

IACP

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CANINE PROFESSIONALS

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International Association of Canine Professionals

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The International Association of Canine Professionals is dedicated to the education, development, and support of dog training professionals world-wide. The IACP provides a community where experienced dog trainers mentor, guide and cultivate members to their full potential. Our commitment to the highest quality training increases our members' skills and abilities, develops professional recognition, and improves communication on training best practices. We support our members' rights to properly use and promote effective, humane training tools and methods to create success for each dog and owner, while expanding the understanding and cooperation among canine professionals and dog owners across the full spectrum of the canine industry.

In achieving these aims through education and training, the IACP works actively to reduce cruelty and abuse to canine partners.

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PROFESSIONAL MEMBER — At least five years experience as a canine professional. Can vote on IACP issues and use IACP name and logo on business materials.

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AFFILIATE MEMBER — An active interest in a career as a canine professional but lacking the experience to be an Associate or Professional member, i.e., apprentices, students of canine professions, trainees, volunteers, part-time, and devotees of canine related occupations. Cannot use the IACP name or logo for business purposes and may not vote.

Annual Fees:

Professional \$125.00; Associate \$100.00; Affiliate \$65.00

An additional \$30 fee applies for initial processing costs of Professional and Associate members only.

Benefits:

All IACP members receive our SafeHands Journal, have access to our email list, seminars, educational materials, business support materials, events and activity calendars, regional group participation, and our Certification Programs. Discounts for sponsor services are available to members.

Applications and renewals can now be paid through MasterCard, Visa, and AMEX.

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Cover photo: Sean, by Dave Blynn (thanks for the save, Dave!)

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The IACP is proud to announce that IACP Member Susan Poludniak

has successfully completed her Certified Dog Trainer examination and is now able to add the designation IACP-CDT to her name.

Congratulations to Susan!

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Well done!

The Board of the IACP



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President's Letter

by Karen Laws

The 'Dog' Days of summer have arrived. The term 'Dog days of summer' for some implies leisurely hours relaxing by the lake, sipping on a cool beverage. However, for many in our industry, it is the busiest time of year – a time to "make hay while the sun shines"!

During the summer months, your Board of Directors continues to function at a frenzied pace. Many accomplishments have been achieved since publication of the last *Safe Hands Journal*. Early in 2014, we laid out what we thought were rather audacious goals to transform the IACP into the largest, premier professional canine organization in the world. The goals related to increasing membership; enhancing public awareness of the IACP and what it stands for, and providing added value to members. We set targets for each goal and went to work to achieve them. The goals were highlighted at the beginning of the agenda for each meeting.

I am very pleased and proud to report that with your support and a Board of Directors whose members are committed to elevating the IACP as THE Worldwide Gold Standard for Professional Canine organizations, we have met or exceeded each goal that was established at the beginning of this year, and we are only half way through the year! Our membership goal of 125 new members has been exceeded, our financial target for new Sponsorship has been exceeded, and our goal of enhancing value to members has exceeded our expectations with the early success for this year's conference.

Hats off to the Web team, sponsor team, financials, home office crew, Certification and Education teams, and member retention team. Most importantly, kudos and a huge

thanks to you, our members--the success of the IACP is a direct reflection of your support and involvement.

Here are just of the initiatives that, with YOUR support, have enabled goals to be met or exceeded:

- Revising our Mission Statement to improve relevance and clarity for canine professionals, their clients and the dog owning public
- Putting the final touches on the latest issue of your *Safe Hands Journal* (thank you Mailey and Evelyn!),
- Shifting into high gear in the final weeks leading up to the annual Conference (thank you Cyndi and team),
- Seeking nominations and preparing ballots for the Fall election (thank you Martin);
- Reviewing nominations and selecting members for the International and Member Halls of Fame (thank you Martin, Jeff and committee members),
- Reaching out to new Sponsors (thank you Martin, James and Brad),
- Completing the financial audit (thank you Jack, James and IACP member Kevin)
- Maintaining and continuing to improve the website (thank you Tyler),
- Enhancing the quality of education for professionals (thank you Chad and Mailey);
- Enhancing the certification tests and process (thank you Tawni and certification team)
- Certifying more new trainers than





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ever (thank you Tawni and the evaluation team)

- Reaching out to new and renewing members (thank you Tawni);
- Finalizing the home office transition, in addition to maintaining regular operations and addressing 'crises of the moment' that goes with a rapidly growing organization (thank you Jack and Dana and all Board members!!)

This year there have been more exams submitted for Certified Dog Trainer (CDT) than ever before. This speaks to the value that canine professionals are placing on certification as a business asset. It also profiles the high quality and integrity of the IACP certifications – the CDT is ranked as the BEST in the certification industry. We are well positioned for any certification requirements that may be required in future.

