

Compliance vs. Defiance

Every dog has a unique personality defined by its individual breed, genetic make-up, and level of socialization experienced as a puppy. These factors not only help to categorize each dog, but they can help to determine what level of training will produce the most effective results within a fair and reasonable amount of time.

For those of you who are looking to get a new puppy, be aware that you can actually test a puppy between the ages of seven and twelve weeks in order to predict its adult temperament. These tests evaluate the puppy's reactions to new experiences and exposures to strangers, assess ability to solve problems, and measure level of sensitivity. One of the more recent tests has been developed by Joachim and Wendy Volhard, who have taken elements from several other well-known animal behavior specialists with 80 years of research and integrated them into one system called the Puppy Aptitude Test. The authors note that, "The result is a puppy evaluation that reliably measures individual temperament (that is, dominance versus submission, independence versus social attraction), as well as obedience and working potential."

The test takes only about ten minutes to perform and is graded using a scoring system of numbers one through six. The final scores help to provide a general picture of the puppy's intelligence, spirit, and willingness to work with humans. This scoring system also helps to predict the pup's obedience aptitude and working ability which can determine if the puppy would be best suited as a companion dog or could be trained as a working dog by an amateur or require an experienced handler. The Puppy Aptitude Test is printed in one of my favorite and most recommended books, *The Art of Raising a Puppy*, by the Monks of New Skete (published by Little Brown and Company, March 1991).

For those who may have already purchased a new puppy or who have dogs that are causing a problem and require more training, the question is, what type of temperament have you identified with them? Are they shy, laid back, submissive- or confident, bold, hyper and obnoxious- or even somewhere in between? These characteristics make up your dog's overall disposition and certainly define the amount of patience, persistence, repetition and correction required to achieve the desired level of obedience. For example, some people love a "stylish" dog that has flying water entries, dives into brambles fearlessly, and never gives up on a bird. These dogs are "high speed," and have tremendous amounts of drive and typically high

tolerances to pain and pressure. Given the opportunity, they may bust you entire field planted with birds before you even load you gun!

You not only need to be on your toes around a dog with this level of drive, but also prove your authority and keep them under some level of control. On the very opposite end of the spectrum are the “wall flower” pups. They need coaxing to help them through stressful situations, are more fearful in new environments, and tend to be very sensitive to pressure. For most of you who may be looking for a family pet and secondly a loyal hunting companion, it is ideal to find a pup with a temperament in between these two extremes.

Next, consider the type of dog temperament that would best suit your expectations and the amount of training that you intend to pursue. If you study the photo, you will notice the facial expressions on the two dogs that are going through the conditioned retrieve. Molly (on the right) has her ears up; she looks alert and eager and exudes a positive, compliant attitude. Now, compare that to the sulking face of Callie on the left. Her ears are cupped back and she exudes a negative, defiant attitude. Which dog would you rather be working with?



Molly is probably one of the best puppies to have come through my kennels. She is confident, eager, enthusiastic, very birdy, and loves to retrieve. Due to her compliant nature, it was quick and easy to work her through the basic obedience. In just six weeks, she was trained, whistle trained, electric collar conditioned, and was quartering and flushing in the field like a champion.

When you work with dogs that are stubborn, sensitive, moody, and defiant it can become a real drag. They usually require more training time, but with short sessions in order to keep them focused. You may have to structure your training day around their particular attitude that day and accept small accomplishments one day at a time. You can “ruin” them more easily if you apply too much pressure at the wrong time or expose them to

something that scares them. They hold grudges and push you to the limits of patience, persistence, and repetition. The squint in their eye says it all: “You want me to sit- well make me!”

When the time comes to pick out another puppy, use this newfound knowledge to choose the right dog for you. If you have a pup already, then utilize the personality traits to help you understand what motivates him/her and to define what styles of training would best suit your dog’s attitude. Happy training!

Note: The Puppy Aptitude Test is available online at volhard.com