

## Advice From a New Puppy

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**O**ur new puppy family member is Quinn, a playful prankster. Our trustworthy and faithful golden retriever, Emme, passed away recently, and our home was just too empty and too quiet. We couldn't stand it. I'm sure you know the feeling. You also know that a puppy may be the quickest and

most decisive way to go from quiet stillness to peripatetic energy; a way to go from sadness to all-encompassing attention to "now"; a way to pay proper tribute to the dog that made it impossible to live without a dog.

I wanted to tell you about our old girl, but I find it very hard. She was extraordinary—as your special dogs have been—a golden with a good heart, smart, and so easy to love. Our grief over Emme's death was such I wasn't sure I'd find any meaningful description that didn't sound clichéd and overworn. When I searched for inspiration, I found a webful of beautiful tributes, quotes, and teary-eyed stories about dogs that have crossed the Rainbow Bridge. What could I say that would sound new?

So I searched for stories about puppies, expecting to find tales and tributes to new life, new possibilities, and the joy of living. Instead, the hits were all about containing youthful energy and getting the puppy to adjust to home life, to a life with boundaries. Is that odd? Maybe, but it's understandable. Without limitations, without clear expectations, life becomes chaotic and uncomfortable. *Aha*, I thought. Just like Julie Squires says in this issue's Final Thoughts, boundaries are essential for us all—human or not. They may not be established easily, but the reward comes when little victories add up to a huge and positive difference.

It's work for Quinn to learn how to function in our home and our veterinary practice. Julie references some great resources for the ground rules we all need in order to thrive. I asked Quinn for his 12-week-old golden retriever perspective on the subject. Here's what he "said."



### **"Know your values.**

Food, toys, getting petted, giving kisses, getting tummy rubbed. Did I say toys? Did I say food? Being loved and giving love. Sleep—but only when you

can't keep your eyes open anymore. Maybe for people, it's more like human family, honesty, nursing animals, volunteer activities? Make time for all of those. Spend time on what matters most to you. Did I say food?

**"Communicate clearly.** I see your nonverbal cues, even when they don't match your verbal ones. Understand my cues: my soulful, expressive 'look'; that little head turn when I don't understand.

**"Create structure and stick to it.** Wake up, go out, eat, play, meet/greet everyone, nap. Repeat. Endlessly. It's better when you are consistent and I know what to expect and what not to expect from you.

**"Bring up boundary violations right away.** Older dogs give me a quick growl when I've gone too far, so I learn what not to do. I get it. (The hospital cat is still a mystery.) I look pathetic and go to my food bowl if a meal is late. You get it, and then you feed me. Say something when someone's gone too far, but stick to the subject at hand. Did I mention the food bowl?

"I'll lean in, on, and next to you. Just tell me when I've gone too far. And expect great things from me!"

Losing Emme and our other golden girl, Rudder, has been difficult; however, as you can tell, Quinn is joyfully exploring and learning while reminding me how worthwhile it is to be open and to try something different. It's been a very long time since we have had a playful puppy, and I know that Quinn will provide us with many happy memories.

New puppy. Spring turns to summer again. Life goes on. Isn't that great? ■

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