

IACP

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CANINE PROFESSIONALS

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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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The IACP is proud to announce that members

Annie Bailey, Elizabeth Campbell, Raechel Clevenger, Meredith Day, Terri A. Hill,
Debbi McArthur, Krystal Niernan, Petra Sheeley, and Tina Zimmerman

*have successfully completed their Certified Dog Trainer examinations and can now
add the designation IACP-CDT to their name.*

and members

Panos Alexakos, Kindle Aseltine, DeeDe Baker, Macy Burr, Carrie Hindman, and Nancy Smith

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President's Letter

by Melanie Benware

This was not the President's Letter I originally wrote and wanted to submit for this quarter, but given the current situation in our world, the Editor and I thought it was wise to cover what our industry is facing right now with COVID-19.

We are hearing from IACP members from all over the world with reports of dramatic declines in business or complete shutdowns. Many are going to online options for lessons with clients, while practicing social distancing. We are also seeing an uptick in trainers offering Live platform options for their businesses as well. We do not know how long the economic impacts of all this will last, but it has certainly made our industry get creative, and I think this is a time for our community to pull together.

I personally have loved watching people share their ideas with others so that they can do the same or even adapt their idea to make it work for them. I also greatly appreciate everyone that is sharing free content in order to help others. All this information sharing will strengthen this organization as well as the industry. These offerings will continue to be helpful for businesses long after we go back to "life as we knew it."

The IACP Board of Directors decided to put a 90 day extension on renewal fees for members who need it. Not only is that helping members stay a part of the organization they love, it takes a small bit of pressure off them. A side effect we didn't intend to see: we have had a few members call in and renew early and pay their fees,

some for even a few years out. If you did this, thank you!

If you are able, this would be the perfect time for you to donate to our Martin Deeley Member Hardship Fund. This fund was set up to help members who are struggling and need help paying their membership dues. There is an application on the website so members in need can apply. The fund is very low and any donations would be appreciated.

This would also be a good time to check in on the IACP Members Group as well as all the FB regional Dog Pro groups that were started by IACP members. The Dog Pro groups are a great way to connect with trainers in your area; even non IACP members are in these groups. Having a community around you, even if it is virtual, is important; share what you are experiencing, share your ideas, and ask for help if you need it. Check the IACP website for a link to all of the DogPro Regional Groups.

Also, think globally. Check in on members and professionals you know around your country and the world. Get creative! For instance, my family and I have been having "virtual dinners" with our friends this week!

Although we always request that our members conduct themselves professionally, now it is even more important. Times of stress and panic can often bring out the worst in people, so as a membership, let's show the world our best. I know the future looks uncertain



at the moment, but we will get through this and it is important that when we do, we are proud of who we are and how we conducted ourselves and our businesses.

The original letter I wrote for this edition of the Canine Professional Journal will come out in the summer edition. I will be discussing our Committees and the great work they are doing for the organization and the industry. The main focus is the great work of the Legislative Committee, chaired by John Imler with Director Oversight Rick Alto. What I will say now is that although we are all focused on COVID-19 and how it is affecting our personal, business, social, and financial lives, now is also the time to be proactive. Once things can start to return to "normal" we will still have legislative battles to face. We will have Members struggling to get businesses back up and running and generating incomes. One way we can help those members is to be strong and prepared to continue to fight for our rights, the rights of our clients, and what is best for our industry.

We need our IACP Family more than ever right now! I joined this organization in 2008, and since

then this has become a family to me, and I know it has for many of you as well. I have forged amazing friendships with people from around the world that I never would have met otherwise. I have watched this organization and its membership grow. I have learned a great deal from our members; some of the greatest trainers in the world. I hope that I have been able to return those kindnesses and share some of my knowledge and ideas that have helped others. We are stronger together, and our industry is better because of the hard work of this organization and its members.

Stay safe out there folks, and be kind to one another.

Respectfully,

Melanie Benware, President

Melanie Benware

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Beyond the Playground: Canine Fitness for Mobility Health

by Kris Butler CCFT

The purpose of canine fitness training is to empower dogs to move – better – through effective exercise. It's important for every dog, not just elite athletes. Canine cross-training that incorporates exercise theory and exercise equipment is relatively new and growing quickly as dog owners realize the benefits for their dogs and professional people enjoy new opportunities to increase business.