Your response to the stellar line up for this year's Conference has been overwhelming! Events are

selling out and registrations are the highest in IACP history. Registrations continue to pour in. Spaces are limited for the conference AND for many of the dinner events, so don't delay ... go to www.canineprofessionals.com and register today! Kudos to IACP members and Directors who are donating their time to share their expertise with you at dinner events – Chad/Tyler; Jeff/Sean – these events are sold out or close to being sold out.

As you can see, there is LOTS going on with your Board of Directors – the above is just a 'short' list of the many projects and outstanding and ongoing work. We are on a trajectory to be the biggest and best association for canine professionals. THANK YOU for joining us.

Happy Summer everyone!

Karen Laws,
President, IACP

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Pressure and Release for People

by Brian Bergford

One of the most critical skills we can develop as trainers is our ability to modify our clients' behavior. Most of us are pretty good at modifying dog behavior – people seek us out because they're at a loss for how to get their dog to stop digging in the back yard, peeing on the area rug, and chasing the cats. Solutions to these problems come to mind pretty easily for us and the dogs are generally receptive and adapt well to change.

The more challenging part of the equation is motivating our clients to change personal habits that have a direct impact on their dogs' behaviors.

The times I'm the most proud of my work as a dog trainer is when I witness a client undergo a powerful personal evolution. Sure, I love working dogs and training and building great relationships with them. But to watch a client go through a personal transformation process is far more rewarding. Why? It's simple: I know that person and their dog (and any dogs they own in the future) will have a much better quality of life from that point on. Almost without exception, the better the people get, the better the dogs get.

I used to get frustrated with owners who just didn't "get it." They'd call me for help and want me to wave a magic wand over their dog. "I just want little Gracie to behave better and listen to me" they'd say. I'd provide sound advice and come back for a follow up appointment only to see that nothing significant had been accomplished. Then I realized that maybe I was the one who didn't get it. Maybe it was time for me to change my approach. Once I became aware of the need to improve in this area, there were a number of

things I began to immediately implement to help myself become more effective at communicating with clients. One of the most important was one I had used with dogs for years: the concept of pressure and release.

This principle can be used to guide, direct, correct, and reward owners in much the same way we trainers use it already.

After all, they're usually calling us to help release the pressure they feel when their dog acts out or is disobedient. Their end game is relief from pressure. So in my mind, I really hone in on exactly what their pain points are. I want to know precisely where they're coming from so I understand how to resolve that tension. This requires good listening skills – active listening skills. Once we talk things over thoroughly and I've clarified their needs and expectations we go right to work to find a fitting training solution. Once I've settled on one,

the real work begins, because now I have to gain buy-in from the client, transfer knowledge to them, and motivate them to make any and all necessary changes to resolve the situation. This is no easy task but can be accomplished by following five basic steps:

1. Rapidly establish trust and rapport – This begins the moment we answer a call from a prospective client. The person on the other end of the phone will always ask themselves two questions: Can I trust them? and Can they help fix my dog's issues? Notice there's a question about both honesty and competency and if the client cannot answer both in the affirmative, they are going elsewhere. If we get to the next phase and meet with them in person, we have to continue to build rapport. Trust

I was
amazed by how
I could be so adept
at practicing [pres-
sure and release] with
people's dogs and so
inept when it came
to working with a
dog's people.

has to be established almost immediately – and then maintained continually – for us to be effective catalysts for modifying their behavior and teaching them how to work with their dogs effectively. We can't add pressure if we don't have a relationship and foundation of trust first.

2. Create a safe environment – Since so much of a dog's behavior hinges on the client's energy and personal stability, they need to feel comfortable enough to share relevant personal information so we can help them realize their goal of having a dog that's better behaved. They must be willing to open up and disclose details about their relationship and personal habits. Family dynamics are important here, too. If at any time they feel like they are being chastised, they will begin to shut down, shutting us out in the process. But if we do our job well, they will see that we are not there to judge; we are there to help and we understand where they're coming from. We add

a little bit of pressure as we ask questions during the information gathering process. We release that pressure by letting them vent frustrations and by listening.

3. Be genuine and have pure motives – We do not build trust and utilize pressure and release to get clients to tell us what we want to know; we build trust because we genuinely care about them and we want to help. They can rely on us because we're there with pure intentions. Using pressure and release with people should never be manipulative. It's manipulative if our motive for using a technique is to help us get what we want. It's genuine if our motive is to help our clients get what they want. Clients can sense if we are being authentic or putting on a facade. If at any time we move away from a center of genuineness, we begin to erode the very trust that is the foundation of the relationship.

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4. Be candid – When we come to a place where we’ve discovered a client’s dog is having a problem and the solution is for the client to change their ways, we must be straightforward and honest about the issue. This is applying intense pressure. If we time it wrong or apply it too quickly (by being curt, insensitive, calling them out in front of others, or acting like a know-it-all), they will shut down or become defensive. Either way, it’s pretty much game over at that point. But if we do it with precision – the right timing, the right intensity, the right motives – they will actually appreciate our honesty and that we cared enough to do it in such a way that we left their pride intact.

