

# **What Dogs Teach Us About Work and Play**

By Matt Weinstein

There are very few things that are certain in this lifetime, but here is one of them: I will get tired of throwing the ball long before my dogs are tired of chasing after it.

And here's another one: I will be the first one to cry "Uncle!" in a game of tug of war with the red cloth snake. Or the blue octopus. Or the stretchy brown dachshund. Or any of the dog toys at all.

When I pull out the squeaky toy fish, I've never seen one of my dogs give me a look that says, "Can't we do this later? I'm too tired!" Even if the squeaking of the fish has roused them from a sound sleep, the dogs always respond by scrambling instantly to their feet with a look that says, "Great idea! Glad you thought of it! Let's play!"

Dogs have an endless capacity to play. It is definitely one of their top priorities, and they do their best to remind us that it should be one of ours, too.

When I'm working at my desk, my standard poodle Celeste will lie quietly at my side. But after a while, she'll decide that I've worked hard enough. She'll get up, stretch her body, then shake herself all over. If I still haven't gotten the hint at that point, she'll walk over to my chair and begin rubbing her nose against my arm. When I look over to her, she'll cock her head to the side and look up invitingly, as if to say, "Well? Have you had enough work yet? Let's go out and have some fun!"

I walk reluctantly outside with her and begin to re-tie my sneakers, and Celeste knows that she has won. She grabs a stick in her mouth, and begins to run in ever-widening circles around me, increasing her speed with every revolution. Speed is another form of communication for dogs, and the faster she runs, the happier she seems to be. I start laughing out loud to see her big poodle ears flapping in the wind as she dashes by, like miniature wings on the top of her head. Already I'm feeling better, and I haven't even gone ten feet out the door.

I am convinced that Celeste is on to something important here. I always return to work refreshed from our walk, and reinvigorated from our little break. Work and play are connected in that way: I often do my best work after some good play, because my head is clear and my body is relaxed and my spirit is soaring. Taking an occasional break is important in any kind of ongoing work activity, but if the break involves play, it is even more nourishing. If we want to take care of ourselves at work every day, taking a spontaneous play break is the best thing we can do for our health and mental wellbeing.

As our dogs constantly remind us, anytime is the right time to play.



*Matt Weinstein is the founding president of **Playfair, Inc.**, an international team building organization that pioneered the study of fun at work. Matt is the author of the international best-seller **Managing To Have Fun**. His latest book is **Gently Down The Stream: Four Unforgettable Keys To Success**. He can be contacted at [www.Playfair.com](http://www.Playfair.com).*