

The world according to Gus

Photo by Mike Yonts

My name is Gus. I am a Golden Retriever. I am a handsome fellow, if I do say so myself. My human is Terry Harrell. She is quite handsome for a human, but I must say that on the whole humans are not a particularly attractive lot. You are almost hairless, and the coat you do have is either too fine or too coarse. Your ears are so small – it’s a wonder you can hear anything at all.

Your eyes are small, too. It’s no wonder that you can’t see much farther than that tiny nose on your face.

Speaking of noses, that miniature nose means you can’t smell anything unless it is right in front of you. When you do smell something, you insist on classifying it as good or bad. I have never understood this. A smell tells you what something is or who someone is or where they have been. It is an information highway for every animal except humans. Humans think it is cute to teach dogs how to shake hands, but I think it would be much better if dogs taught humans how to smell each other. You would learn so much more about a person from how they smell than from just touching paws.

Back to Terry – she is a lawyer. One of the most interesting things Terry and I do is go to meetings with other lawyers. Sometimes it’s just a few people in a small room. But two or three times a year we go to big meetings with hundreds of lawyers. Terry says these meetings are for humans to learn how to be better lawyers.

My favorite thing to do at these meetings is to observe the lawyers. Sometimes they stop to pet me or scratch me behind my ears. But most times they just rush by, heading from one meeting to the next, with their cell phones stuck to their tiny ears. For some reason, they often bark at the phone, sometimes very loudly and for a very long time. I don’t understand this.

After going to so many of these meetings, I think these people would be better lawyers and happier humans if they were more like me. So here are a dozen tips to be healthier, happier and more productive.

1. Get plenty of sleep. Dogs know the fundamental truth that a body needs sleep. Heck, even cats know this, and everyone knows how stupid cats are. As children, humans understand this, too. But as they grow older, they somehow forget the value of sleep.

Humans, particularly lawyer-humans, stay up late, doing all sorts of things like reading files they bring home from the office or watching what they call “the News” or “the Colts” or looking at something I don’t understand at all called Facebook. Then the next morning, those same humans try to get up long before their



body is ready. They have a clanging noise wake them up even though their body is telling them “I need more sleep!” And lawyer-humans rarely take naps.

Sleep is the way you refresh your body. It gets you ready to face the world. If you don’t get enough sleep, you’re always going to be growling and snarling. You can’t run or chase squirrels or do anything else important without enough sleep.

2. Exercise regularly. You can’t be your best unless you exercise. Lawyers seem to spend all day sitting at desks, pecking on computer keyboards and barking at phones. They don’t get their heartbeat racing or work their muscles – except the ones connected to their mouths.

If you don’t use your muscles, they wither away (except for cats, who somehow can be the laziest creatures on earth but still run and climb really quickly). Chase rabbits and squirrels regularly. If you don’t have any squirrels or rabbits in your yard, just make sure to walk, stretch and work your muscles. Swim if you have the opportunity. I love when Terry takes me swimming.

3. Eat the right food. You can’t work or play if you don’t eat the right food. Terry feeds me only the best food. It took us a while to find the food that made my coat the most beautiful, but I feel and look so much better since we did.

Once after everybody went to bed, I found something left out on a counter. It’s called chocolate, and my human loves chocolate. So I grabbed this bar when no one was looking. That was not a good experience. Apparently chocolate is very bad for dogs.

It’s just like that for humans. Even if they taste good, certain foods are bad for you. Humans should watch how much red meat, fats and sweets they consume. But just like dogs, you have to figure out

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what food makes your coat shine and what foods cause bad experiences.

You also need to watch how much you eat. Dogs and humans both want to eat as long as there is food in the bowl. It's hard not to eat more than you need. But Terry helps me. She just gives me a smaller supper bowl. Maybe humans need smaller supper bowls, too.

4. Wag your tail when you work. I love my work. I was trained to be a therapy dog. I work with humans to comfort them and ease their stresses. It's not always easy. Some humans can be very difficult to deal with. But I find that if I use my energy and training to do the best job I can, it makes doing tasks more enjoyable, and the tail wagging just takes care of itself. Despite

the difficult humans, I still wag my tail, knowing I'm doing the best that I can. Some days that's all a dog can do.

