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## Family Focus Treat Your Partner Like a Dog

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want to please me because I offer praise and rewards while I minimize his mistakes. In other words, I don't rub his nose in it.

If only couples could get over their grievances as easily! Some couples I see in my practice have memories like elephants when it comes to things their partner did wrong.

Lydia and Dave had been living together for eight years when they came in for counseling. Three years earlier, after drinking heavily, Dave threw a wine bottle against the wall during an argument. He immediately expressed remorse, and he stopped drinking altogether soon afterwards. Dave had never before engaged in violent behavior, and there were no further incidents.

Lydia continued to harbor distrust and resentment toward him for this incident, although she never let him know how she felt. Her stepfather occasionally beat Lydia with a belt while she was growing up, and Lydia swore she would never tolerate violent behavior when she became an adult. Gradually she distanced herself from Dave physically and emotionally.

After several months of couples therapy, Lydia finally allowed herself to move past this episode. She saw how her doubts and distrust interfered with any chance for a healthy relationship with Dave. She had been overlooking all of his wonderful qualities while she fixated on this unpleasant incident. Now, like Nelson, Dave would be able to think of himself as a GOOD partner and the relationship would have a better chance to flourish.

Is your dog the only one in your household who receives constant praise and a minimum of criticism? If so, it's time to treat your human at least as well as your dog!

(Excerpted from Treat Your Partner Like a Dog: How to Breed a Better Relationship, 2011)

"Oh, you are such a love! Come here you sweet thing! Kiss, kiss."

Isn't love wonderful? It's so nice to hear people expressing affection! But too often the recipient of all this devotion is our dog, not our human companion.

Although we may adore our dogs, sometimes we don't put nearly as much effort into our human relationships. Forty to fifty percent of all first marriages, and sixty to seventy percent of all second marriages end in divorce.

### Emphasize the Positive (Positive Reinforcement)

When I take my dog, Nelson, to the dog park here is what happens: I throw a ball for him to fetch. Nelson responds by dutifully bringing back the ball (well, some of the time anyway). Each time that Nelson returns the ball, I say "Good job," or "good dog!" Often I give him a treat for cooperating. Let's face it, Nelson is not bringing me money or doing my ironing, yet I shower him with positive attention.

How often do we use this system of reinforcement and positive rewards with our partner? Do we offer thanks and gratitude when our partner does the laundry, washes the car, or fixes a tasty meal? All too often our humans are the ones going begging for attention and compliments.

### Eliminate the Negative (No Negative Reinforcement)

When Nelson makes a mistake, such as digging in the garden, principles of dog training tell me that I am supposed to reprimand swiftly at the time of the bad behavior and then switch gears back to positive mode. The idea is for Nelson to think of himself as a GOOD dog and not have a negative self-image. In this way, Nelson will

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