

Nine to Five Dog

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For most of us, it's difficult to do two things at once - pat one's head and rub one's stomach, for example, or stand on one's head and whistle "Dixie." But while, with a little concentration and practice, these tricks can be mastered, no one has yet figured out how to be in two places at one time.

In the 1990's this is what dog owners who work full time would probably like to be able to do more than anything else. As more people work full time, more pet dogs are also becoming nine-to fivers - dogs that are left alone from 9:00 (or earlier) in the morning to 5:00 (or later) in the evening every weekday and whose time with their owners is limited to weekday evenings and weekends.

Owners who love their dogs and want the best for them, find themselves struggling to fit it all in: feeding, grooming, exercising and just spending time together, strengthening the bonds of companionship that are so rewarding and make owning a dog such a joyous experience. Sometimes it seems as if it would be impossible to do everything recommended by manuals, magazine articles, animal behaviorists and dog trainers to produce a happy, well adjusted pet even if one devoted twenty four hours a day to it.

Where once a household may have had someone at home all day, now it's likely that the house will be empty, except for the dog, from early morning to evening. Although many dogs, fortunately, can adjust to a life alone during the day, others may be lonely, bored, or frustrated. They may turn, as a result, to destructive or undesirable behaviour - digging craters in the garden, barking incessantly or chewing up the new oriental rug.

The dog's behavior, in such cases, creates an unhappy owner who dreads unlocking the door each evening and viewing the latest disaster but who isn't home enough to cope with the problem. Frustrated by an apparently unsolvable dilemma, the owner may decide he cannot keep the dog and give it up to a shelter. Aside from problems such as barking, digging and chewing, other problems may arise for the nine-to-five dog. The dog may have housebreaking problems or be so full of energy by the time its owner gets home that it's rambunctious and uncontrollable.

It's not surprising that such problems cause dog/owner relationships to sour. Does this mean a person who works full time should not own a dog? No, not at all. It is possible to have a mutually satisfying, rewarding relationship with a nine-to-five dog. One way is to recognize how the dog is going to behave and then arrange things so that its behavior will not upset you.

Choosing the right dog can start you off with an important advantage. Since your time with your dog will be limited, don't choose a dog that will force you to spend that time doing things you'd rather not. If you dislike grooming, for example, choose a pet with a short coat that requires a minimum of care. If you dislike vacuuming up after dogs that are heavy shedders, choose a dog that will have minimum shedding. Dogs should not be nine-to-fivers until they are at least six months old.

Puppies less than six months of age need to be fed four times a day and have not yet developed the muscle strength for urinary control. They should not be left alone for extended periods. If you are already working full time when you decide to get a dog, take advantage of the opportunity to adopt an older dog from a shelter.

Some dogs need more exercise than others, so only think about a high energy breed if you can meet its needs. The point is to choose a dog that has a good chance of fitting in with your lifestyle from the start.

Training a nine-to-five dog is a must. Dogs are happier and more relaxed when their behavior is directed rather than left up to them. They can be very anxious if they feel that they must make all the decisions. Training can strengthen the pet/owner bond and help each understand the other.

Courtesy of the Bull Terrier Club of America