

Dr. Ernie Ward, DVM

Ernie has more than 20 years of experience in the veterinary industry and is a well-known veterinarian, media personality and author. He is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

A columnist for the U.K.'s [Daily Mail](#) recently shared her purchase and subsequent abandonment of four [dogs](#) in a four-year period. [In a posting on DailyMail.com](#), Shona Sibary, writes, "The minute they become too much trouble — which they always do — I fall out of love and start advertising them in the classifieds section of our local newspaper." This makes me outrageously sad.

As a practicing [veterinarian](#) for the past 23 years, I've unfortunately seen plenty of this kind of thinking. People get a [puppy](#), love it for a few months, then dump it when things turn tricky. What upsets me most about this story is how brazenly Sibary writes about giving away these living, loving creatures. She writes on DailyMail.com, "So where, today, are all these four-legged friends I promised a 'for ever home' to? I'm ashamed to say I have absolutely no idea."

Sibary isn't alone, but by focusing our attention on why this is a problem, we can help prevent this scenario from being repeated millions of times each year in the U.S. and U.K. A big problem with this kind of thinking is the failure to accept personal accountability for relinquishing pets. Sibary spends most of her 2,300 words defining the shortcomings and faults of the dogs ("Maybe one that is less bouncy, less barky, less inclined to moult everywhere. And so the new search begins and I cannot rest until I have found a replacement puppy to lie adoringly at my feet"), when all they really needed was commitment and compassion.

Why do most dogs end up in shelters?

Most animals end up in animal [shelters](#) for the crimes of [peeing or pooping](#) in the house, barking, [chewing](#), scratching, or, as Sibary puts it, "... the moment things get complicated and they develop a problem, I don't covet a dog-free existence like any other sane person might. Instead, I start wondering if there is another, more suitable dog out there." In other words, if you get a dud-dog, try another one. It's not me; it's the dog. It is

this sentiment, in my opinion, that leads to millions of animals being senselessly euthanized: If a pet becomes too much trouble, swap it out until you get one that works.

How can we keep more dogs out of shelters?

The truth is most dogs and [cats](#) will work just fine if the owner is willing to work with them. The real problem is when we demand instant-gratification with minimal participation, prefer pre-packaged perfection delivered to our door, and spend more time researching return policies than learning new skills or solving problems. It's no wonder we would then have rampant relationship problems. Living beings aren't shrink-wrapped in a factory with strict quality control measures and reset buttons. Individual living beings require work.

Before you get a new dog, make sure you're ready

When it comes to living with humans or animals, there will always be effort involved. That struggle is worth it because of love. To encourage 'puppy-love' to progress to a deeper, more meaningful and rich relationship, I've always advocated for a minimum two-date rule when choosing a pet:

- Meet the dog or cat, spend as much time as possible together, and return home pet-free to evaluate your feelings
- If after a good night's sleep, you're still enamored, schedule a second date

Successfully connecting with a pet on two separate occasions indicates you're ready for a lifelong commitment.

Most folks purchase, adopt or rescue animals on impulse. Sometimes there's outside urgency or pressure to immediately decide, often resulting in "rescue remorse." I've heard too many excuses. "I wished we'd known he was a barker," or "She's a little more rambunctious than I wanted." Take the time to get to know a prospective family member and see if you're truly a perfect match. If the love isn't there, only the problems will remain. True love provides the patience and perseverance to overcome these obstacles.

The problem with re-homing pets due to

behavior issues

Pets aren't products or fashion and [lifestyle accessories](#). They're living, breathing, loving beings that deserve our complete commitment far beyond the cuteness of puppyhood. Shona Sibary doesn't need any more attention, although I hope the negative outcry will convince her to consider her remaining dog, Clover [according to Daily Mail], a forever commitment. If you're fuming, I urge you to address the larger problem. I'm more concerned with the hundreds of thousands of silent, serial pet returners content to discard any animal that isn't arbitrarily "perfect." If you're involved in animal rescue or encounter someone contemplating adding a pet to their home, consider recommending my two-date rule. I'd rather delay an adoption or potentially miss a re-homing opportunity than experience rescue rebound. The psychological trauma a pet endures bouncing from home-to-home can be devastating. Do everything you can to provide the perfect, permanent home for every animal. Until our society fully embraces the notion of "forever" for pet ownership, it's our obligation to create systems that prevent pets from being traumatized. If you're having problems with your dog, talk with your veterinarian. Your vet may be able to help, or refer you to an appropriate expert.

Also check out:

- [Dogs, Digging, and What You Can Do About It](#)
- [What Happened to My Well-Mannered Puppy?](#)
- [Think Carefully Before You Give Pets as Gifts](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.