5. Know when to ebb and when to flow – When we’re in a training session, we apply a little pressure by asking something like “how much exercise does Fido get every day?” That pressure is released as they answer the question and

we accept the answer. Then we apply pressure again by stating our observation that Fido is a high energy dog and asking if there’s any way they or other members of the family can give him access to more walks. They say “no” – they are, in truth, too busy. The tension remains. We acknowledge the reality of the situation and ask if they’d be willing to explore the possibility of hiring a dog walker or taking the dog to a local daycare a few days a week or training their dog on a treadmill. They don’t have a treadmill but would be up for finding a dog walker or daycare. You give them information on a couple that you personally recommend. They are excited about the new possibilities. The tension is released. There’s a natural ebb and flow to it and we have to know when to lean in and dig deeper and when to back away. Sometimes, if they’ve just endured some serious pressure, creatively moving on to

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another subject that is very low pressure so they can recover allows us to revisit it later with much less resistance.

Now go back to the top of this section and quickly re-read the titles of the five steps and consider how each principle relates to how you implement pressure and release when training dogs. When I did this I was amazed by how I could be so adept at practicing this with people's dogs and so inept when it came to working with a dog's people. I decided right then and there to commit myself to becoming as good with dog owners as I was with their dogs. The thought of only being halfway effective really got to me. I just knew I had to strike a balance. It took a lot of time but was worth every bit of concerted effort to get there. Even if you are already right on track with this

point, it bears reminding that we should give the same level of ongoing attention to developing our skill with people that we do to their pets.

I almost always prefer to work with clients privately when we're first building our relationship. It allows me to focus exclusively on them and their dog and their needs. Plus, we can communicate openly without worrying what other people in the room are going to think. No matter your training arena of choice (private sessions, group classes, etc.), mastering the 5 steps of applying pressure and release with clients is a powerful way to maximize your impact as a trainer.



Brian Bergford is a Dog Behavior Specialist, CDT, and the owner of Altitude Dog Training and Uptown Dog. His area of expertise is the interplay between dog behavior and human psychology. For more information, visit www.altitudedogtraining.com or email brian@altitudedogtraining.com.

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It's Summertime! Let's Go Swimming!

By Cyndy Douan, MHDL, CDT

Editor's Note: *This article was previously printed in Safehands Journal in the summer of 2010. As membership has grown quite a bit since then, we thought we'd re-run it.*

Water can provide a nice respite from the heat for you and your dogs. Swimming is a great exercise for dogs, as it is non-impact, easy on joints, and often helps them stay cool in the hotter months while burning lots of energy. But it can have its hazards, too, so be prepared.

Backyard Play

A baby pool, small animal water trough, sprinkler or water hose can be great ways to provide some at-home water fun for your dog. Place the pool in a shady spot so that the water stays cool throughout the day (dogs can easily overheat in a sun heated pool of water, especially if they've been active and are already hot). Change the water in the pool often to keep it clean and remove places for mosquitoes to breed. If you have a (human) swimming pool, make sure your dog knows how to enter and exit the pool safely on his own in case he falls in or jumps in when you are not watching him. Chlorine-treated pools can be okay for dogs to swim in, but watch for eye irritation and skin dryness, as the chlorine can strip the natural coat oils. The chlorinated water shouldn't harm your dog if he drinks it, but have fresh water available nearby. Salt-purified pools are safest for your dog. If your pool has a concrete deck, check your dog's paws regularly for signs of painful wearing or tearing on the pads.



Ponds & Streams

Fresh water swimming is usually easiest on your dog's skin and coat, and it is generally okay for your dog to also drink the water while he swims. Some still waters can contain harmful protozoa that can cause intestinal problems, or bacterium, such as the type that causes leptospirosis. Speak with your vet about where you will be swimming your dogs as your vet may recommend a leptospirosis vaccination. Check the bottom surface under the water where your dog will swim; glass and other refuse can cut your dog, and he can become tangled in string, rope, fishing line, or fish hooks near or below the surface. Watch out for snakes and snapping turtles, and do a head to tail inspection on your dog after swimming. Look for any cuts or scrapes and (yuck) leeches after any fresh water swims.

Rivers & Lakes

I recommend neon-colored life jackets for dogs swimming in big open water. A dog who really loves to swim can become physically fatigued before his desire to swim runs out. Also, there is always a danger in open water that someone driving a motorized vehicle, like a boat or Jet Ski, may not notice your dog. The life vest makes the dog visible, and also allows him to rest in the water when he gets tired without the risk of drowning. Life vests also make it easier and safer to pluck a tired/panicky dog up out of the water. Strong currents and fast running water will tire your dog quicker. Have an emergency plan in place

for rescuing a dog that has become caught in a current and is drifting down river. Some dogs love to leap or dive into water. Be aware of large rocks or other large debris under that surface of the water that a dog could accidentally land on while leaping or diving.