Mobility can be defined as the ability to move with ease, to accomplish physical movement proficiently. Canine fitness engages muscles, joints, and related connectors beyond ways in which dogs move through their typical days of play, work, or sports. Strategically designed exercises increase each dog's "mobility health" and, in the process, mitigate risks for injury through increased physical resilience.

Fitness training relates to improved function and mobility through goal-directed interventions. It's the "improved function" and "goal directed" focus that separates authentic fitness training from merely performing stunts on fancy equipment. Think "fitness center" rather than "playground."

Too often the first questions handlers ask about canine fitness relate to the equipment they should purchase, when the first consideration should be

determining goals to address one or more of the following:

- Proprioception (body awareness)
- Strength
- Balance
- Flexibility
- Injury Prevention
- Attitude, Confidence
- Cardiovascular health

However, before addressing fitness goals with any dog, primary considerations must include:

- Dog's life stage (puppy, young adult, prime, senior)
- Dog's current fitness level, physical condition, activity levels
- Handler's performance expectations (couch potato, active pet, athlete, working dog)

Following are just three of many ways in which goals and primary considerations work together to create new opportunities, each with precautions that must be addressed:



Canine exercise form: When standing, front legs and rear legs are under the dog and spine is straight, not roached. If either front/rear end is elevated, spine will be angled but straight. For sit and down positions back legs are tucked tightly and evenly under the dog, spine is straight. Everything "exercise" begins with form. Proper form is vital to effective exercise.

- Very young dogs should not engage in repetitive, concussive exercise until their growth plates have closed. But young puppies can (should!) exercise naturally and become confident on safe unstable equipment to address their ever-changing balance and proprioceptive issues. Puppies can learn appropriate form through games that teach foundation fitness (and obedience) skills such as tucked and kick-back sits, sphynx downs, and square stands on the ground or on carefully selected stable fitness equipment that helps them manage their bodies.

- Typical pet dogs, especially couch potatoes, overweight, or senior dogs are not physically prepared to do ninja warrior stunts on dynamic inflated equipment. Sometimes they are not prepared to even maintain proper form while briefly offering foundation sits, downs, and stands. But, after being cleared by their veterinarians, they can begin fitness training at some level. All dogs should begin on the ground or on a solid plank designed to help them manage their bodies while learning to maintain proper form.

- Canine athletes and working dogs are thought to be the fittest of the fit, but they are absolutely vulnerable to injury from the un-natural demands their jobs place on them. Their needs are specific to their jobs and their current overall physical condition. Reasons for exercises that promote balance, flexibility, and supportive muscle development are easy to overlook in these active, fit-looking dogs.

The key to effective exercise is not so much what equipment a trainer uses as how the handler progresses the dog through purposefully selected exercises to target specific goals.

There is no denying, however, that people like to imagine their dogs as super stars, and colorful inflated equipment often serves initially as a draw. Hopefully the impression of a playground will morph into a catalyst for healthy change. As with any training, results are dependent upon the skill of the professional person overseeing the activity.

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Opportunities for dog owners present opportunities for their dog trainers, too. Classes that are not fitness related might become more interesting as trainers introduce elements of functional fitness during lessons. Fitness focuses on proper form during sit, stand, and down behaviors, which fits nicely into most existing training programs. Fitness training can also support progressive levels of stand-alone lessons. Fitness equipment sales also contribute to training profits. People who respect their trainers' views regarding best practices are most likely going to want to purchase any equipment their trainers recommend. (Recommend responsibly, my friends!)

Resources are plentiful. Internet searches will identify many online courses that address specific fitness goals and considerations. Fitness for athletes, fitness for long-backed dogs, fitness foundations for young dogs, conditioning for injury prevention, and conditioning for specific muscle groups are examples of just a few specialized online courses completed by this author. For in-person opportunities, training centers and clubs often sponsor weekend foundation fitness workshops.

