

Trouble in paradise



Mondays are my days for catching up on paperwork or doing emergency consultations. It is also the day that my veterinary clients know they have a good chance of finding me in. So it was this particular Monday when the phone rang.

It was Richard, head of a veterinary practice at the edge of my travelling range. He wanted to talk through one of his cases, Otto the Vizsla. Otto lived on a beautiful estate with his owners, Helen and James, and another dog, a Lurcher called Clyde. Both dogs were rescues. Nine-year-old Otto had been with Helen and James since he was a year old and they were his second owners. Helen told me later that when the previous owners arrived with him, Otto had been sick in their car and he was dragged out and hit. Helen decided then that he was not going back with them. Since Otto has been with them, Helen and James have never had any problems with him, though he is a very sensitive dog. They do travel a bit but have a housesitter who moves in while they are away or they use a friendly kennels nearby.

A year ago, Clyde became very ill and was placed on steroids. One of the side effects of these was to make him incontinent. Otto then started to urinate in the house as well. Over three months, Clyde made a full recovery, came off the steroids and was once again clean. However, Otto continued to urinate in the house and they were having serious discussions as to whether he could stay with them.

Richard did a full veterinary screening of Otto and found no reason for this continual urination around the house. Interestingly, when Annie, the housesitter, was there, Otto was clean.

I contacted Helen and James and made an appointment to visit. I asked if Annie could be

there as well. I sent out my questionnaire and asked for it to be returned to me at least two days before the consultation, which it was. I read it through very carefully and picked out a couple of areas that I wanted to explore with them, but there was no glaring reason for the behaviour.

My drive to their home was through some spectacular countryside. I hesitated at the ornate gates to the estate and drove through thinking, "This is dog heaven!" There were wonderful rolling fields and coppices to explore. As I drove down the drive, the two dogs heard my car and rushed out to welcome me. They were very friendly and I couldn't get out of the car with the enthusiastic greeting from them both. It was as if they were saying, "Come and look where we live! Aren't we lucky?"

James came and greeted me and we all went inside the house. Here I was given a tour of where the dogs slept: Clyde in Helen's study downstairs and Otto in another lounge further along the hallway. Both dogs had the freedom to roam the house at night. Clyde, they felt, wandered more than Otto.

We talked through the COAPE EMRA® technique (emotional, mood and reinforcement assessment) and, during the day, these dogs had a life that some dogs could only dream of. They followed James as he went around the estate on his ATV (all-terrain vehicle). They could come and go as they wanted from the house with big dog flaps in the kitchen door. They would go off and check on any workmen around the place.

The more I listened to their lifestyle, the more puzzled I was about trying to find the trigger to Otto's behaviour. He had urinated the night before I arrived in Clyde's bed and Helen showed me this. It was not so

much urination as marking, so I concentrated on the night-time routine.


Apparently, when Helen and James went to bed, Clyde would go off to his bed but Otto would come up and stay with them until they put out their bedside lights. At this point he would wander off and, they presumed, head for his bed. I thought that if Clyde was wandering and Otto was wandering and unable to settle, this could be a key. When Annie stays, she puts both dogs in their beds, tells them it's bedtime and goes to her bedroom. She also goes to bed later and gets up earlier than Helen and James. When she gets up, both dogs are still in their beds.

I decided that a whole new regime needed to be set up, as the current one was not working for Otto. I decided that his time of rest was not restful. EMRA® is not all about action - it is important to remember that resting is also an important component in having a balanced lifestyle.


I recommended that Otto's bed be moved upstairs to Helen and James's room and that their door was shut. This way, if he did get up then he could be let out. However, both Helen and James pointed out that Otto snored! The solution was to put his bed in their dressing room. Last thing at night, the dogs were not just to be let out but supervised outside to make sure they emptied their bladders before bedtime. They were to be let out first thing in the morning and Clyde's bed temporarily lifted in case Otto felt the need to mark this on the way through the house.

It was going to be a trying time for Helen and James, as they needed to be very alert to avoid Otto 'failing' in this new regime.

Three weeks into the new schedule, I received this email:



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"Just wanted to let you know that we have had the new regime in place for nearly three weeks and we are very pleased to report that we are having clean, undisturbed nights. Clyde seems very happy to settle into his basket at night, undisturbed. And Otto is, in the main, sleeping right through the night in our dressing room. He also seems a much happier dog - more active during the day, less anxious and especially

happy every evening to rediscover his basket upstairs near us and settle to sleep. We hand over to Annie tomorrow, as we head off to France for two weeks, so we have our fingers crossed that all will go well for her. Who said you don't have a magic wand?"

In fact it all went well for Annie as well. What Otto was lacking from his EMRA® was rest, especially after such active days! ■

Leading a charmed life isn't all it's cracked up to be - sometimes you really can have too much of a good thing!



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