

TALKING TO MY DOG

By
Rich Dixon

I talk to my dog. A lot. This strange habit serves a number of useful purposes.

Sometimes I explain my thoughts to him. Articulating an idea aloud often clarifies a difficult point. Simply hearing the words frequently convinces me to abandon an inane notion before revealing my convoluted logic to someone who might question my sanity.

Whenever I create a new presentation, I practice it in Monte's presence. He never objects when I make a mistake, and he'll listen to numerous repetitions without complaint.

He can also be a tough audience. He doesn't laugh at my jokes, which frequently mimics the reaction of actual listeners, and occasionally he snores.

Once in a while I "vent," and he's perfectly willing to allow me to dump my emotional junk into his floppy ears. When I get on an impassioned roll, he never interrupts with inappropriate attempts to interject reason or logic. He just listens, and then promptly forgets it all. He's a goofy-looking sponge who soaks up my anger or despair without judgment.

This has many advantages over, for example, an email in which I respond with hasty, exaggerated anger. When I talk to Monte, I never have to regret hitting the SEND button.



An audience that never talks back

Monte's a wonderful listener. He makes great eye contact, raises his ears to confirm alertness, and even cocks his head occasionally to confirm understanding. He doesn't disrupt my flow of innovative, stimulating thoughts with his own flawed arguments. He just listens patiently, allowing me to voice my latest life-altering revelation or, more commonly, waiting calmly until I talk myself into a corner of confusion.



Monte even listens while my brother rambles--or dozes

Of course what he's really thinking is something like, "What in the world are you talking about?" He's waiting for a truly meaningful term such as *Frisbee*, *ball*, or *biscuit*. Apparently he's learned that most of my chattering is completely irrelevant and that the most effective strategy is to lie quietly until an important phrase materializes.

I could learn a lot from Monte's listening style. I'm certain that he'd respond intelligently if he could, but he simply does what he can with the tools at his disposal. Rather than interrupting because he doesn't understand or isn't interested, he listens quietly as I blabber. And when I finally say something he does understand, like *tennis ball*, he's ready for action.

Monte does "right" as he knows it. I never worry about his hidden agendas or what he's saying when I'm not around. His motives are always sincere and transparent. He performs a great service because he does a simple thing well.



Monte's always attentive--especially when there's a tennis ball involved

I've learned to share my ideas indoors. When we're outside, a flood of interesting information diverts his awareness. Every bush or blade of grass must be sniffed. Birds must be watched, kids on bikes must be observed, obscure sounds must be investigated. It seems that Monte perceives a parallel world that mostly evades my senses. He becomes immersed in the smallest movement or the slightest variation from the norm.

Even in the midst of this potpourri of fascinating details screaming for attention, he'll grudgingly walk slowly beside me. But I know that the entire time he's wondering why we would bypass such incredible opportunities to explore, romp, and observe. With the slightest permission, and occasionally without it, he abandons the barren concrete path to sample from a sensory buffet filled with endless captivating possibilities. Familiar, uninteresting background, from my perspective, overwhelms Monte's senses with an irresistible urge to extract every bit of information.

Monte's exploration interrupts my mission. I have an objective, a goal, and the meaningless trivia beside the path slows our progress. If we stop for every flower, every animal, every new element of the scenery, we'll never get where we're going. Halting to greet every neighbor and meet everybody's dog takes extra time and prevents me from moving along to the next item on the list.

Nothing is more critical than wherever he happens to be at a particular moment.

He naively imagines that the quality of the journey matters more than the destination.

He behaves as if being where he is right now might be more essential than getting somewhere else as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Perhaps I should listen more to what he wants to teach me. The same boring thirty-foot trip from car to school door is a new adventure

for him each morning, and he doesn't want to miss one sight, sound or smell. The back yard he's explored thoroughly still contains wonders worthy of attention. For Monte, no uninteresting background exists. It's



Who says dogs can't smile?

all important, and nothing is more critical than wherever he happens to be at a particular moment.

Of course, he's just a silly dog. He doesn't know about planning, about focusing on the future, about projects and deadlines. He naively imagines that the quality of the journey matters more than the destination.

He innocently enjoys the scenery, unaware of the importance of maintaining course and following the path. He knows nothing of being a responsible adult with places to go, people to see, and things to do. He behaves as if being where he is right now might be more essential than getting somewhere else as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Yeah, he's just a dog. I need to pay more attention to him.

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RELENTLESS GRACE: God's Invitation To Give Hope Another Chance.

Please visit my website: www.relentlessgrace.com