Docks, Marinas, Beaches, and Landings

Be certain to closely supervise your dog in these areas, as trash, debris, bait, fishhooks, and other tackle are prevalent. Dead fish can make your dog sick if he ingests them; fish bones can cause punctures within your dog's throat and digestive system, and dead fish can make for an awfully stinky outing if your dog decides to take a roll on them (bring along some dog shampoo just in case). Beware of the footing on docks, decks, and piers, and look for protruding nails and splinters. Docks, decks, piers, and sandy beaches also become very hot for your dog to walk on. If you cannot walk on these surfaces comfortably without shoes, they are uncomfortable for your dog. Wet surfaces can become very slippery and dangerous for dogs, making it easier for them to slide and accidentally fall into the water. Look for limping, reluctance to walk on the surface, and any signs of soreness. Remember to provide shade and fresh water for your dog when you are out boating or near the water. Dogs with short fur and white or light pigmented skin can be at risk for sunburn. I recommend a

waterproof sunscreen which is safe for babies, applied to areas that will be sensitive to sunburn.

Ocean Swimming

The big caution to ocean swimming is that ingesting ocean water can cause nausea and diarrhea, and I'm talking really big yucky diarrhea (the kind you do not want to be dealing with while traveling in hotels, condos, RV's, or beach rentals). With my dogs, I avoid playing fetch in ocean water, as dogs can't avoid swallowing some water when they are retrieving and swimming with objects in their mouths. Other hazards include jelly fish, oyster beds, barnacles, corals, and other bottom surface risks that could injure your dog's legs and feet. Rip tides in the deeper surf area of the beach can also be dangerous. Playing in the surf is OK, but discourage your dog from swimming out over his head (a longline can help). Always shampoo your dog and rinse well after a trip to ocean water. In some waters, there are organisms that can affect your dog's skin, and sand can cause chafing and



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abrasions when not rinsed thoroughly out of the coat and off of the foot pads. Be sure to check paw pads for sand burs and thorns that come off of vegetation growing in beach areas. Ocean water can ruin the metal parts on dog collars, so you may want to replace your dog's good looking everyday collar with a beach collar that you don't mind tossing after the trip.

I do not recommend allowing your dog to swim in inland coastal areas. Marshes are risky because of oyster beds, water snakes, and alligators. Dogs can also become stuck in the pluff mud that makes up the surface of most marshes and brackish water tidal inlets.

Teaching a Dog to Swim

While some dogs are natural swimmers, others are not so fond of the water. I have seen a number of dogs, with time and patience, who have learned to swim and eventually come to love the water. I start teaching swimming to these dogs by standing in waist-deep water, having someone hand me the life-jacketed dog down into the water, and guiding

the dog by holding the life jacket and helping the dog move forward through the water. Never throw or push your dog into water. A novice swimmer will usually flail and flap his front legs up out of the water, which causes his head to sink. Once the dog figures out that he can swim if he leaves his front legs under the water, he is usually okay. Be careful in teaching these swimming lessons. A novice dog will try to climb on top of another swimmer or even another swimming dog in order to try to get up out of the water, creating a great risk of drowning. This is why I like to have control of the dog by holding his life jacket, and teaching swimming lessons in water that is shallow enough for me to touch the bottom.

Have a great summer and enjoy some safe water time with your dog!

Cyndy Douan, MHD, CDT is owner of Georgia Dog Gym, LLC in Rome, Georgia; a 12,000 square foot facility employing 8 staff members, that offers dog training, boarding, daycare, bathing, and retail supplies. Georgia Dog Gym specializes in instruction and coaching for canine performance sports. Now a 24 year veteran of professional dog training, Cyndy owns 6 working lines Border Collies and enjoys training and competing with her dogs in Dock Jumping, Dog Agility, and Herding Trials. Cyndy is a co-founder and a past-president of IACP and was inducted into the IACP Member Hall of Fame in 2012.

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Aggression: When Are You Ready?

By Steve Appelbaum

From time to time, I am asked in my capacity of President of Animal Behavior College when I believe it is appropriate for professional dog trainers to start working with aggressive dogs.

This is an interesting and fair question and one we have debated at the school for a number of years.

First, let me define “aggression”: I am not talking about the 3-month-old puppy who nibbles playfully on hands and feet. I am talking about a dog who, for a variety of reasons, exhibits behaviors that could result or has resulted in biting.

Second, let me go on record as saying I understand that no rules can fit every circumstance. Some trainers might find that they are ready to work with aggressive dogs sooner than others. Some trainers might never wish to work with aggressive dogs, although it is almost impossible to avoid coming into contact with aggressive dogs as a professional trainer.

