

[About Steed Real Estate](#)

[Area Visual Tours](#)

[Area Maps](#)

[Community Close Ups](#)

[Directions to Steed Office](#)

[Steed Home Page](#)

[View Our Listings](#)

[School Information](#)

[Tips For Buyers](#)

[Buyer Representation](#)

[Disclosure Forms](#)

[Free Reports](#)

[FAQ's](#)

[Comparative Property Analysis](#)

[Marketing Plans](#)

[Tips For Sellers](#)

[Home Warranty Program](#)

[Seller Representation](#)

[Disclosure Forms](#)

[FAQ's](#)

[Sell your home with us - form](#)

[Open House Invitations](#)

[Marti's Country Digest](#)

[Arts & Entertainment](#)

[Concierge Services](#)

[Privacy Statement](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Susan B. Fireman

Who's The Boss Anyway?

Or Why Can't My Dog and I Just Be Friends?

By Susan B. Fireman

You can...but only if you're the boss. That's the way it is, and that's the way it has to be. Dogs are pack animals and like it or not your family is the pack. And like all packs there has to be a leader. No ifs ands or buts. Either you call the shots or guess what?...your dog will, and that won't be very good for either of you.



Reggie is a Lab whose owner Debbie let him do as he pleased. Not because she didn't care, but because she loved him. In her eyes Reggie could do no wrong until the day he took off after a squirrel. "Stop?" "Come!" "Down!" She kept shouting. Reggie paid no attention. The squirrel was more important and Reggie just kept going and going to the end of the street and across a busy intersection. Horns honked, brakes screeched, and only dumb luck kept Reggie from being run over.

Then there was Lucy, the friendly Doberman. She jumped upon anyone that came through the front door. Jack thought it was cute. "Isn't she cute?" is what he always said to everyone. Then one day his elderly mother came for a visit. Lucy was so happy to see her she did the unthinkable. She flattened her. Lucy wasn't quite so cute anymore.

And let's not forget Sam the Rottweiler pup that had a habit of putting his mouth on anyone he thought was challenging him. What Bill and Carol thought was puppy play, turned out to be aggression. Unless that kind of behavior is recognized and nipped in the bud, you may find yourself living with a loaded gun instead of a best friend.

No responsible parent, no matter how much they love their child would let a two year old run their family. The child would be impossible to live with, and a nuisance to others at best. Well, the same holds true for a dog.

So what do you do? Start by establishing yourself as the boss or pack leader from the moment you bring the new dog home. Now that doesn't mean yelling or hitting. It means communicating in a way the dog will understand. Then, as soon

as possible, housebreak your dog; teach him to walk on a leash, to come when called, and to stay in place on command. Bad habits such as chewing on furniture, or nipping the hand that feeds him, should be stopped before he has a chance to get started. And always have your dog to something for you before you

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do something for your dog. Have her sit before you feed her, before you pet her, or even before you walk her.

Unless you're really experienced, joining an obedience class is an excellent idea. A good instructor will teach you how to teach your dog, and your dog will learn how to behave around other dogs and people. But most important, if you really want your dog to be your best friend....be your dog's best friend first and that means being the boss.

Susan Fireman is a well-known Animal Behavior Specialist. She teaches in the tri-state area. Her A.K.C. Champion German Shepherd dogs have ranked nationally in the top ten in their A. K C. Obedience Class.

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[Choosing a New Puppy](#)



[Previous Page](#)