For more comprehensive education with "fitness" credentialing available, consider:

- University of Tennessee Certified Canine Fitness Trainer Program (CCFT) (<https://shop.utvetce.com/ccft>). In addition to extensive online study, this program requires three days of in-person hands-on class work, case studies, and a comprehensive final test. I chose this program for certification, which I began in 2015 and completed during 2018. This program is sponsored by FitPaws® and Blue-9, companies

that produce and sell canine exercise, rehabilitation, and training equipment. Blue-9 is currently an IACP silver sponsor.

- Certified Professional Canine Fitness Trainer certificate program (CPCFT) offered by Fenzi Dog Sports Academy and taught by Debbie Gross DPT, MSPT, Diplomat ABPTS, CCRP. (<https://www.fenzidogsportsacademy.com/courses/8-fdsa/3631-fitness-trainer-certificate-program>) In addition to four levels of online study, this program requires case studies and exam. Dr. Gross is a rehabilitation



veterinarian and the owner of TotoFit®, a company that produces and sells canine exercise and rehabilitation equipment.

Another program that offers a certification process, but with specific focus on sporting and working dogs, is Certified Canine Athlete Specialist (CCAS) (<https://northeastk9conditioning.lpages.co/k9fit/>) offered by IACP member and Journal author Erica Boling Ph.D., CCFT, through her Northeast Canine Conditioning Academy.

Fortunate owners and trainers might find local fitness experts to learn from and perhaps collaborate with in person: Try these listings provided by the certifying organizations:

- CCFTs <https://shop.utvetce.com/ccft-graduates/>
- CPCFTs <http://cpcftworldwide.com/find-a-cpcft/>

In order to teach clients about safe and effective fitness for dogs or to begin exercising their own

dogs, trainers must understand the principles of safe and effective exercise for dogs. Studying and becoming certified have been worthwhile and rewarding endeavors for me. Of course there is much more than can be written in any one article. It is my hope that the information and resources provided here facilitates positive steps forward.

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Kris Butler CCFT trains dogs for busy families eight months per year at her boarding school in Norman OK. She wraps her busy training schedule around competitive events where she and her husband compete with their two border collies from strong working lines. It was the risks associated with agility that initially drew Kris into the field of canine fitness. In addition to master agility titles, Kris has also earned many obedience, rally, and hunt test titles. She is the author of "Therapy Dogs Today: Their Gifts, Our Obligation." She is a Professional member of IACP. Her website is www.DogPrograms.com.

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Dog Trainer Regulations: Is the Tail Wagging the Dog?

by Jeffrey S. Leavitt, IACP-CDT

We recently have seen a rise in the efforts to regulate dog trainers by local and state governments. Whenever there is breaking news about an abusive dog trainer, well-intentioned people, ordinary citizens and legislators, seek to find a legal solution to the problem. Let me provide you with three reasons why the current legislative efforts are ineffective in addressing the problem, and one alternative way to reduce the likelihood of dogs being abused under the care of a dog trainer.

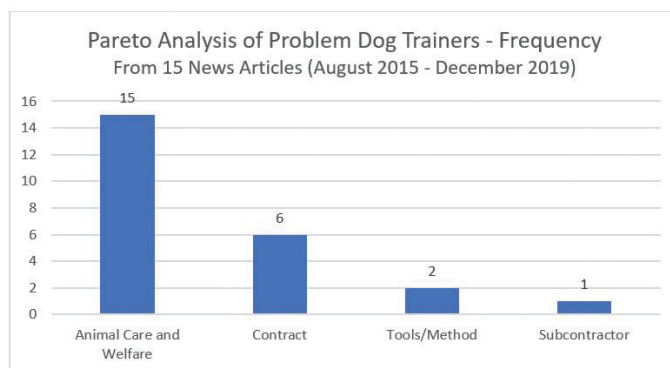
Reason #1: Statistical analysis was not (apparently) performed in order to help determine the root cause.

The death of a dog named Sarge in Hillsborough County, FL seems to be the incident that motivated the local government to enact dog trainer regulations, and subsequently prompted other states to at least consider similar efforts. However, according to an article published by the Tampa Bay Times on March 3, 2017, *“Complaints to Hillsborough County’s Pet Resource Center about dog trainers are rare. There were just three complaints since 2014, according to county records.”* If complaints about dog trainers were rare, did they really need legislation?