At ABC we made it a point to NOT teach our students how to treat aggression. This was deliberate, although I believe that all professional dog trainers must understand how to read canine body language, including understanding calming signals, how to identify possible warnings of aggression, etc. What’s more, I believe it behooves all trainers to at least understand the different root causes of aggression in dogs. To recognize that fear-motivated aggression is a much different incentive than say for example, territorial aggression or learned or pain-elicited aggression. So, when are dog trainers who are interested in working with aggressive dogs ready and why aren’t they ready from the start?

In my view, which encompasses 30 years of experience, dog training is a profession that takes time to truly master. Timing, how to read dogs in an almost unlimited number of circumstances, working with and reading owners, and getting proper

history from the owners (which is itself an art) all require practice and experience. I also think that handling aggression is complex and sophisticated enough to require schooling as well as a high level of hands-on mentoring.

As to when trainers are ready? I strongly suggest working a minimum of three to five years full-time mastering basic dog training before trying. This means at least 30 hours per week teaching obedience and helping owners to address “simple” problems such as chewing, digging, jumping, general unruliness, house soiling, nuisance barking, etc. After three to five years, assess your skill and desire. Still interested? Think you are ready? If so, either contact a school that focuses on this type of specialty or a trainer who will mentor you. Perhaps some of the trainers reading this newsletter will be interested in mentoring.

Important note: While the need for trainers who can calmly, intelligently and effectively diagnose and treat aggressive behavior is real, so are the risks of injury and liability. This is a decision not to be taken lightly.

What happens when trainers not experienced enough to handle aggression cases are faced with one?

Develop a network! You are not alone out there and there is no reason why you can’t forge a relationship with a trainer or behaviorist who specializes in these types of cases. When reaching out to such a trainer, ask them if they would be open to taking cases. If yes, it is reasonable to inquire about the kinds of methods they use as well as how much experience and education they have. Assuming you are comfortable and they want to take cases, you might have found a great resource. If not, ask them whom they can refer you to as they might know other specialists.

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Making A Move

by Brittany Robinson

In 2008, I graduated from a well-known dog training school and thought I was ready to take on the world of dog training. I was 19 years young, had just moved to Tucson, AZ from a very small town in Ohio and thought I could run a business. I started out with a small in-home training company and used my limited dog training skills to build a pretty successful business. But I wanted more! After a few years had passed and my company grew to a very decent size, I had taken on an assistant trainer and decided to open a dog training facility. I had found a very small space, all of 900 square feet, and remodeled it to fit my needs. Once the doors opened, word spread fast of the new place and I was soon running a daycare and board and training facility without even realizing it. Three months into opening my doors, I had already outgrown my space and decided to look for alternative options. I found a very nice store front space in a shopping complex that boasted a well-known pet store and a vet. It was an ideal location, had ample space and allowed me to pursue my dream. Business was great, but as my clientele grew, so did my staff and the responsibilities of owning a business.

Now, I love training dogs and that is what I am good at. I was not prepared for the intricacies of owning a business and dealing with employees. After a few years of struggling to keep the business side of things running and dealing with the drama that comes with employees, I was losing focus of my passion and having an issue finding time to train dogs. My business ended up failing for many reasons, the largest including embezzlement from my office manager. I took the hit very hard and even considered getting out of the dog training business. My heart wasn't in the game anymore and I couldn't see another way to fulfill my passion. I took a short break from training dogs, but realized that I lost a large part of me. I decided to open another training company, but I

wanted to keep it small so I didn't have to deal with running a large business. After a few months going down this path, things were still not working out and I was still not happy with the way my career was moving.

Fate, destiny, chance or whatever you want to call it has a funny way of changing things. In November of 2013, I had received not one, but three Facebook messages from training friends around the country telling me a training job position had been posted on a few dog training forums. I only had to think about this for a moment and realized that training for an already established company would be a great fit for me. I could focus on training dogs and not have to worry about the business side of things! I started looking into this job posting and soon realized that it was located in Gilroy, California. Aside from the location, this seemed to be the perfect solution for me. I contacted the owner of the company, sent her my resume and we set up a phone interview. She had a list of criteria she was looking for in her new Training Manager and I seemed to fit the bill. The phone interview went great and the next step was to meet in person. After about 3 weeks of making plans, I ended up flying out to Gilroy and met with the owner. She gave me a tour of her wonderful facility and we talked in great detail about how we could make my skill set a great fit in her company. During this time I had an internal battle going on. My whole life was in Tucson, including my family. But my true calling in life couldn't be fulfilled there. After I received an offer letter for the Training Manager position, I decided to accept and make the journey from Tucson, Arizona to Gilroy, California.

It has been six months since I started my new position working for a person other than myself. She and I had both had our reservations as to how the transition would work from me previously being

the employer to becoming an employee. I knew in my heart that my passion was training dogs and I had to accept that I am not a “business” woman in the sense of growing a large, successful business at the heart of the operation. But, my true potential could be reached by doing what I love and helping her grow a business in which I had always envisioned myself being a part.