5. Deal with what is in front of you. Humans, and particularly lawyer-humans, seem to worry about a lot of stuff that has happened in the past or might happen in the future. I don't. I can't do anything about what already happened. And I don't know what is yet to come. If there is a squirrel in front of me, I chase it. I don't worry about the squirrel I missed yesterday or whether there will be a squirrel there tomorrow.

I have learned to savor every moment, whether it's running after a squirrel, lying in a ray of sunshine or snuggling on the couch with my human. I think people, particularly lawyers, miss many of those opportunities.

6. Include time in your day for play. Everyone needs to do something besides work. Your mind and your body both need to relax and have fun. Keep a ball or Frisbee in your office and play fetch. Take a day to go to the bark park and play with others like yourself.

7. Reward yourself with small treats. Treats make everything special. When you do something good, you should reward yourself with a treat, whether it's a bit of something special or just doing something you really enjoy. It makes your tail wag and just makes life better.

8. Approach everyone with the presumption that they are good. Most dogs treat humans with the presumption that they are good. It makes us much happier than suspecting that everyone is out to do us harm. Those unfortunate dogs that do suspect everyone is out to get them usually end up in very sad situations. I think the same is true for humans.



Golden Retriever Gus (lower right) joins another therapy dog, Kirby, at the ISBA Solo & Small Firm Conference in French Lick, Ind., earlier this year. They had a great time on the 5K Fun Run/Walk!

9. Show affection and let others show affection to you. Nothing is as rewarding as a scratch behind the ears or a pet on the head. Sometimes I even turn over on my back and let people scratch my belly.

Greet those you love with great enthusiasm so they know how important they are to you. To show appreciation, I'll wag my tail, "talk to you" and lick you. Terry pretends she doesn't like it when I lick her face, but she smiles and laughs. Follow the slogan, "Wag more and bark less." It really *does* work.

Showing love, giving love, being open to love – that's what makes life worth living. Don't shut yourself off from those opportunities, whether from humans or dogs or even cats.

10. Find humor in life. The one advantage humans have over dogs is that it is so easy for people to smile and laugh. But so often they don't. Most lawyers seem to

take themselves too seriously. They walk around with stern looks, head down and shoulders hunched forward. Dogs know this is not a good way to go through life.

Even just a moment of humor raises your spirits and makes the rest of the day so much better. It may be the joy of romping for a few minutes, laughing with a friend or simply chuckling at your own foibles. Terry and I always laugh at least once a day. Well, actually, Terry laughs, and I jump and bark. Dogs haven't mastered laughing yet. But if you look closely, we do smile.

11. Work hard. I bet you didn't expect me to say that, but I have a job, too. I work as a therapy dog, and I work at obedience training with Terry as well. When we work, we focus and work really hard. But we mix in play with our work, and we balance our work with lots of rest, more play, snuggling, napping,

playing with friends, sleeping and belly rubs. This way, I'm willing to work hard again the next day and do my very best.

12. Care for yourself. Every dog needs a good vet, and humans need a good primary care doctor. Just like me, you should see him or her at least once a year. Your doctor gets to know you and can recommend ways to keep you healthy. If you do get sick or make the mistake of chasing a porcupine and get injured, your doctor will already know you, which always helps with treatment.

I love my vet, Dr. John Klarquist. He is actually a lawyer-human, too. Terry thinks that is why he is good at answering her questions. She does ask a lot of questions, but I guess all lawyers do. Unfortunately, he doesn't see

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humans, so you will have to find your own doctor.

Humans also have other issues that affect their health, such as stress, anxiety, depression and substances they take. If you would like to talk confidentially to a human about how to be happier, healthier and more productive, you can call the Indiana Judges & Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP) at 866/428-5527 or 317/833-0370. That is where Terry works. It's so confidential, she doesn't even tell me.

Bonus Tip: Bathe occasionally. Dogs don't mind, but you should do this as a courtesy to other humans. But not too often. It takes the shine off your coat. 🐾

Author's Note: I would like to thank my human, Terry, and her good friend, Steve Terrell, for their assistance in crafting this article. Honestly, I'm good at a lot of things, but typing is not one of them.