

Primary Sources

Give a Dog a Job

By Kim Pearson

Goody Beagle here. You don't know me unless you have read my book *Dog Park Diary: the social round of Goody Beagle*. It's about my visits to my dog park and who I meet there and all the things we smell. It's a good book, and mostly true, but after it was published, I discovered that I have more to say about dogs. Now I want to talk about the important work us dogs are here to do, and why you should let us do it.

Everybody is looking for meaning and passion in their life. Even dogs. Our talents and abilities were given to us so we could contribute to the good of all. Dogs are unselfish and generous, as I think most humans would agree. In fact, it was you humans fiddling with our DNA that made us such helpful animals. We were born to work. When we work, we are happy.

Humans take their dogs to dog parks so the dogs can play and have fun, and so can the humans. Some humans also like dog parks because they think dog parks mean they don't have to take us dogs on walks. If this is what you think, you are wrong.

For one thing, dog parks are not a substitute for walks. When I run around a dog park, I'm not going anywhere, just round and round, smelling the same old smells. It's fun sometimes, but it's not enough for us dogs.

But a walk, now that's going someplace! We have a destination and a goal to achieve, and when we get there, we turn around and come home and have a treat and a drink of water. I get exercise so I can keep my body strong and healthy – so I can go back to work.

Secondly, dog parks are not just for play. I like to play as much as the next dog, but the best play is where I get to practice my Beagle skills, like smelling and tracking and howling. That's my real work in the world. My ancestors were rabbit hunters when rabbits were an important part of humans' food supply. Just because you humans don't eat as many rabbits as you used to doesn't mean that I should be out of a job. Now beagles work as explosive and bomb sniffers, and drug detectives, and even as medical researchers. Our noses are so keen they can detect sickness way before any of your human machines do. So if you want a Beagle to have fun, let us smell and track things. We'll be happier, and so will you.

But not all dogs are beagles. (Which is too bad for them.) Other dogs have different skills. Take Labrador Retrievers, for instance. Their ancestors worked with fishermen in the icy cold waters off Canada. Because of the rocky coastline, the fishing boats couldn't come close enough to shore, so the dogs swam to the boats and then back to shore, dragging nets full of fish behind them. It was hard work,

but the Labradors loved it. So now, if you take a Lab to the dog park, try to find a dog park that has water – and I don't mean a water dish, I mean a place to swim. Labradors think that swimming is life itself. And if you really want to make them happy, throw something into the water and let them bring it back to you. This is Labrador heaven.

For another example, take a look at the Terrier clan – any kind of terrier. What makes a terrier happy? A chance to dig, and dig, and then dig some more – especially if there is something in the hole that they can grab hold of and kill – or at least shake around. Terriers' ancestors were mighty hunters, bred to find any kind of small game or pest that hid in holes. And once they found it, they grabbed it and shook it hard enough to break its neck. This may sound brutal to you, but terriers are proud of their skill, and they should be. Think how many more humans would have died of plague if it hadn't been for terriers hunting and killing rats! So if you live with a terrier, give them something to chase into a hole. Or play their favorite game with them – tug. This gives them a chance to grab on, shake, and never let go until the other player gives up.

Remember: to a dog, play is not as much fun as work. Water dogs such as Spaniels and Labradors need water to swim in. Hound dogs like Beagles and Bloodhounds need plenty of smell time. Herding dogs like Border Collies or Australian Shepherds are only happy when they are telling others where to go. Give guard dogs like Dobermans something to protect. Give pack dogs like Huskies and Saint Bernards something to carry or pull. I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

This is *your* job as a dog "owner." (You don't really own us, you know.) Find out what your dog's work is, and then let them do it.

© 2008 - Kim Pearson is the author of five books, including Dog Park Diary, and a ghostwriter of more than thirty non-fiction books. Dog Park Diary is the first she has ghostwritten for a dog. For more about Dog Park Diary, visit www.dogparkdiary.net, and for more about Kim's ghostwriting services, visit www.primary-sources.com.