



Hello everybody! Hope you enjoyed last month's newsletter and our feel-good stories. We had a good time putting it together. This month in honor of National Pet Month, we are going to talk about pet behavior. We have a special guest for you this month! Andrew Nelson is a dog-training consultant, and owner of The Clever Canine; he put something special together for us about positive reinforcement. Thanks, Andrew, for sharing some useful information with us!

Positive Reinforcement Dog Training as a Lifestyle **The Clever Canine** | Andrew M. Nelson



Normal dogs pull into their leashes with owner in tow; normal dogs bark when a person passes by the property; normal dogs jump all over their owners when they come home from work; normal dogs see no reason why the living room carpet can't be used as a toilet. Actually, a lot of the behaviors we'd like our four-legged friends to *not* engage in are normal for them, while the behaviors we prefer them to exhibit are actually abnormal, or, at least, very unlikely to occur without proper guidance.

Think about that for a minute; *most of the behaviors you'd like your dog to do are pretty unnatural for them.* (Sure, there are always those easy-going dogs that enjoy lounging on the couch all day and never do anything "bad." But those dogs are the exception to the rule, not the other way around.) So, what are we humans to do about those unwanted behaviors? It's simple; we teach and motivate our dogs to do the behaviors we prefer.

The confusing part for most dog owners is knowing how to teach the desired behaviors. A quick googling, perusing through the dog training section at the bookstore, or just asking other dog owners usually doesn't make things any easier. There's a lot of conflicting information out there, but most of these philosophies can be lumped into two different categories: old-style, force-based methods and positive reinforcement-based methods.

I'll go into more detail below, but the main difference in these two categories is how they affect the relationship you have with your dog. Old-style, force-based methods harm the relationship; positive reinforcement-based methods build and encourage a good, trusting relationship. Just knowing that piece of information, it would seem that everyone would want to employ positive reinforcement. Unfortunately, that just isn't the case.

The theory on why some people choose to use force and intimidation to train dogs is an article in itself, but, honestly, it isn't necessary. Forcing a dog to do anything, whether it's a pull up on a leash to get them to sit or a harsh correction in an attempt to get them to stop barking at a stranger on a walk, teaches her all the wrong things. Dogs learn that force is a means of acceptable conflict resolution and that living with you is a power struggle. And, not only that, these sorts of training techniques just aren't as effective and easy to use as techniques that use positive reinforcement.

So, what exactly is positive reinforcement dog training? In positive reinforcement dog training, we reinforce behaviors we like, or make them more likely to occur again in the future, by giving the dog something she likes. The reinforcer can be food, laughing—my dogs *love it* when I laugh—a game of fetch, you get the picture. Just make sure that it is actually something that the dog likes. (I've seen a lot of people give their dogs pats on the head, thinking the dogs like it, but the dog is actually annoyed.)

Positive reinforcement dog training isn't just for formal training sessions. Owners who adopt positive reinforcement as way of life build an incredible relationship with their dogs. These owners have dogs who trust them, like being with them, and actually enjoy doing things for them. Again, all you have to do is reward the behaviors you like and ignore the ones you don't. The desired behaviors will increase in frequency and the undesired ones will fizzle out. A lot of people are skeptical when they hear that for the first time, because it just seems so easy. It really is that easy, though. This can be applied to everything from basic manners to more serious things like dog-dog aggression.

In future newsletters, we will discuss how to apply these methods to specific situations, but, in the mean time, give this a try for increasing your dog's attention around the house. Don't ask for your dog's attention (unless you absolutely have to, of course). When you catch her offering it, though, reinforce it. Tell her how good she is and run to the cookie jar to give her a treat; flop over on your back and let her kiss you with enthusiasm; go grab her favorite toy and play tug. Soon enough, your dog will be offering you attention, because she's learned that offering you attention feels good. I'll say it again: *it really is that simple.*

Please note that, although positive reinforcement is effective in treating serious issues like aggression, you should always consult a professional when dealing with such cases.

For more information about Andrew and dog training consultations through his business, The Clever Canine, visit his website at

<http://sites.google.com/site/clevercaninedogtraining>

ADOPTIONS:



I am happy to report that 2 out of 4 of our kittens got adopted! We still have one orange and one black/white male kitten. They have been felv/fiv tested, neutered, vaccinated, dewormed and are ready to go!

UPCOMING EVENTS:

We have the best events of the year coming up!

The Annual Animal Friends Easter egg hunt is scheduled for Saturday April 9th at Marilla Park. Registration is at 12:30 and festivities begin at 1:00.

The Annual Animal Friends Cash Bash is Saturday May 7th at the Elks Lodge. The door opens at 5:30 and the festivities start at 6:00.

Both of these events are so much fun, and all the proceeds go to Animal Friends.



M-SNAP will be spreading the word about spay/neuter during three events in April. Stop by their information table during the 5th Annual Healthy Hound Dog Fair at Marilla Park on April 10; during Impact E.A.R.T.H. 2011 at the Riverfront Amphitheater on April 16; and an Earth Week Celebration Week event being held at the Mountainlair on April 21.

NATIONAL PET HOLIDAYS:

- National Pet Month
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month
- National Pet First Aid Awareness Month
- National Pet Day- April 10th
- National Pet ID Week- April 18th-24th *We will be offering \$5 off our Home Again microchip this week. Get your pet micro chipped with one-year activation for \$44.99! *
- National Kids and Pets Day- April 26th
- Hairball Awareness Day- April 30th
- National Animal Control Appreciation Week- April 11-17th.

We want to thank our wonderful animal control personnel at the Canine Adoption Center. They do a wonderful job and truly care for the animals! If you know who they are or if you adopted your pet from them, let them know of your appreciation!

If you adopted your pet from the Canine Adoption Center, please send us a picture and a story; we would love to know about it!

That is all we have for this month. Hope everyone has a Happy Easter!