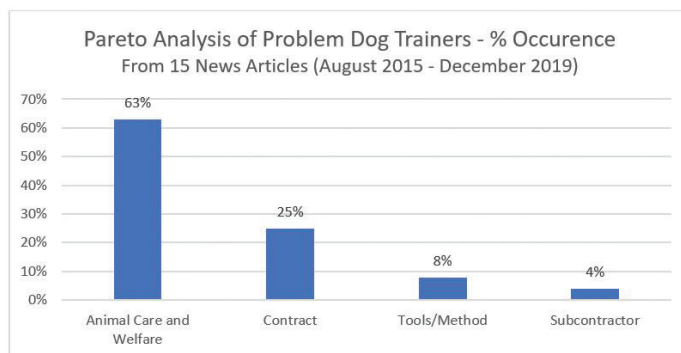
We need to look at a number of cases of “bad dog trainers” to see what types of problems are surfacing. To do this, we will use a basic statistical tool called a Pareto Diagram. The Pareto Principle (aka “the vital few” or “80/20 rule”) is basically that 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. It can be displayed as a chart with the most frequently occurring reasons on the left side and continuing to the least frequently occurring on the right side. I looked at fifteen news articles from August 2015 to December 2019, and categorized the problems identified in each one. Some of the articles reported multiple problems, so there is not a one-to-one relationship between the number

of articles and the number of problems. There were four categories of problems that I named: Animal Care and Welfare, Contract, Subcontractor Evaluation and Control, and Tools/Methods.

Here is the Pareto Diagram for the frequency of occurrence:



This is the Pareto Diagram for the percentage of occurrence:



88% of the problems (effects) were caused by #1 – not taking care of the dogs (e.g. starved, emaciated) and #2 – contract issues (e.g. verbal or no agreement). The regulations should be laser-focused making the care of dogs and contract execution a priority.

However, as is the case with many emotional, political issues, there is always a push for

sweeping regulation intended to stop the few while impacting the many who are not part of the problem. Legislators should look at the data, do statistical analysis, formulate a plan, implement that plan, monitor the results, and adjust where needed. Anything else is a Piñata Approach: Put on the blindfold, grab a stick, start swinging, and hope that you can break open Poppy the Pinata.

Reason #2: The general eligibility requirements do not adequately address the prevention of animal abuse/cruelty.

MA Senate Bill 118 requirements:

- *Be at least 18 years of age.*

In every news report where the trainer age was stated, there was not one instance of the offending dog trainer being under the age of eighteen.

- *Be of good moral character.*

By definition, an animal abuser is not of good moral character. The problem lies in (a) What does this mean? and (b) How do you determine/measure this trait? Unless you can answer these questions,

this eligibility requirement is meaningless and will not address either of the top problems.

- *Have successfully completed high school or successfully passed a high school equivalency examination developed by the General Education Development (GED) Testing Service*

Having graduated from high school, I can say with relative certainty that no time was spent on the proper care of animals. This requirement has nothing to do with dog training in general, or the vital few, specifically.

Reason #3: There is a heavy emphasis on certification, when the certification requirements are not focused on abuse prevention.

MA Senate Bill 118 requirements:

- *Have successfully completed a minimum of 300 hours in dog training, under the supervision of, and documented by, a dog trainer licensed pursuant to this act, within the three years immediately preceding application for licensure under this act.*

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- *Pass an examination administered or approved by the board to determine the applicant's competence to practice dog training.*
- *Each applicant for a license as a dog trainer shall be examined by the board.*

One of the certification exams (written only) deemed acceptable by the regulation (and offered by the identified "Certifying Organization" – CO) does not emphasize the top problem. There are only 7 questions (4%) dealing with animal care:

180 Questions Total
 Instruction Skills 48% (86 questions)
 Animal Husbandry 4% (7 questions)
 Ethology 7% (13 questions)
 Learning Theory 36% (65 questions)
 Equipment 5% (9 questions)

Intuitively, answering seven questions about animal husbandry on an exam does not seem like an effective measure in preventing abuse.

