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Ryerson Says Treat Your Partner Like a Dog

By Andrea A. Firth



Margie Ryerson with her "partners" Photo provided

"Nelson was really the impetus for the book," says author Margie Ryerson referring to her three-year old labradoodle and her new book, *Treat Your Partner Like a Dog, How to Breed a Better Relationship*. "This huge, gentle dog has such a personality and is so gregarious, I spend a lot of time at the dog park," says Ryerson explaining that her pooch has transformed her from a dog owner to a real dog person. And, as she watched Nelson socializing and observed the exuberance "dog people" share with their "best friends," it set her to thinking about the parallels between how we treat our dogs and how we should treat our partners.

Ryerson's experience with Nelson provided the inspiration for her to write a simple, short, constructive guide for couples that is also humorous. Couples are a big part of Ryerson's counseling practice. She has been a Marriage and Family Therapist for over twenty years and has offices in Orinda and Walnut Creek. "I work with couples on communication techniques and all the issues that come up in a relationship-kids, in-laws, sex, financial issues. I'm used to clients coming in and having read segments of longer books. I wanted to write a book that would hold their attention and also serve as a resource."

Humor is a key ingredient to effective couples' therapy according to Ryerson. While her goal is to help couples to understand their issues and develop constructive ways to be with each other, she tries to keep therapy sessions lighthearted. "Humor joins people together. It makes us relax, alleviates the stress and tension, and provides a place to focus on that is encouraging," she says. In addition to the entertaining comparisons between how to treat one's dog and one's partner in Ryerson's book, it also includes amusing cartoons by artist Barry Hunau.

Ryerson advocates the use of calm assertiveness in a relationship and compares this approach to the way a dog responds well to a strong but calmly and respectfully delivered message. "Assertiveness requires using good judgment, and timing is important," says Ryerson who also emphasizes the importance of supportive and consistent non-verbal communication. "70% of our communication is nonverbal. Your face has to match your words."

Throughout the book Ryerson provides real-life examples and lists of tips and techniques to support these communication principles. "I hope couples will get help from reading the examples and make use of tips and techniques," says Ryerson, but she adds that just like training your dog, it takes practice.

Read an excerpt from Ryerson's book in her Family Focus column on page D8.

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