


# Substantial Disruption



<https://www.substantialdisruption.com/>

## All Hail the Interdog!

By Mike Tully

Humans domesticated wolves and they became our helpmates, gradually evolving into the domestic canines we cherish today. At least that's what is commonly accepted, but I'm not sure. I suspect canines helped domesticate us as well. Early humans certainly noticed that wolves had developed a governing hierarchy, as they had. It was a shared trait.

So was the concept of *quid pro quo*. Wolves came to realize that humans were wasteful, and much of what they wasted was tasty. More importantly, it didn't have to be chased down and killed. Pretty good deal, right? Not long after humans recognized that certain wolves seemed to be ever-present, a bargain slowly developed. Humans began to feed the wolves. The wolves began to merge with human packs. Humans learned that wolves could help protect the tribe and even assist in the hunt. Wolves smelled game long before humans detected them and helped bring it down.

When you walk your dog, you are replicating 15,000 years of the magical relationship between canines and humans.

Whether or not canines evolved a hierarchical structure before humans did, one thing is certain: they came up with social networking before we did. Long before the Internet, there was the *Interdog*.

Back to walking your dog. You know the drill: walk, sniff, walk, sniff, walk, sniff, repeat. It can be maddening for humans who aspire to a brisk walk (especially if the air actually is brisk). The problem is, a non-stop pace is not a reality in most dogs' lives. That's because a walk is more than a stroll to a dog. It's an ongoing learning experience. We've all seen people who walk while using their phones. Sometimes they'll pause to scroll the screen, send a text, or make a call. Well, the smart ones do. The others show up in videos showing them falling into a manhole, smacking into a tree, or (I actually saw this) walking directly toward an oncoming bear.

Think of smartphone walkers when you lose patience with your dog's frequent sniff and pee stops. The behaviors are very much alike. Humans like to walk while keeping in touch with the Internet. Canines like to walk while keeping in touch with the Interdog.

You've seen the Interdog. It's that large rock where your dog stops and sniffs on every walk. It's likely that your dog will pee on that same rock, at least if it's a male. But a male dog is not just marking his territory and female dogs also sniff and pee. All those rocks, fire hydrants, walls and other popular sniff and pee places are the structure of dogs' social network. It's Facebook with a different body part.

“This means that sniffing a fire hydrant or a tree along a route popular with other dogs is a means of keeping abreast of current events,” [writes Dr. Stanley Cohen in \*Psychology Today\*](#). “That tree is really a large dog tabloid containing the latest news items in the dog world. While it may not contain installments of classic canine literature, it certainly will have a gossip column and the personals section of the classified ads.”

Dogs learn about other dogs when they visit the Interdog. They can discern gender, size, diet, age, even emotional state. “Urine can tell another dog how he was feeling when he peed,” observed Ada McVean, [writing in \*Animal Wellness\*](#). “Dogs produce different hormones when exhibiting different emotions, and these hormones can be detected in their urine. When another dog sniffs the urine, he can determine the ‘pee-er’s’ stress levels.”

Remember the old meme, “[On the Internet, Nobody Knows You’re A Dog?](#)” That *New Yorker* cartoon, published thirty years ago, was a savvy comment on the anonymity of the new phenomenon known as the Internet. Anonymity means you can lie about yourself. But lies are told on the Interdog as well. Dr. Cohen notes that male dogs like to mark vertical surfaces for two reasons: (1) the scent will carry farther when it’s off the ground, and (2) it lets other dogs know how big you are. Size matters to dogs.

And small dogs lie about their size. Consider this example by Dr. Marty Becker, [writing in \*VetStreet\*](#): “Have you ever watched the effort a tiny dog will put forth to make his mark more substantial than any other’s? It can be dramatic. I’ve known many little dogs who have an almost acrobatic ability to stand on their front legs and adjust their rear ones to squirt as high as any Great Dane can. They put the high-hitching leg-lifters to shame! These dogs are trying to ‘overmark’ the scent of other dogs, and they won’t let short legs stop them.”

That can lead to awkward dog park comments like, “Funny, you smelled taller.”

The human brain, with its frontal cortex and executive function, is a marvelous creation. So is a dog’s nose, which gives them a sense of smell [between 1,000 and 10,000 times as powerful](#) as the average human’s. We have the world at the tip of our fingers. Dogs have the world at the tip of their nose. They don’t need to carry a device and they never have to deal with ransomware.

There’s still spam of course. The other kind, if you’re a very lucky dog.