But there is a 300 hours of experience requirement, which is also a pre-requisite for taking the CO's exam. My first question is, "Why 300 hours?" Why

not 250 hours? Why not 500 hours? The majority of hours (225 minimum) deal with giving group classes, private classes, and consulting with clients. This is related to the "act of training," not to learning animal husbandry in order to prevent starvation, emaciation, dehydration, etc. If proper animal care requires certification, why then are not all dog owners required to be certified? It is because, in general, people by nature know how to care for animals by providing food, water, and other types of care.

Additionally, the certification requirement written into the law is problematic in and of itself.

The accepted certification is primarily from the single CO. Other certifications may be acceptable: "or any other examination that is determined by the board to be a substantially similar assessment of dog training skills and competency." But the CO states the following with regard to dog trainer certification in a position statement (emphasis added below):

a) *"who have little to no legitimate education, training or experience in the field of dog training"*

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and behavior modification”

b) “individuals who do not hold an accredited certification”

c) “(CO) supports and will facilitate efforts to introduce and pass legislation intended to implement appropriate regulation that would require legitimate certification.”

It seems that other certifications not following the CO philosophy would have a difficult time threading the eye of that narrow requirements needle. And the CO consults with the board on review/examination of applicants, and the requirements of what goes into the review/examination. There are also two members of the board who are dog trainers, licensed through the legislation. “Legitimacy,” then, is in large part determined by the CO who has a vested interest in funneling applicants to their certifications. There is an implied, if not direct, conflict of interest in this arrangement.

So, what is the answer that will satisfy all of the stakeholders? I suggest that a “Best Practices Standard for Pet Dog Training Organizations” would fulfill the need. Here is the general approach for the standard:

- 1) Identify prescribed (must have) requirements only when there is general agreement among experts that it represents a best practice that should be required of all businesses.
- 2) The standard would be primarily descriptive in nature, so any size organization would be able to implement it.
- 3) The standard would be tool and methodology neutral, focusing on assuring that personnel and clients are properly trained and competent in the tools/methodology.
- 4) The standard would go well beyond mainly requiring a certification with a specified number of hours experience.
- 5) When used as part of a regulatory statute or law, the governing body is in the best position to determine how it will verify the compliance with this standard.

This is the key: The business decides how it will comply with the standard, and the lawmakers decide how they will determine compliance. Additionally, lawmakers still have the flexibility to add any requirements that are unique to their locale. As an example, they might decide that an on-line course in preventing animal cruelty would be beneficial.

This is the general outline for the standard:

- I. Scope
- II. Normative References (e.g. applicable laws)
- III. Terms and Definitions
- IV. Standard Requirements
 - a. Establishment as a business
 - b. Management Responsibility
 - c. Contract activities
 - i. Contract execution
 - ii. Training plans
 - d. Dog trainer qualifications
 - i. Certifications
 - ii. Grandfathering
 - iii. Continuing education
 - e. Supplier evaluation and control
 - f. Animal care and welfare
 - g. Abuse prevention
 - h. Business metrics
 - i. Corrective action
 - j. Documentation requirements
- V. Annex
- VI. Bibliography
- VII. Contributors

For a dog training business that does not fall under any state or local regulations, this is a systematic way of helping get and keep the organization’s processes on track. For regulators, it provides a more logical approach to solving the problem of animal cruelty by dog trainers.

Jeff Leavitt is the owner of Blue Bridge Dog Training in Hixson, TN. He is an IACP Legislative Watchdog and a member of the IACP Legislative Committee. He can be reached at jeff@bluebridgedogtraining.com.

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Charge What You are Worth

by Tara Siefring

The topic of pricing is a fickle beast in the dog training industry.

I remember when I first started out as a new dog trainer in 2012. I got into training dogs because I owned a dog who had aggression problems. I made the ignorant mistake of hiring a few "fly by night" trainers that never really helped me get his issues resolved and as a result, I was broke. I was eventually forced to euthanize my dog. After grieving my dog, I was determined not to let others in my local area have to suffer the way I did with Brutus and fall prey to trainers who didn't live up to their promises. That's when I opened Happy Hound.

