

Your well mannered dog may counter surf at camp!

If you're a first-time camper, I thought I'd give you a heads up about what to expect at camp.



In 2005, the camp cook instituted a "No Dogs in the Chow Line" policy. This has made things a lot less hectic, and we no longer have to worry about a dog's leash getting tangled in the fold-out supports of the buffet island, bringing stuff crashing to the ground. And, of course, there will be no more "mystery muzzles" appearing next to food bowls on the buffet table. Nonetheless, this is all still good information.

We eat our meals buffet style (every man and woman for themselves!) There's a big counter full of food (higher than table height), and people go through the line with their plate and seat themselves in the dining area (or picnic tables outside). Every now and then (more often than we'd all like to think about) a dog used to rear up and plop both feet on the countertop, and scope out the fixins! Smaller dogs have been known to leap right up onto a table, if it was too much of a stretch to put front paws up.

I know, you're gasping right now. That's what people usually do when it happens, too. People are shocked by their dog's behavior, and we immediately hear: "He NEVER does that at home!" That's why I'm writing this. There was nothing in the pre-camp information about this "table surfing phenomenon."

Dogs arrive at camp, and they have no idea what's allowed and what's not. It's sort of like re-living puppyhood. They're having so much fun that they think that they've died and gone to heaven. They either think that heaven is such a cool place that counter surfing must be allowed here, or, they're already IN heaven, and they've got nothing to lose for taking a wild stab at food stealing! One way or another, we have dogs whose owners swear that they don't do this at home. People say that the dogs are doing it because they don't have tables at home... they eat off T.V. trays or coffee tables. They can leave the plate of food unguarded on the low coffee table and go to do the laundry and come back, and the dog doesn't steal the food!

While I find all of these testimonials extremely fascinating, it does not take away from the fact that your dog apparently has a problem with leaving the food alone HERE at camp. (Newsflash: No one cares to hear "why" your dog has his foot in the pudding bowl--they'd rather just have their food free from dog molestation). So, I'm going to help you.

I'm warning you in advance that your stellar, non-food-stealing-at-home dog is probably going to embarrass you with some act of counter surfing or table "wading," right in front of God and everybody, here at camp. So, instead of the typical reaction of shock and surprise, followed by apologies and excuses, please be ready for this. Pretend your dog has no knowledge of manners around kitchens, food, and tables. Be prepared for that first investigative sniff, and remind him (or her) that the surface in question is off limits. Don't assume that your dog will generalize that because food tables are off limits at home, that the same rules apply here. As you will learn from our dog trainer's "Bible" (Jean Donaldson's "The Culture Clash"), dogs don't generalize well, and it is so VERY important to catch that FIRST instance of errant behavior (looking toward the table top or counter top) so that you can immediately replace it with a different behavior: sitting, looking at you and/or leaving counters, and human food, alone.



I really DO feel for the owners of dogs that make these transgressions. They are mortified. And, I personally am not all that annoyed about the dog taking a stab to find the extent of his liberties. Dogs are innocents. What does annoy me, is when the owner does nothing about it, because, "He never does that at home." Usually, they're probably in shock. That's why I'm giving you this little caveat in advance. Dogs test limits. That's how they learn. Please teach. Be ready for it. It could happen to you. We already KNOW your dog doesn't do this at home. Really.