Moving from my home to a new state alone was a nerve-wracking transition. Making the decision to give up working for myself and becoming an employee was not easy. In the end, however, I am happier than I have ever been before. Being honest about my abilities and knowing where my strengths are have helped me achieve personal happiness. I took a leap of faith by moving to a new state, accepting a position for someone else, and being real with what I wanted.

I have seen many dog trainers struggle owning a business by trying to make things work on

their own. There are other options out there and knowing your strengths will help you make the best decision for yourself.

Brittany Robinson is a Certified Professional Trainer and the Training Manager at The Dog House Inn, Inc. She is a Professional member of the IACP. To learn more, visit www.dogbehaviorrehab.com

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The Client Complains - Now What?

by Shirley Greene

Some rules of business are fairly straightforward: Grow your business, maintain or decrease your debt, and you will profit. Another good rule is that businesses selling a product cannot be managed the same as those offering a service. If you deal in tangibles, you are “market” driven. And, if you provide a service, you are “customer” driven. To me, that means a customer doesn’t make contact until there is a problem. How many of us call a plumber to report the toilet DID flush? And, how many of your clients made an initial call to report their pup didn’t need any training -- it was perfectly behaved? Problems are what drive people to service businesses. No problem = no need for a trainer. Doesn’t that make us LOVE problems? You might say that problems fuel the bottom line profits. That’s correct, except when the “problem” is an unhappy client.

The number of satisfied clients leading to referrals and repeat business is universally important. Most business consultants offer up pages of information and yards of lists on how to make your clients happy. We understand that happy clients increase our business, and our profits, by repeat spending, purchasing additional goods or services, and sending us those all-important referrals. It is easy to treat these people well.

However, an area often overlooked, and equally influential, is how unhappy clients are treated. The outcome of conflict resolution with complaining customers has the potential to decrease profits, sales and referrals. An unhappy customer, on average, repeats (and embellishes) their “tale of woe” to at least 11 people, while a satisfied customer many only brag 3 or 4 times. There is a large opportunity for every trainer to increase business revenues through appropriate management of client complaints.

For several years, I was a secret shopper. Hired by companies large and small, I went into a store

and made a purchase from a targeted department. Then, I returned home and completed a lengthy checklist of positives and negatives to help the store evaluate its level of customer service. I soon grew to realize that evaluating customer contact through purchasing a product wasn’t reality-based testing. What separated the “Chihuahuas from the Mastiffs” would more likely occur when an employee had to handle a product return or a customer complaint.

I have a theory: almost any employee can make a customer happy by selling them the product or service they’ve already come to buy. Perhaps raises should be based upon how well employees resolve customers’ complaints. Promotions, on the other hand, should be earned by employees who not only resolve the complaint, but also retain the client and, therefore, generate repeated business opportunities. Bravo to those wise souls who can look upon a complainer as a potential profit center!

In addition to “secret shopping,” I spent almost nine years of my life as the “buck stopper” in a large medical school/clinic atmosphere. Before a complaint or a lawsuit stopped at the executive offices of the President or Board of Directors, it came through me. So, if I didn’t want to be Swiss cheese, I had to handle the situation and convert the dissatisfied into happy campers. Think I wasn’t motivated to learn the art of negotiation?

The real moment of “customer service” truth for any trainer comes when that unhappy client walks into the room, or their message is retrieved from your answering machine or e-mail. What you do next determines the futures for all 3 sides of the training triangle: the client, their dog and YOU. So before we “engage the enraged,” let’s take a look at the psychology behind our upcoming “close encounter with the mad mind.”

Product -vs- Service: Psych 101

When a customer buys a product that doesn't work, it's returned to the store. "Hey, this iPod won't hold a charge." No one person is blamed because the product was defective.

But, when a "service" is the product and the promise of solving the customer's problem is broken, the focus of the client is squarely on the PERSON. "YOU made a noon appointment for my dog's first lesson. YOU never showed up and another dog came by and I was pulled across the grass in my work pants." Yep, it's pretty clear: YOU are to blame for everything else that happened with that dog, and their person, that entire day - - or maybe for the rest of their week. At least, that's how the client perceives the situation and, unfortunately, perception is reality.

STOP Before You Start

Dogs have taught me that in any "tussle," only one of those involved can be in charge for the tussle to find a resolution. The same applies to complaining clients. Before you open your mouth to respond to the client's complaint, stop. Find "higher mental ground." I don't mean Alpha posturing and growling out your response. After all, you wouldn't attempt to correct an unruly dog without the proper tools, i.e. collar, leash and a training plan. So get your mental tools in order and follow a game plan that will leave you, and your client, winners.

They Want To See You Sweat

Eric Hoffer, in *The True Believer*, says: "You can tell the novice from the journeyman carpenter not so much by the finished cabinet but by the sweat on their brows. One works so much harder to accomplish the same end than does the other." (Like me teaching "running downs in motion" across a field--the dog isn't panting and I am sweat-soaked!) As long as both cabinets look the same, the effort doesn't matter to the buyer. But, when you are dealing with a service, effort does matter, especially to the unhappy client. They want to watch your effort at solving their problem and they want to see you sweat!

