

Fur, Fun, and Faithfulness

Margot Roosevelt tells the fascinating story of Koyla, a 145-pound Great Pyrenees dog, in her article entitled, "Canine Candy Strippers," (Time Magazine, August 6, 2001.) Koyla was a member of the canine candy-stripping corps, on call for special services to patients at the UCLA Medical Center. On one occasion, a woman who had recently received successful quadruple bypass surgery was moved to the ICU, and should have been well on her way to recovery. But for reasons the medical staff could not comprehend, the woman remained motionless and totally unresponsive. Koyla, the canine candy-striper, was called and arrived shortly at the woman's bedside. Koyla carefully climbed into the hospital bed next to the ailing woman, snuggled her warm, furry body close to her human charge, and lay quietly, allowing her presence to work its magic. Within minutes the woman's hand began to inch toward the dog. And in no time, the two had bonded, with the woman smiling, talking, and stroking the fur of her new friend. Koyla's instinctive gentleness and patience had changed the course of recovery for a sick woman in need of her love.

When Rev. Wesley Taylor heard this story, he reflected that people would do well to emulate the basic goodness of Koyla's behavior. We could do far worse than to adopt some of the characteristics of dogliness. Here are ten ways that being a little more doglike might make us better friends to others, and might help us enjoy our own lives a little more, too.

First: Greet loved ones with a wag. Nothing is more important to our sense of well-being than feeling loved. And no one conveys love more enthusiastically than your dog. Try being as outwardly affectionate as your dog. Second: Eat with gusto and lick the dish clean. We humans claim that breaking bread together is holy. So allow your mealtime to be a real cause for celebration, as it is for your dog. Third: On hot days drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree. Relax and slow down. Give yourself a time out. Periodic laziness is restorative. Fourth: Run, romp, and play daily. Approaching physical exercise lightheartedly makes it so much more enjoyable. Fifth: Be loyal. Loyalty is a virtue which is in short supply in the human realm. But your dog is loyal and trustworthy, to a fault. What if we could trust one another as thoroughly as we could trust our dogs? Sixth: When you're happy, jump and wriggle and dance around. Thankfulness and celebration are powerful dynamics for successful and healthy living. Seventh: If someone is having a bad day be silent, sit close by, and nuzzle gently. Clearly words are frequently unnecessary as a means of conveying empathy or offering meaningful help. Eighth: No matter how harshly you're scolded, don't pout. Run back and make friends. Carrying grudges makes life drudgery. Don't keep a scorecard of rights and wrongs. Don't take offense easily. Ninth: Avoid biting when a simple growl will do. Strength and firmness can be exhibited lovingly and without injury to others. And tenth: Bark with your buddies. Don't sit on life's sidelines. Raise your voice. Contribute with eagerness. Join life's chorus.

Because our dogs see only the best in us, it's been said that we should try to become the kind of person our dogs think we are. That's not a bad goal. But perhaps we should also take some time to really see the best in them. We just might learn a few things from our dogs about humility, love, gratefulness and joy. Let's chew on that thought awhile!