

## The Dog Did It OR Blame The Bird

Most all of us have experienced the scenario where all are sitting around in a room when suddenly faces crinkle, noses start to curl, everyone looks at each other when someone looks at the innocent dog laying on the rug and says "the dog did it". How many of us tend to look for someone or something to blame when something goes wrong.

If we tend to blame someone else rather than look at the real cause which in many cases is ourselves then we don't have to take responsibility for our own actions and we also won't make improvements that could change the outcome of given events.

Problem behaviors are often blamed on "the parrot". As soon as we blame the parrot we have tied our hands when it comes to finding possible solutions that might be tried. We limit what we can do because after all we can only do so much if it's truly "the parrot's fault" right? Statements such as: You have a "Super 'Too", "Your bird will test you at some point", "The bird is hormonal", "He's a dominant bird", "Cockatoos are needy and demanding" and many many more all lead you down the path of if there's a problem behavior then "blame the parrot". Nothing or very little can be done if it's truly out of our hands.

The results of that type of blame the bird thinking would vary but some possibilities depending on what behavior the bird is being blamed for could be the bird is eventually relinquished, put up for sale, or maybe spends more time than it should sitting in the cage, possibly covered up most of the day, maybe nothing much to do since the mean bird might bite if you try and enrich the cage. In some cases the bird may end up being euthanized or if it ends up in a parrot shelter that doesn't have adequate behavior knowledge it might be labeled as a bird that isn't suitable for a new home or in "rehab" for several years. The word "rehab" also tends to put blame on the bird. Why would a good bird need rehabilitation? Perhaps evaluation period would be a better term as in getting to know the birds individual personality. Although in some cases rehabilitation may be an appropriate term such as the Cockatoo that has been mishandled by its people for years through excessive cuddling and is how a chronic choacal prolasper or knows no other way to interact with humans than to quiver ecstatically. Or some cases of extreme fear where a bird thrashes when people come near so needs to learn how to trust again.

If we consider the bigger picture of everything (that includes us) that is going on when the bird bites rather than stopping at blaming it for biting then we can better find real solutions and start building a true relationship between ourselves and our birds. If we fall into the trap of blame however then what you think or wish for just might come true. After working with birds and consulting for many years I have found owners who think parrots bite end up with biting parrots, if they believe birds are dominant they have trouble getting birds to step up and are often bitten. If they believe Cockatoos need them 24/7 then they find themselves with a bird they can never leave even to use the bathroom. They become prisoners in their own home. Funny or actually not so funny thing is that their birds didn't come to them that way!

By talking to people in these situations IF the magic word here is IF they follow suggestions, listen and learn to change their own behavior and make any other needed changes in the environment they find the bird is suddenly a good bird. Or in cases where birds have been relinquished for lunging, biting, terrorizing the household and go to a new environment that sets those birds up to succeed through antecedent arrangement and use of positive reinforcement those behaviors are never seen. I have yet to

find a bird that truly is the problem or is any of the labels some people place on them. The importance of continued learning about behavior science and not hearsay about the behavior can't be stressed enough. Parrot welfares are filling up and many are full, good homes for birds waiting can be hard to find. Every parrot in a parrot welfare was once someone's loving pet bird and some still are but many more are dumped for various reasons. Birds should not be dumped just because we want to blame them alone for problem behaviors instead of looking at ourselves and finding ethical solutions.