With a game plan, you will be in charge. You understand that perception is reality and know about working smarter to accomplish "damage" control. Things are looking up - - for YOU, your profits and that client.

Battle Plan

Just as you have a plan of action should a trainer call in sick an hour before group class, you need a battle plan for handling complaints. As you develop one that feels natural for your business, keep mine handy.

Step One - Be Mentally Prepared

Take a moment and clear your mind of problems ---even the one facing you. If you are physically in the presence of the "problem," ask for a 5-minute break. You don't want to begin "engagement" until you are mentally prepared to take control.

Of course, privacy is required. If you can't obtain it at the confrontation location, offer to call the client as soon as you get home or meet them at another time or place. You don't need an upset client's perceptions becoming contagious! Begin the encounter when you are certain that your head is clear and you have the ability to be calm. If you feel angry, the anger is in control--not you.

Being angry when trying to do damage control is like taking poison and expecting someone else to die.

Step Two - Stay Quiet (Listen)

When you are composed, begin the encounter. You are already in control because you began a process of "customer recovery" and have a compass pointing to resolution: your game plan. The best opening line for me is: "Tell me what happened." Then, by listening to the customer, and NOT INTERRUPTING, you will find out if the client feels annoyed or victimized. There is a HUGE difference between the two and how you'll need to make amends. Listen so that you can accurately diagnose the problem and retain control.



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Annoyed -vs- Victimized

Ron Zemke, in *The Service Edge*, first referred to the concept of annoyed -vs- victimized. Here are some of my examples:

- When both lines on your phone are out of order, you are annoyed. When both lines on your phone are out of order and you just ran a new ad for dog training that lists your phone number in 14-point type, you feel victimized.
- When your flight arrives home late, you are annoyed. When your flight arrives late and you miss the last connecting plane to home, you feel victimized.
- When your trainer arrives late, you are annoyed. When your trainer arrives late and you've just been dragged down the street by your dog and need 2 stitches in your lip, you feel _____ (you fill in that blank!)

Let the client talk until they've run out of wind. This is their chance to get it ALL out -- to vent. If they stop talking and their body language, or heavy breathing on the phone, tells you more is just under the surface, use a detective's trick. KEEP QUIET. In person, tilt your head and raise your brows--that should get them emptied out. Don't engage or defend yourself; that is only counterproductive. This isn't a debate; it's damage control.

Now, I'm not saying let them abuse you. I am saying that as the one on the wrong end of the perceived "wrong doing," they get to talk FIRST. You have to LISTEN until they are all talked out if you are going to "win."

Step Three - Repeat After Me: "I'm Sorry."

Initially, no other comment is needed. Just say, "I'm sorry." You aren't making an apology for your acts. You aren't agreeing with their statements. You are removing the fuse from the powder keg.

What if the client says: "Well, what do you mean you are sorry?" Personally, I say: "I'm sorry that you feel this way and have had such a bad day."

If you remember you are in CONTROL and are leading the unhappy client down the pathway

towards satisfaction recovery, it is much easier to disengage from their words. Speak calmly and with sincerity. As with dogs, your excitement increases the volatility of the encounter.

Step Four - Express Empathy

Expressing empathy--not sympathy--is evidence of your compassion. It says: "I know how you feel; I've been listening; I understand." It doesn't say: "You are right; I am wrong." Expressing empathy is essential for a customer who feels victimized. In many instances, you can't get to the next stages of fixing the problem until you express empathy. Actually, the client will let you know if you haven't properly expressed it--they'll go back to telling their story and complaining.

A simple repeating of the major highlights of their story can begin to convince the customer that you were, in fact, listening. Adding: "I understand how you must feel and why you are so upset," takes the wind out of their sails. Most will then have no emotional need to keep repeating or escalating their complaint. If you understand the problem, surely the next step must be that you are going to do something for them. And trust me, they are waiting to hear just what it will be.

I have a mentor who recommends you ask the customer: "What can I do for you?" He swears that they usually ask for less than he was willing to give. He's very successful; but personally, I'm chicken!

Step Five - Offer Them A Freebie

Anything "extra" can serve as a symbol that you are, in fact, ready to repent and acknowledge a blip in the radar screen. From free "upsizing" of the fries or drink with the hamburger that proved "fast food" was an oxymoron, to picking up the dry cleaning tab for the client whose dog dragged them down the field; it all serves the purpose--something tangible that says "I owe you and the debt is paid." The freebie needs to be in proportion to the PERCEIVED wrongdoing. Had the client required stitches in his lip for having been dragged behind his dog, free dry cleaning for his pants will not be viewed as enough retribution.

Follow Up!

