

It's not fair to compare this dog to 'the other dog'

By Matthew Margolis -- Deseret Morning News

The other dog: No, it isn't the latest salacious kibble out of Hollywood. At least not yet. For our intents and purposes, it's the excuse many people cling to in order to avoid accepting responsibility for their ill-mannered pooch.

But the other dog didn't chew up the sofa cushions.

But the other dog never attacked the mailman.

But the other dog knew not to, ahem, "hug" the neighbor's leg.

If that's true, if the other dog really knew so much more, then you're in great shape. All you have to do to get the new pooch to pass muster is teach him all that great stuff you taught the other dog. After all, if you don't teach him, he won't know. Then again, the other dog simply might not have shared the new pup's appetite for upholstery, postal carriers and great games. As they say, to each his own.

It defies logic to believe any one dog will behave like any *other* dog just because they're both dogs. That's like being surprised to discover that your second child cries when he's hungry and doesn't like boiled spinach. "But the *other* baby never cried and ate everything!" Just count your lucky stars that you got off easy once. Most dogs don't instinctively know to stay off the BarcaLounger and out of the soufflG. And most babies cry.

Dogs, like kids, need discipline and guidance from their "parents" in order to become good citizens with whom the rest of us enjoy sharing space. In other words, we have to train them.

In late January I made a special appearance at the Golden Gate Kennel Club All-Breed Dog Show in San Francisco. There I met beautiful dogs, groomed to the hilt, with textbook temperaments. I met proud and dedicated dog owners who had dropped thousands on handling and grooming. I also met a 160-pound Neapolitan mastiff that pulled so hard on the leash his owner couldn't walk him and a 15-pound terrier that continually bounced off my kneecaps.

Beautiful show dogs, but still not trained. Perfect teeth and bones and super-shiny coats, but still not trained. These animals were quite literally the champions of their breed. And still they had bad manners. Excepting the four legs and tail, they were like that great-looking guy in the expensive suit who yaks on his cell phone all through dinner. Remember, ladies: Good looks are fleeting. Bad manners last longer than even the best-made suit.

The good news is, it's relatively easy to teach a dog good manners — there's no ego factor to negotiate when teaching a dog. But you'll need to do some homework first. For some dog owners, everything they know about dogs is based on the other dog. They don't know about teething, they don't know about crate training, they don't know about housebreaking. They don't know about temperament testing, tone of voice, personality or the particulars of one breed versus another. While all dogs may be created equal, all dogs are not the same.

A good way to drive that point home is to go to a dog show. You'll see beautiful specimens from every breed imaginable, but for some up-close one-on-one with the dog and its owner, attend a "benched" show. Those are shows where the competing dogs are required to stay in specific areas, on benches, when they aren't being judged. This allows for interaction between spectators and participants, and it's a great way to ask questions of breeders and do some homework when trying to decide what breed of dog best suits your lifestyle — before bringing a dog home.

The International Kennel Club has two benched shows every year, and an online search of your area will reveal other benched shows open to the public. If you're thinking about replacing the other dog or getting another dog, dog shows are a great way to get a lot of homework done in one sitting. And it's more fun than reading a book about breeds.

Don't get a new dog with the other dog in mind. Even if he's the same breed, even if he's the same litter, even if he's the twin brother, he still won't be the same dog. So the next time you find yourself dangling "the other dog didn't do that" from the tip of your tongue, remember, that's why he's called "the other dog."