

Do You Have to Be Cruel to be Kind?

The Power of Positive Dog Training

I'm constantly asked "Are you the Dog Whisperer?" especially when I get out of my car, which is covered with my business logo. I generally answer with a quick "no, not me," since the reference is to Cesar Millan, the star of his own television show and someone who has a much different philosophy on dog training from mine.

HAIL CESAR!

With a charismatic personality and a hit TV show, Millan claims to "train people and rehabilitate dogs." But, instead of whispering to them, what he is really doing is coercing dogs into "calm submission" through extensive exercise, discipline and affection—in that order. And, while none of this is especially bad for dogs, what I object to is the way in which it is done.

In his best-selling book, *Cesar's Way*, Millan states that there are only two positions in a relationship, leader or follower. In the blink of an eye Millan has brought back the old "dominance theory" in dog training that had been retired some 30 years ago. It was replaced with kinder, gentler and more scientifically driven techniques known as positive dog training, which are still being used by the majority of dog training professionals today.

A LITTLE HISTORY ABOUT POSITIVE TRAINING

In the early 1980's a revolution occurred in the dog world—the positive dog training movement. It started when Dr. Ian Dunbar, a British born veterinarian and behaviorist living in the Bay Area went looking for an obedience class for his new pup and

couldn't find one for dogs younger than six months of age. He started designing and teaching his own classes, and the rest, as they say, is history. In 1993, he founded the Association of Pet Dog Trainers with a mission to promote better and more humane training through education of dog owners and dog training professionals.

It became commonplace to have puppies enrolled in training classes as young as eight weeks of age. And, thanks to Dunbar, fewer dogs are destroyed because they are properly socialized and have been obedience trained, using gentle methods, at a very early age when it is most important.

Since Dunbar started his first puppy classes, he and his many protégés (Jean Donaldson, Karen Pryor, Pat Miller to mention a few) have made major strides in advancing the field of positive dog training. Several generations of dog owners have come to realize that training dogs does not have to include coercion or the use of hurtful tools or techniques that force dogs into submission.

FEAR BEGETS FEAR

A major contribution of positive training was to introduce research that had long proven that pain induces fear and that fear is likely to produce aggression. It is always much better to be kind in training a dog (or any animal) and to reward her for good behavior. So, the "old fashioned" philosophy of training dogs, using "dominance and pack-leadership theories" receded from popularity.

As an example, the old school ritual such as "kneeing a dog" to stop her from jumping up, the "jerk-ing and pulling" method to stop her from pulling on leash, or "pinning a dog down" to teach her to submit when she was getting "out of hand" were all but retired. It was replaced by "learning theory," which uses gentle techniques, primarily positive reinforcement, to teach a dog the right behaviors. Simple applications of classical and operant conditioning were also utilized.

With these alternatives, instead of kneeing the dog to prevent the jumping, you would turn around and withdraw attention until the dog sat or stopped jumping and then reward him with the attention he craves. Instead of pinning a dog into submission, you would give him a quick "time out" to discourage unwanted behaviors and make sure that "enjoying your company" was contingent upon good behavior.

I asked Jean Donaldson, Director of the Training Academy at the San Francisco SPCA and author of *The Culture Clash* (and the person with whom I trained), what has changed in "learning theory" over the years and her response was, "not a single thing." She continued to say that, "the amazing and gratifying thing is how behavior is so



incredibly lawful. The laws of learning (for animals) haven't changed — they are the most studied phenomenon in psychology with 60 years of research to support them."

WHAT SHOULD I DO? I'M SO CONFUSED!

Where does that leave the unassuming, dog training public — you good folk who only want to do what's best for your dog and look to experts for guidance? What are you supposed to do when the experts are all saying different things?

"He makes it look so easy," said one of my clients referring to Millan's mysterious ability to solve a serious behavior problem in only one segment of his popular TV program. "The magic of television editing," I responded. I also explained that it is much easier to coerce a dog to do something than to condition it. It's very seductive to think that you can get at least one thing in your life to easily submit to your will.

WHY HURT A DOG? NO REASON!

The plain truth is that it is not necessary to physically or emotionally hurt a dog in order to train him. For example, a positive reinforcement could be as easy as saying "Good Boy!" each time the dog sits on request. If the dog is motivated by praise he will look forward to being asked to "sit" as he anticipates the praise. If he doesn't sit, the praise is withheld or you can get up and walk away. Another gentle technique could involve stopping or turning around on a walk each time the dog pulls to get her to walk alongside you more predictably. The dog doesn't like to stop and prefers to keep going, so she learns to walk without pulling.

A technique that is a bit more extreme, but is still not going to hurt is to simply make a shrill sound and give a puppy a dirty look when she play bites with you. Done consistently and with a proper toy or chewy to immediately pop into her mouth, instead of your hand, the puppy will learn quickly what she is allowed to bite and chew on and what is off limits.



This can also work with adult dogs. If you withhold a chew bone from Max the three-year-old golden retriever because he tried too enthusiastically to grab it out of your hand, you have given him a gentle punishment. In truth, what you have really given him is a clear directive to take the bone from you "gently" or he won't get it. In addition he has, hopefully, learned some muscle memory and maybe a little impulse control to help him understand the proper way to take the bone from you the next time.

WE DISCIPLINE AND SET RULES FOR CHILDREN—WHAT ABOUT DOGS?

As with children, dogs need discipline. What's most puzzling is why dog owners are afraid to set rules and discipline their dogs consistently when those rules are violated. We don't think twice about withholding the new flavor of ice cream after dinner when a child refuses to clean his room. Why then should we hesitate to withhold a treat or toy and make it contingent upon performing a particular behavior or skill first? "You want the ball, lay down and wait politely for five seconds. You got up, sorry, no ball for you!"

USING CRATES FOR TIME OUTS

A common discipline that is always very confusing to dog owners is the simple "time out." If done correctly, this is a great way to send your dog another very clear message. And, it can be done without getting angry and without even saying a word.

This technique should be used for extreme situations, because like anything else, if overused it will lose its

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efficacy. It's especially good for puppies that are doing a mad whirlwind around the house (running is reserved for outside) or jumping, biting or nipping uncontrollably. You have to be quick to get the puppy into the crate while he is behaving badly. Wait too long and he has already forgotten why he was put in there. For the same reason, don't keep him in the crate for more than two minutes.

At the end of two minutes or before, you don't say a word and (only if he's quiet) let him out. If he starts the behavior again, back into the crate he goes. Try that a few times and you'll notice a change in behavior.

A common question for "time outs" for dogs is "will the dog start disliking his crate if it's used for punishment?" The answer is "no." A dog will no more dislike his crate than a child will dislike his bedroom when he's given a time out to his room. What the puppy dislikes is being removed from the source of attention and affection. This is why when you go back to let the puppy out of the crate you don't get happy with him again until you see a shift in behavior.

KEEP THINGS POSITIVE

When faced with the constant influx of new and changing information about how to train a dog, it may seem easy to go back to the old school of force and coercion. I can tell you that I, for one, am glad my parents never went back to boxing ears or smacking hands and bottoms with a ruler – techniques that were used by their parents. When you are trying to develop trust and confidence with any dog, especially with a young puppy or a rescued shelter dog, it is much better to use a kind and gentle technique to coax preferred behaviors.

And, while it can certainly be confusing to be a dog owner with so many experts doling out information and advice, you must remember that you can still use positive training methods even while you integrate some clear, firm and consistent messages. You don't have to be "cruel to be kind" with your canine companion. Always stay positive – you'll feel better and so will your dog. 🐾

For additional information or comments contact Deborah Rosen at www.goodcitizen canine.com.