Once your offer of amends is accepted, the immediate battle is over and the client should be satisfied with the outcome. Of course, having been in control all along, you secretly knew YOU were destined to be victorious. After all, you've defused the situation, kept it from spreading and retained the client.

Now comes your biggest opportunity. Give the client an appropriate period of time and then "follow up."

Inspect what you expect. You expect that everything is fine; call and find out. Make sure the dry cleaners did remove the grass stain from the work pants or that those stitches are healing nicely. Once again, you've made the customer feel that their complaint was heard and that they are important to YOU. Even if you never see their dog again, I doubt this individual will have anything negative to say if your name comes up at the vet's office or grocery store.

The Real World

Ah. If only every problem were so easily solved in the real world. Of course, you will hear from clients whose complaints are petty and mean-spirited. And, you may hear from clients who are clearly out of line. And, like all of us, you may have to face the fact that you should never have agreed to work with that "problem waiting to happen." Period. And, we all live and learn. Mistakes are what make us "experienced."

If you are inclined to put some of my suggestions to use, here are a few additional pointers to keep in mind:

- If you are angry - it WILL show in person or be heard on the phone.
- If you are sarcastic - the customer will know it and the problem will GROW.
- If you can't feel empathy for what your client has endured, this approach won't work. Using no approach is better than an insincere one.

•If the item offered as a "freebie" is measurably smaller than the perceived wrong doing, you have INSULTED the client, which is a HUGE problem.

•If you did not follow up and the problem wasn't completely solved, you have damaged your relationship with that customer--probably permanently. They now see you as insincere.

•If the customer smiles after the freebie and is pleased during the follow up, you've really WON the battle and, most likely, the WAR of client retention against your competitors.

And remember:

The PERSON is more important than the PROBLEM. Make them happy through conflict resolution and then go back and work on why the problem happened, talk with the "responsible" employee, do paperwork involving a refund or credit, etc. Take care of the PERSON first.

Finding out who is at fault is NOT the customer's concern. Blame doesn't solve the problem. If you own or manage the business, take full responsibility. RESOLVE the situation and then look back to determine what, if anything, can be done to keep the same problem from happening to another client. NEVER point fingers at others in front of the client and never draw anyone else into the conflict resolution process.

Good luck with your next problem client!

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Critical Thinking

by Mailey McLaughlin, M.Ed., CDT, Editor

"Happiness, not in another place, but this place...not in another hour, but this hour."

~ Walt Whitman

Have you ever been working with a dog and gotten lost in the activity, finally looking at your watch and being amazed that so much time had passed? How about when you are teaching a class or a private lesson and things are going really well, and you realize, sadly, that time is up? This probably happens to you when you engage in a favorite hobby or sport, too (if you have any outside of training dogs, which you should).

This experience is called flow. When you are in flow, you are engrossed in the activity at hand and time just flies. It's productive time, though, and you generally feel pretty accomplished by the end. Finding flow is sort of the "holy grail" sought by most people, though they may not know what it's called. Author Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has written about flow in several intriguing books, including *Flow*, *Finding Flow*, and *Creativity*. I return to these works again and again for inspiration.

When you are "in flow," something else is happening in your brain that can, when practiced, change your brain. This something is *mindfulness*, and more and more, science is pointing to the benefits of mindfulness meditation as a way not just to get more out of life, but to relieve depression, mitigate the effects of certain diseases, and stave off dementia, among other things. I've been studying mindfulness for a few years now, including having taken an 8-week course in MBSR (Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction) that I will follow starting next week with an Intermediate level intensive.

To be honest, I didn't seek out MBSR for stress relief, per se. I was mostly interested in the

mindfulness portion of it so that I could become more fulfilled as a human, and become a better teacher. It's already helped with that, and I expect it will help more. Why? Well, doesn't dog training require mindfulness?

When we are interacting with dogs, they are always being mindful. They simply cannot be multi-tasking! They are thinking about what we are asking them to do, and that is all they can think about (if they are tuned into us). Shouldn't we meet them where they are—and bring mindfulness to the activity? I strive always to do so, in every interaction I have with dogs. I owe it to them to be present—not daydreaming, not worrying about how I am going to pay a bill or whether my spouse is upset with me, and not wishing I was somewhere else. Dogs never wish they were somewhere else when they are with their pack, performing their tasks.

Mindfulness meditation improves my work because it is the practice of focusing on one thing—my breathing. Let me tell you, is it not easy to shut out the constant litany of what feels like thousands of thoughts that careen around in my head every waking moment and concentrate on that one thing, but daily practice makes for improvement. As I train my brain to let go and focus, coming back to my breath over and over, I like to think I become more like Dog.

And Dog is Good.

Mailey, The Pooch Professor, is Editor of SafeHands Journal and IACP Board member. She has worked professionally with dogs and their people for over 30 years, holds a Masters in Education, is a CDT, and is Behavior and Training Manager for the Atlanta Humane Society. Read more at www.carpek9.blogspot.com.

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