

“A Rose by Any Other Name Would Smell as Sweet”

—Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare

Q I adopted an older dog from a shelter who was an owner surrender. He was called Spike and I would like to change his name. Is that possible? Will he learn to respond to a new name?

● Arden Moore ● Steve Brooks

FIRST, I'D LIKE TO COMMEND YOU ON RESCUING your dog from a shelter! Knowing your new dog's old name helps because my first suggestion is to find a similar name to Spike... like Mike or Ike. If you prefer another name, the good news is it's never too late to completely change a dog's name. Some of the best dogs I've ever met have single syllable names, but I find that most dogs respond best to two or three syllable names ending in "y" or "ie" (like Spikey). Names that sound like 'no' like Bo and Bruno are usually not ideal.

The name itself isn't nearly as important as *how* you say it; what matters is the tone and rhythm. You're aiming for a happy, calm, and sweet tone. When you say your dog's name, it means to look at you...one of the most important things a dog needs to learn.

To teach your dog their name: hold a treat behind your back or hidden somewhere on your body in close proximity. If you feel lucky, say their new name, and if they look at you, great! Mark it with a click sound

or "Good girl/boy" and say their name again to reinforce it. Get eye contact and connect for a second, then immediately give them a treat. Repeat several times.

If you don't feel lucky, don't ask their name over and over again...wait until they look at you on their own. When

they do look at you, bring your hand with the treat to your face for eye contact and label it by saying their name. Pause for a second...take a deep breath, connect, and immediately deliver the treat. Your dog will learn their name in no time! 🐾

ARDEN MOORE hosts the Oh Behave weekly radio show on petliferradio.com, is founder of the fourleaguelife.com pet community and creator of National Dog Party Day. **STEVE BROOKS (CPDT-KA)**, founder of Steve Brooks K9U has been teaching dogs a solid foundation of real-life manners, specializing in behavior problems for more than 20 years. stevebrooks9u.com.

FIRST, TAKE A WELL-DESERVED (PLAY) BOW for adopting an older dog at an animal shelter. You are giving this dog a second chance for a happy, healthy life for the second half of his life. And, yes, you can successfully change this dog's name and get him to respond to the new moniker.

Years ago, I adopted a Husky-golden retriever mix from a local animal rescue group. She was named BJ and about two years old. But within a few days of acclimating to my home, she was happily answering to her new name: Chipper. I dubbed her Chipper because she sports a happy grin and because of my love of golf (and please note that my short game on the links did improve after I adopted her—talk about name power!).

I'm a proponent of changing a shelter dog's name for a couple of reasons. The name change symbolizes a fresh start for this dog who may have been abused or neglected and has a negative association with his name. Also, your bond with this new dog gets bolstered quickly because it is you who came up with the new name. The equation to success is simple: new home, new pet parent deserves a new name.

You can start by initially calling him by his old name paired with his new name while he adjusts to life with you. For example, "Spike-Chipper." And within a few days, drop the "Spike" from your call out.

Dogs do learn their names, but they are savvy at reading our tones and body postures. So, when introducing the new name for Spike, say it in an upbeat tone. When he makes eye contact, reinforce this attention-requesting name by proclaiming, "Good, Chipper!" and immediately follow by giving him a small, healthy treat. The goal is for your new dog to discover that heeding your name calling merits him either a treat or praise.

Be consistent in calling your new dog by his new name and in time, when your friendship bond is strong, he will be ready for the next name game challenge: nicknames! Most dogs respond to their formal name as well as nicknames. Right, Chipper-licious? Right, Devil Dog? I mean, right, Chipper? 🐾

