

Who's the Pack Leader?

By Lisa Perrecone, CPC - your parent coach

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I am dog sitting for my neighbors this week. Rocky is an amazing and beautiful Australian Sheppard. The best part about Rocky, besides his sweet temperament is that he is so well trained. I must admit most of my past dogs have been a bit slow on learning manners. Probably because I always chose the alpha of the pack and my inconsistency and confidence as a trainer, or shall I say "Pack leader" to quote the dog whisperer, Caesar Milan. It feels good taking Rocky for a walk (sans leash) and have people envy me thinking he is my dog and his obedience training, my doing. This is rather shallow thinking, but true.

I was thinking that raising kids is so much like raising dogs. It's my opinion that if a parent read, "good dog, bad dog," or watched some Dog whisperer episodes on television they would pick up some fantastic parenting tips. The key to raising both species is, the energy you exude, a balanced life and the consistency of your actions so says Caesar.

Rocky, knows that I am in charge. He doesn't question or test the boundaries. He listens the first time and he knows the rules. Rather remarkable. Now, I am aware that Rocky is a bit of a follower, he is definitely not an 'alpha' or 'pack leader' type dog. His personality makes training easier. You could say that he is a 'people pleaser,' and 'people pleasers' rarely upset the apple cart. His owner also put the time into his training, he was consistent with his expectations, and he exercised him regularly to exert his energy. Rocky's owner is a police officer and in the Marine Corps, actually, Rocky didn't stand a chance.

Here's the thing, our children were not pleasers, especially our son. He wanted to be 'alpha' or 'pack leader', so he was always testing and struggling to be in charge. These power struggles can derail most families; our daughter on the other hand was a bit easier. When I use the word easier, it only means that it was easier for us to keep our cool and stay consistent and not get our buttons pushed when they pushed back. What I know is that all kids are different and it takes some consistent parenting to be in charge especially with the "strong willed" or pack leaders. I'm not saying we always succeeded. Some days were better than others.

What I notice most about today's parents is that they don't understand this concept of being "in charge". They don't envision the end result that the lack of powerful parenting will create. They start giving their power away at the first sign of their baby's exploratory quest for control. This loss of parental power happens so gradually, it is so insidious in nature because it creeps into your daily rituals so quickly. A wise parent must be on

guard, and be proactive. One of the first signs I notice is that new parents start asking their child's permission to do things. For instance, "Is it okay if Mommy sits here?" "Can Daddy eat his sandwich now?" The message you are giving your child is..."yes kiddo, you are in charge around here."

Now I am not condoning being a drill sergeant or a dictator, actually that is just as damaging. What I am suggesting is the following:

- Having a vision for this child, and a vision for your family.
- A good set of family values to guide you.
- Consequences for actions that do not align themselves with those values
- Commitment to practices to strengthen and live those values.
- Consistency with your word and actions
- Compassion and empathy for each other
- Acknowledgment and positive energy
- Confidence in your parenting skills

If you can master these you will be on the road to a whole and healthy family. If you need some help I would be honored to assist you just give me a call.