

**NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE – Calm and Rational Leadership**  
**Karen Peak**  
**West Wind Dog Training**

*Under no circumstances should this be used in place of professional assistance.*

Old school used to be if a dog did X (and X could be anything), we were to respond with Y (which was always something harsh.) Many undesired behaviors are based more out of more confusion and less out of dominance. When trying to determine if a dog is acting out of confusion or true “I want to be in control,” we have to look at various things such as what the dog is doing, how and the situation. For example, is the dog maniacally bouncing around trying to get something from you or is the dog deliberately placing his feet on your lap and staring at you? Now, dogs acting out of confusion may begin to try to take control over time especially as they mature and/or confidence increases. Old school reactions from humans (rolling, yelling, hitting, etc) can be even more confusing for a dog for many reasons. Dogs are dogs and react to what we do. The vast majority of dog behavior issues stem from the owner.

A dog that is comfortable in his position is going to be less reactive, less “hyper,” and less testing. A dog that is not comfortable in his position will test, push and do other behaviors we will probably misinterpret. Some dogs are confident in themselves but do not have confidence in their owners. This type of dog may start to try and “take over.” In actuality, the dog is trying to bring order to chaos. Since the humans are unsure and confusing, the dog tries to be leader. Some one has to lead. Dogs that are insecure in themselves react out of confusion and lack of confidence. Things that bring down their confidence in them and their confidence in us can lead to bad issues.

Old school methods of gaining control teach we lack confidence and even put us at greater risk. An alpha roll puts your face in the direct line of bite. The use of collars that choke or pinch (even if plugged as safe and humane) work by pain and force. Pinching behind the ear is not kind and can teach hand-shyness. These and other commonly taught methods could cause damage both physically and behaviorally. You may get fast result, but they are for the wrong reasons. Down the road, that dog could become more of a problem. When it comes to dog management, many of the commonly taught methods of gaining control can lead to greater risks.

Dogs do not want a physical confrontation. Dogs want clear, concise and fair leadership under a confident and competent dog or human. Yet humans often go to the “end game,” giving a challenge or threat as our first response to undesired behaviors. For a dog, an attack is the last resort; however, we can teach dogs that they have to go to the last resort by how we respond. Then we get shocked when the dog reacts. Instead, we need to control resources from food to attention. We dictate what our dog has to do for anything and we “rule.” Leaders need to be fair and confident: not loud and aggressive. In a NILIF program, we control all food, fun, attention, etc. The dog works for everything he needs or wants. **NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE.**

When beginning a NILIF program remember:

1. If you have a small dog that you carry everywhere, walk in a stroller, etc. STOP this behavior. It leads to undesired behaviors for a variety of reasons. This is a dog, not a baby. We should not expect a different species to act just like us. No matter what the size, we must understand these are animals and respect that.
2. Everyone in the house must adhere to the new rules. If not, dog remains confused. All guests must adhere to the rules as well!
3. It is common for the behaviors to worsen at first. Dogs learn through experience and when things are changed, will often try the old ways with more gusto to see if they still work. STICK WITH IT. If the dog keeps upping the ante, call in a professional.
4. Having dog work for something is as simple as a “Sit” or “Down.” Once dog learns the new rules, he may start doing things automatically. In NILIF, this can be bad; dog is back in control to some degree. Therefore, have him do something else.
5. If your dog is not ready for something behaviorally, such as a good down while you eat, do not allow him in these positions until you have worked him up to them. When an undesired behavior is allowed to go on because you are expecting too much too fast, training ends and “fighting” against the behavior begins. Be proactive, start with what you expect, if dog cannot do it, and then eliminate presence from the situation. Start slower, with scenarios the dog can handle, train up to the level you desire.

Now, a few common issues owners allow to persist that undermine NILIF.

1. There can be no freebies. Dogs that get everything or even some things without human having control is confusing. This will undermine a NILIF program. You cannot lead effectively if you are confusing the dog. Working for everything means WORKING FOR EVERYTHING!
2. House freedoms will be limited to where you are. If you are in a room, the dog will be with you either through use of a baby gate or on leash (tied to you, held under your foot or in hand). You walk through house, dog walks too. If the dog is allowed to wander, he is setting his own rules. Many owners forget this step in a NILIF program or are sporadic in reinforcing it. Freedoms must be earned and lost as needed.
3. Insist on good manners for everything. Do not allow people to say, “I do not mind if he jumps on me.” This can undo all your hard work!
4. Keep control of play. If you play tug games, these must stop until your dog understands who is in control. If your dog has aggression issues, these games should be avoided. Have clear rules for all games. You start and end every game. If your dog asks for a game, have him work for it, then play. Every so often, stop the game, do some formal obedience work and restart.
5. Do not allow your dog to lead walks. If he pulls towards a tree and you follow, he is in charge. When your dog does this, take control back and then give him a cue

- allowing him to go to the tree. Owners tend to persist in allowing the dog to lead the walk. Even potty times are dictated by us during walks.
6. If your dog jumps on furniture, you are not in control of it. Rules of furniture include dog cannot get on if human is there without permission. Dog will give up his spot for human or when told to by human. Human will never give up his spot for the dog. Many owners claim to be doing a NILIF program but persist in allowing the dog to rule the furniture.
  7. Never hesitate to start NILIF again if your dog regresses.

A well-applied NILIF program can go a long way towards gaining control in a manner that is safer for the human and overall, saner for the dog.

In addition, it is always a good idea to consult with a good trainer or behaviorist before starting a NILIF program. If not employed correctly, you could be disappointed.