

How to Give Good Advice

Talking to reluctant people about spaying & neutering



► **By Faith Maloney**

One of the most frequent questions I'm asked is how to persuade someone to spay or neuter a dog or cat. It's hard enough giving advice to one who asks for it, but giving unsolicited advice can be brutal.

I've tried various methods over the years: facts, logic, tears, anger, hysteria, even blackmail; however, vast experience has taught me that there is really only one method that stands any chance of working: an appeal to self-interest.

I have watched eyes glaze over when I recite annual national euthanasia figures. But I've seen them spring back to life when I mention how much mess there is with a dog in heat.

It makes a kind of sense. We all are the centers of our own universe, so how a situation impacts us directly is often what makes us change our thinking.

Once I cottoned on to this amazing revelation, my advice about fixing a dog or a cat went from the cosmic to the mundane. I began describing, in glorious detail, the spotting of a dog in heat and how hard it is to get blood off the carpet. I started telling stories about how many male suitors would be

waiting outside the front door, day and night, waiting to take their beloved female dog on a date. ("Oh, and before I forget to mention it, unneutered male dogs run away all the time, and their pee smells really strong – inside and outside.")

Anyone who has had to live with a cat in season, especially a cat with any Siamese in her, will either buy earplugs or make an appointment with the vet immediately. Their plaintive howling is unbearable and can only be appeased by one thing – a successful mating.

Once I've hit all the appropriate negatives, a little positive persuasion helps. Like the fact that spayed female animals are less prone to mammary tumors or other problems relating to the reproductive system. Male animals, once neutered, won't develop prostate problems or testicular cancer and will stay home more. This means our animals will be with us longer.

So what about those people who just want to breed an animal because a) theirs is so cute that *all* the neighbors want their offspring or b) they really want their kids to experience the "miracle of birth." That's when I start hitting the costs. Many dogs, especially the small cute ones, need to have Caesarian sections to give birth. That costs *a lot*.

Then there's the special puppy and kitten foods, vaccinations, medical checkups, etc. Reminding people that money is involved often brings some reality home.

And the final burden for the casual breeder is how to give away the puppies and kittens. Most people think this is so easy – after all, puppies and kittens are adorably cute. What these folks haven't taken into account, I point out, is that several other people in the neighborhood have all had this same bright idea. There is now a glut of puppies and kittens in town and not enough homes.

I am not saying that this always works, but bringing it close to home on the level of mess, inconvenience, and cost is often more effective than a grand lecture on responsibility and pet over-population.

Another example of self-interest at work was when the San Francisco SPCA began offering people \$5 for any male cat brought in for neutering – no questions asked. People who would never have dreamed of bothering to take their pets in to be fixed were suddenly lining up in droves!

There's nothing wrong with appealing to each other's self-interest. In any case, doing good for the animals really *is* in our self-interest. And by having our pets spayed or neutered, they will live longer, stay home more, smell less, not be a noisy nuisance, and save us lots of money. What's not to like about that? 🐾