

being barkley: 17 life lessons from a new pup

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1. Be perpetually excited. The longer we live, the less exciting things often become. Watching Barkley explore the world through her less-than-three-months-old eyes has reminded me of the benefits of being excited by everything around me. The world really *is* an amazing place and we'd all get a lot of out seeing it the way a puppy does, with endless amounts of excitement and wonder.

2. Respect limitations. Barkley is still struggling with this one a bit, but she's starting to get the hint that some things (my hair, my shoes, my handbag...) are off limits—no matter how tempting they are. Respect limits is something we should all do, even when we don't always understand *why* others have those limits. Sometimes happiness is the simple act of respecting another person's boundaries.

3. Explore endlessly. Everything is amazingly new to Barkley and she's constantly underfoot, wondering what I'm doing and looking for any little thing that might be interesting. Exploring is such a great way to enjoy new experiences and learn new things, but it often seems harder and harder to do the older (and more set in our ways) we get. We'd all do well to take a tip from Barkley and explore the world around us. There's so much to see!

4. Greet others happily. Like most puppies, Barkley is thrilled with the arrival of a newcomer and (rudely) jumps up with licks and little puppy nips meant to show how happy she is to see a new face. What if we all acted that way? Thrilled to see someone, even if we'd seen them just a short while ago? We can probably skip the jumping and licking, but a little bit of happy enthusiasm can go a long way when it comes to greeting others.

5. Stay in the moment. Barkley, in typical dog fashion, stays in the moment. Unless she has to go to the bathroom or is bothered by something, she's not focused on what's coming next. Instead, she's in the moment, enjoying and celebrating what's happening to her at the very second that it's happening. We all know how important staying present is, but we often struggle with it. Watching Barkley reminds me how wonderful life can be if we just stay in the now.

6. Be always grateful. When Barkley receives a new toy, her dinner bowl, or even an ice cube from the freezer, she is thrilled. Her tail wags her whole little body and you can just tell that she is so thankful to be receiving something new. We, too, should always be thankful for what we are receiving. It's tough to remember gratitude when it comes to life's mundane matters, but we gain so much when we choose to be thankful.

7. Embrace the time-out. Barkley's not a huge fan of the time-out (a necessary evil for a wild pup like her who can get so excited that she needs a few moments of alone time to calm down), but more often she's learning to embrace it, playing quietly by herself or giving in to a much-needed nap. Encouraging

ourselves to take time-outs from our busy schedules is also tough, but we need breaks to calm down, recharge, and feel refreshed.

8. Keep on learning. Though she hasn't *quite* mastered the art of "sit" (or any other command for that matter), Barkley's always up for learning—especially when there are treats involved. Even when we're no longer in school, we can keep learning—and it never hurts when we reward ourselves for mastering a new task. School or not, we should, like Barkley, never give up on learning new things.

9. Do what you love. When Barkley finds an activity she loves (fetch being her current favorite), she goes after it with all she has, doing it over and over and over again until she tires herself out. We, too, should focus our attention on what excites us most about life. While there are some things we have to do that we might not enjoy, there's a great deal of time to spend as we wish—and we should spend that time on what makes us happiest.

10. Brave your fears. For a new puppy the world is a big and scary place. New sights and sounds can be quite intimidating (especially if you're only a few inches high!), but Barkley cautiously tests the waters when she comes upon a scary sight or sound. It's not always easy to be brave in the face of fear, but we can be inspired just thinking of all that puppies have to overcome in a world where everything is so scary and new.

11. Conquer comforting. My heart is still heavy with the loss of Bella, and when I found myself clutching Bella's collar with tears rolling down my face on the day she would have turned nine, I was instantly comforted by Barkley. With playful nudges and hopeful licks, she conquered the art of comforting, reminding me just how important it is to reach out to those in need. When we reach out to others, we not only offer them comfort but find an inner solace of our own.

12. Seize silliness. Puppies have absolutely no problem embracing silliness. They will jump and flip and flop and crack you up with their silly antics. People, on the other hand, are often resistant to silliness, worried about what others might think or just plain hesitant to let go. We should seize silliness, be puppy-like, no matter how we might look. There's little better than a completely silly moment and we should embrace them whenever we can.

13. Forgive wholeheartedly. Being a tiny pup and constantly underfoot, Barkley's destined to a few unfriendly encounters with shoes. Even when she's been nudged by a walking foot, she doesn't hold a grudge. She's wary for a moment and then she's back to bouncing and bounding (and getting in the way!). Like Barkley, we should keep in mind the importance of forgiveness. Life's much too short to hold a grudge.

14. Adapt to new places. Can you imagine being uprooted from your home and everyone you knew and loved, driven to a new place where you were just expected to settle in and love the new people in your life? I don't think I'd do very well in that situation—but Barkley adjusted to her new home right away and I like to think she really, really likes it here now. Learning to adopt to change is hard, but if Barkley can do it, we can too!

15. Practice patience. Barkley hasn't *quite* mastered this one yet (but, hey, neither have I and it's been nearly 30 years!), but she's trying. She's learning that good things come to those who wait—even when waiting is really, really hard. And she's learning to have patience with me, a new puppy owner. We're learning from each other and, as in all relationships, we've discovered that we have to be patient with one another.

16. Enjoy the little things. How excited do you feel when someone hands you an ice cube? If you're anything like me, you'd probably be annoyed—after all, it's cold! But not Barkley. Ice cubes, just like almost every other thing she sees, are awesome to her. She enjoys every little thing as if it's the first and last time she'll ever see it. We can help but being a bit jaded by life, but the more we pay attention to the little things, the more likely we'll be to be excited by life.

17. Show your love. Barkley doesn't hold back when it comes to affection. Her playful licks and sweet nuzzles show how much she cares, and we could all learn a big lesson from her on how important showing love is. If you love someone, *show it*. Don't hold back. Instead, hold hands. Give kisses. Snuggle up. We might think our loved ones know how we feel, but it never hurts to make love obvious. Share (and show!) the love!