3 Important Life Lessons I Learned From My Dog That Help Me Run My Business



You can teach a dog tricks, but it can teach you some, too, if you let it.

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I started my business almost six years ago when I was in college. Since then, I've been relentlessly pushing forward and watching my company grow, but sometimes (okay- most of the time) at the expense of my sanity. First thing I do when I wake up is turn over and check my email. Last thing I do before I go to bed is set my alarm on my phone and check my email. I felt a blanket of anxiety draped around me all the time and anytime I stepped foot into doing something for me,

there was always a voice in the back of my head telling me to get back to work.

Needless to say, it wasn't healthy. A business I loved and built with so much intent and passion was suddenly becoming a prison; not because of what I was working toward but in the *way* I was working toward it.

I didn't want to lead my team at Headbands of Hope in the stressed and negative way I was feeling because that would rub off on them. We were growing every day and impacting hundreds of thousands of people but yet I was always worried about what could go wrong. I wanted to find that fun, playful, optimistic person I felt like I really was.

I tried meditating (that lasted for about three minutes), I tried shutting my phone off, I tried breathing exercises. Some things worked temporarily, but then it would wear off.

But, all of this changed on June 28th, 2017.

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I stumbled across a Craigslist ad for a poodle puppy, around four months old that needed a home. My husband and I went to "just look" and immediately fell in love.

The next day, we brought home a 25 pound ball of fluff named Ollie.

Unknowingly, all of these bad habits I'd developed in my business started to dissolve. In the mornings I'd wake up and immediately take him for a walk outside without any time to check my email. So instead of waking up to work, I was waking up and enjoying fresh air and time with my dog first.

In the middle of the day, I stop what I'm doing and take him on another walk and play with him. At night, we'll play and snuggle until we go to bed (again, not checking my email).

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I guess the saying *not all heroes wear capes* is true. Some wear dog collars. Ollie was the distraction I had no idea I needed. He reminds me to be playful, get outside and break up my day. On top of being a huge benefit to my mental health, I've also been inspired by Ollie's behaviors. Call me a crazy dog lady, but Ollie has taught me about the kind of leader I want to be:

- **Everyone is a friend.** Taking Ollie to the dog park, there's no awkward moment when he's afraid to join a group of dogs. He's *all* in from the moment I take him off the leash. Dogs or people, Ollie says hello to everyone. I wish I didn't get in my own head sometimes wondering if I should go sit with new people I don't know or not saying high to someone passing by. Ollie doesn't see race, gender, status or anything. If you're in the same room, you're his friend.
- **He gets over negativity quickly.** If another dog is mean to Ollie or he gets in trouble (usually for trying to eat food off the counter!), he doesn't mope around all day because of one bad incident. He's over it within seconds and off playing with his chew toy. Sometimes, I'll get one bad email or have one conversation that sets my mood off for the rest of the day. I'm working to be more like Ollie and let things roll off and not get in the way of my enjoyment.
- **He's relentlessly happy.** If there's one thing I admire most about my dog, it is that he is always just happy to be alive. Every day starts with his tail wagging and uncontainable excitement to do *anything.* It's hard not to feel the same way when I see how excited he is just to go on a walk or eat his breakfast or go for a ride in the car. Every day has no agenda and he doesn't need one. He's just happy to be there.

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Being an entrepreneur or trying to do something big with your life can be messy and chaotic, but it can also be extremely rewarding. But, in order for that reward to mean anything, we have to find a way to enjoy the process. For me, it was getting a dog. If you travel too much to have a dog, volunteer at your local animal shelter or sign up to be a dog walker on Wag!.

We can teach our dogs to sit, stay, come and roll over. But, if we’re open to it, they can teach us a lot as well.

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