

THE OFF DUTY Hack



WHEN to use it

For the past 10,000-40,000 years dogs have studied and refined their understanding of human body language and social signals. This talent is a function of how they became dogs in the first place, and over the course of our long relationship with them they have become experts at human observation and reading our social signaling.

Knowing what a dog really needs from us in our own behavior and signaling in stressful situations, and then employing simple changes to the environment and our own positioning related to our dogs and their triggers, can be absolutely game-changing in otherwise very difficult scenarios.

One of the best examples is the all too common problem of our dogs' behavior *when visitors arrive at our homes*. - For a large percentage of dogs, having visitors to our home is a highly loaded situation. Reactions to company can range from being so over-the-moon with the prospect of a new friend that they are bonkers with arousal, to being in some amount of conflict about how to interact with the "intruders", feeling fearful about the strangers, ambiguous or threatened by their presence, to being outright prepared to protect and defend their home and their people.

Historically, we have tended to try to tackle these problems the hard way by attempting to change the dog's behavior at the front door with "dog training" - which leaves us stressed and multi-tasking as we command a dog and invite a reluctant guest in with nervous assurances that it's ok to enter the home, leaves the guest largely uncomfortable about the invitation, and leaves the dog feeling like they are right in the middle of a sticky situation that we don't seem entirely on top of.

Rather than try to control the dog, we simply need to control the environment with some competent upper management that signals we have the situation entirely under control

The purpose of the Off-Duty Hack is to create a predictable pattern for dogs that are over-excited or reactive when guests come to the home to settle down quietly at a distance from visitors through proper management and social signaling.



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Hack

HOW to use it

BEFORE YOUR GUESTS ARRIVE, ESTABLISH WHERE THE OFF-DUTY PLACE WILL BE AND HOW IT WILL BE SET UP.

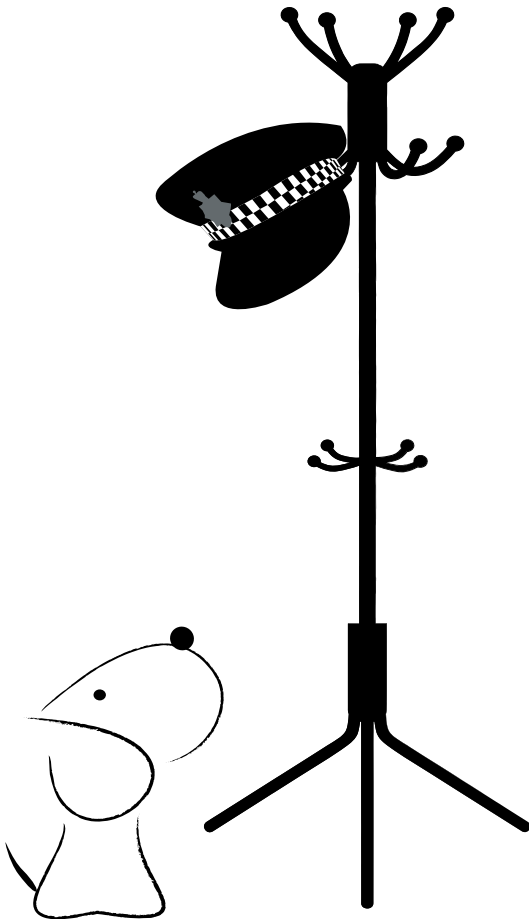
- Ideally it should be a secure baby gate or tether with a bed situated in a spot where the dog can see you greeting and granting access to your visitors. You will also want to have at the ready about 2-5 HIGHLY VALUABLE chews/bones/activities that the dog only gets when there are visitors.

HAVE YOUR COMPANY ALERT YOU TO THEIR ARRIVAL

- prior to approaching the house (if possible) so you can be ready. As soon as the doorbell rings you say to your dog, **"We have Visitors!"**, and escort them to the Off-Duty location and generously dole out their treasures.

THEN CALMLY GO LET YOUR COMPANY IN.

- Your dog will see you giving the "green light" to the guests without hesitation or concern. Ignore any barking or jumping at the gate and just proceed with the visit as if there was no dog. Eventually, once they see that isn't going to work for them they should turn their attention to the bones, etc. you gave them and begin to calmly enjoy them.



It will be helpful as you are introducing this to your dog to have some friends or neighbors come over for some practice sessions, starting with short visits and gradually increasing the duration.

< **For social dogs** who just need a time to breathe after their "new best friend" enters the house, you will want to wait until they are calm a good 10-20 minutes before attempting to allow access to the guests. This will make an appropriate greeting much more possible.

< **For the more socially awkward, fearful, or cautious dogs** they may be more comfortable just staying in the off duty area. Some of them, however, may want to investigate further and that is possible if you are confident your guests will follow your rules on how to interact with the dog.

< **For the overly protective, aggressive dogs**, everyone will feel better if they just remain in the Off-Duty station for the entire visit. Once the guests leave you will open the gate and remove the chews until next time.

**If you find your dog is unable to eventually settle or you anticipate from prior experience your dog will have difficulty confined behind the gate you will want to practice this a few times prior to having visitors over.*

When you step up to the plate in a suddenly arousing, concerning, or intrusive situation for your dog by controlling the environment rather than trying to control your dog then you are demonstrating how amazing you are at upper management and keeping your dog safe in his home when life is happening.

