

Dog Training by PJ

5303 Louie Lane #19, Reno, Nevada 89511

www.dogtrainingbypj.com

775-828-0748

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Choosing the best dog instructor/trainer for you and your dog...A Choice in Science or Fiction?

Consider: Dog Training based with lures vs. force?

There has always been a "movement" of some sort when it comes to how to pick the best trainer and instructor for you and your dog. Additionally, there has been an ongoing debate on lure or forced based training methods. Luckily, people have become more aware of the necessities for training a dog, however, I am increasingly asked about popular dog training television programs. My response, "I suggest doing your homework." I might also consider, for example, if a program has a message flashed throughout the show, "*don't try this at home*" - should you try it? [1] Consider, why use a method or something that makes the dog or you uncomfortable? Consider, what occurs to the relationship you seek with that puppy or dog with each method?

LEADING EXPERTS WEIGH IN:

Leading dog training experts and behaviorists have actually weighed in on the "dominance" style of training. Try an internet search and "Google" some of the leaders: Ian Dunbar, Jean Donaldson, Nicholas Dodman, Patricia McConnell, Susanne Hetts, Pat Miller or the American Humane Association. In Jean Donaldson's article, "*Talk Softly and Carry A Carrot or a Big Stick*", she writes, "[T]he force-free movement has been partly driven by improved communication from the top. Applied behaviorists, those with advanced degrees in behavior, and veterinary behaviorists, veterinarians who have completed residencies specializing in behavior problems are in greater abundance than in previous decades, and there is much more collaboration between these fields and trainers on the front lines. These two professions are quite unified on the point that the use of physical confrontation and pain is unnecessary, often detrimental and, importantly, unsafe." Ms Donaldson continues, "[O]n a more grassroots level, trainers have found more benign and sophisticated tools by boning up on applied behavior science themselves. Seminal books like marine mammal trainer Karen Pryor's *Don't Shoot the Dog* made the case that training and behavior modification can be achieved without any force whatsoever." Additionally and sadly, dog training is an unregulated profession, and

anyone, even without any formal education or certification, can hang a shingle out and call themselves a dog trainer. [2]

CONFUSED ON WHAT TO BELIEVE? BECOME INVOLVED:

All pet owners should become directly involved in the education of their puppies. Just like parents with children, pet owners become the first instructors or teachers for their dogs. Unfortunately many dogs are relinquished early in their lives simply because they lacked owner's influence to modify behaviors that were normal puppy/dog behaviors. A recent study conducted by the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy (NCPSP) showed that 47.7 percent of the surrendered dogs were between 5 months of age and 3 years of age. Sadly, more than 96% of those surrendered dogs had never received any training. [3] So how do we begin to modify typical "doggy behaviors"?

In a word--teach! As a dog owner it is your responsibility to teach your puppy socially acceptable manners and behaviors. Teach and train your puppy or dog on the first day, continue this education and train on a regular ongoing basis. Whether you intentionally teach your puppy or not, your puppy is always learning. This is true for puppies and adult dogs of all ages. If you do not teach your dog the rules, she will invent her own rules. Sometimes dog owners need a little help from a professional trainer/instructor to start the groundwork and teach the puppy or newly acquired adult dog.

WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN A PROFESSIONAL DOG TRAINER OR INSTRUCTOR?

Now that you have made the life-long commitment to your puppy or dog, investment of yourself is as important as investment of your resources to hire a trainer. Choose a trainer whose skills exceed what you would like to do with your dog. Do you want a well-mannered housedog, a field dog, or a dog you can show in the obedience ring? Find a trainer with experience consistent with your expectations. This will make a huge difference in how you and your pet relate to each other for the life of your pet.

It is crucial that your trainer/instructor use humane training techniques that encourage appropriate behaviors through such positive reinforcement as food, attention, play and praise. Look for a trainer who ignores and does not punish unwanted or undesirable responses, or withholds the rewards until the dog responds appropriately. The Humane Society of the United States suggests that

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when determining which trainer to select, the "training techniques should never involve yelling, choking, shaking the scruff, tugging on the leash, alpha rolling (forcing the dog onto his back), or other actions that frighten or inflict pain." [4] The Association of Pet Dog Trainers suggests, "You should be comfortable with the training tools and methods used by the instructor. A skilled and professional dog trainer employs humane training methods which are not harmful to the dog and/or handler, and avoids the practices of hanging, beating, kicking, shocking and all similar procedures or training devices that could cause the dog great pain, distress, or that have imminent potential for physical harm." [5]

CONSIDER - REPUTATION:

You may find a trainer by asking your veterinarian, humane shelter, family members, or friends whom they recommend. Talk to people who have had their pets in the trainer's classes.

AN EASY CHECKLIST:

Experience and knowledge:

- ✓ How long has the person been training dogs?
- ✓ How do they stay updated in their training techniques? A conscientious trainer will stay informed about innovations in dog training, behavior tools and techniques and pursue ongoing educational opportunities.
- ✓ Does the trainer hold any certifications, such as a Certification for Pet Dog Trainers (CPDT) or other "reputable" dog training academy?
- ✓ Check to see if the instructor is a member of any educational organizations such as the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT), or National Association of Dog Obedience Instructors (NADOI).
- ✓ Ask the instructor permission to attend a group class and talk to current clients. How does they feel about their experiences, are enjoying the class, and are their goals being met?

Communication skills and Methods:

- ✓ Can the instructor communicate well with both the people and the dogs?
- ✓ Does the trainer answer questions in terms you can understand?
- ✓ Does the trainer provide written handouts?

- ✓ Can you ask questions? If you are uncomfortable asking questions or do not like the instructor's methods, find another trainer. Training methods vary.

What To Look for in the Instructor's Group Classes [6]?

- ✓ Is the class size limited to allow for individual attention?
- ✓ Are there different class levels (for example, beginner, intermediate or advanced)?
- ✓ Are the students, both human and canine, enjoying themselves?
- ✓ Are voice cues given in upbeat tones?
- ✓ Are lesson handouts available?
- ✓ Is information available on how dogs learn, basic grooming, problem solving, and related topics?
- ✓ Are all family members encouraged to participate in classes?
- ✓ Must all dogs have proof of vaccination before starting the class?

A good trainer/instructor should make training fun! Look for an instructor who is approachable and who encourages participants to have fun and has fun too! A sense of humor is a plus and could become important when dealing with our dogs. A positive attitude, laughter and fun can make a big difference between learning and not learning. Remember, positive training methods enhance the bond between you and your dog while ensuring your dog responds happily to your requests.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] "The Anti-Cesar Millan Ian Dunbar's been succeeding for 25 years with lure-reward dog training, how come he's been usurped by the flashy, aggressive TV host."

San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, October 15, 2006 by Louise Rafkin (<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/10/15/CMGPHL9D1N1.DTL>)

[2] "Talk Softly and Carry A Carrot or a Big Stick?" By Jean Donaldson, Director of The SF/SPCA Academy for Dog Trainers *See additional information on this web page, including the above-referenced article @ http://www.urbandawgs.com/divided_profession.html*

[3] "Moving: Characteristics of Those Relinquishing Companion Animals to U.S. Animal Shelters," Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science (JAAWS, July, 1999, Vol. 2, No. 2)

[4] http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/dog_care/choosing_a_dog_trainer.html "Choosing a Dog Trainer."

[5] http://apdt.com/po/ts/choose_trainer.aspx "How to Choose A Trainer."

[6] Excerpts from The Humane Society of the United States' "Choosing a Dog Trainer."