyes remain glued to her and his nose pointed up toward the table. He wiggles a little closer to her with each bite but he never oversteps his boundary. If he thinks she cannot see him, he gently nudges her leg with his nose.

Oscar's job is sitting and staying put during mealtime. He has perfect focus. When he eats, Oscar concentrates on his meal – with perfect focus. When he goes out for a walk, he follows her lead – again, with perfect focus. When he plays fetch, he focuses on catching the ball. He can stay focused for hours.

Perhaps you should start thinking like a dog at play: Focus. Focus. Focus. Dogs can help you understand how to lead, how to manage and how to stay focused on the job.

How many times a day do you get distracted by the beeping reminder of an incoming e-mail message or a text messages on your cell phone? Do you read the news on your Blackberry during staff meetings? Are you so busy multi-tasking you don't finish assignments at the end of each work day?

It's time to stand up, stretch, take a moment to breathe, and get right back on task. Concentrate on your job, your company, the bottom line. Stay disciplined and you won't feel overwhelmed. Don't dwell on what went wrong or how you lost your focus. Instead, concentrate on what you can do next to achieve your potential instead of on your limitations.

Try turning your back on the computer – and not the people in your office -- when you are in a meeting. Make eye contact. Put the cell phones on vibrate and out of harm's way. Do not text message during the meeting. Be fully present. Listen. Respond. You don't want to get so distracted that you have no idea what transpired during the meeting.

Most dogs are always fully present. When trained, they stay on task. They generally don't stray too far from home. They certainly don't pick up cell phones while being trained and they pay attention when their leaders give instructions like walk, sit, go to your crate. They aim to please and so they practice tasks until they perfect them.

You need to be fully present to stay focused and the only way to stay focused is to practice it. If you concentrate completely on your company and employees, they will respond positively and will focus on the jobs you hired them to do. Likewise, you will find your way to business success.

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