I think this message will ring true to many dog trainers out there. They say necessity is the mother of invention and for dog trainers, that often means we were once in the shoes of our clients and have a lot of empathy for struggling dog owners.

But while our empathy can make us great dog trainers, it sometimes makes us terrible business owners. By not charging our clients enough money, we inadvertently turn ourselves into those fly-by-night dog trainers. It affects other facets of our lives, too.

You're only one human. You only have so many hours in a day, and your resources are limited--not just as a dog trainer, but as a parent, spouse, friend, and in the other roles you fill in your daily life.

Not charging what I was worth affected my life in ways I didn't even realize. The less money I charged, the more time I spent working, which made me a distracted spouse, gave me a tremendous amount of mom-guilt, and it even made me fat. My dog training calendar controlled my life and finding time for anything other than work was almost impossible. There was a lot of driving, a lot of fast food, and a lot of depression. Am I making you uncomfortable yet? Good.

That person I described above was me about 4 years ago until I learned to adopt a more "business-oriented" mindset when it came to my dog training business. That's when I really started to dig deep into educating myself more about the technical aspects of owning a business. I knew there had to be a way I could

do things better. One of those ways, I learned, was to increase the value of my programs and raise my prices.

I think when it comes to raising prices, a lot of trainers are concerned that they will lose business or customers. The problem with that theory is by not raising your prices, you are actually sacrificing man-hours working with high paying, high-quality clients who do their homework and sing your praises to keep running yourself ragged for low-paying and low-quality clients who never do their homework and will forget your name within 6 months of finishing training. In case you haven't figured it out already, that's not good for business!

Yes, you will deter some people by raising your prices, but you will attract others who are willing to pay a premium to have the dog of their dreams or folks who need serious behavioral help if that's something you niche in. You'll also work less hours (if you prefer to) and will enjoy your work more which prevents the dreaded "burnout monster" everyone in this industry is always talking about.

If you're like me, you're the kind of dog trainer who will stop at nothing to help your clients succeed. You'd give them the shirt off your back if it meant they could train their dog better. I hope after reading this, you're starting to realize that for your own sanity, your compassion needs to come at a price.

Have you ever walked in a client's home and walked out with one less slip lead, pet corrector, or other training tool and yet no money-in-hand for that tool? Have you ever spent hours on the computer writing handouts, guides and materials to give to your clients? How much have you spent on printer ink this year? Software subscriptions? Have you ever allowed a client more lessons than you charged them for? When you do that, you're hemorrhaging money without even realizing it, and you're not making any of it back! You're also not getting back any of that time either. You're also ultimately not giving your clients the best service you're capable of because you're prioritizing the wrong things and forgetting about your other important resources such as time and adequate rest. This is why

it's important to charge what you're worth. When you don't charge what you're worth, both you and your clients suffer for it.

So here's the secret. Here's the magic formula to figure out how to get to the gym, be a better parent, a better spouse, a better dog trainer, AND live richer.

When setting or adjusting prices, you want to follow this formula:

$$\frac{(\text{Business Expenses} + \text{Desired Salary})}{(1 - \text{Tax Liability Percentage Expressed as Decimal})} = \text{Minimum Gross Revenue.}$$

Now take Minimum Gross Revenue and divide it by average number of clients.

This will tell you how much, on average, you need to be charging each client.

Sure, you'll charge some clients less and some more, but the answer above needs to be your average price. When I say average, I actually mean a calculated average, not an estimated average in your head.

You can calculate this by the year, month, or even down to the week or day if you prefer. I personally tend to calculate both monthly and yearly and then make any other business decisions after (and only after) I've calculated this formula.

Here's an example calculated for one month: $(2,000 + 8,000)$ divided by $(1 - .25) = 13,333.33$. So if my business expenses are 2k per month and I want

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to make 8k per month, I add those together, which equals 10k. Now I calculate my tax liability which for the business (I'm an S-Corp) plus married filing jointly which is around 25%--I'm rounding up a bit--that's (1 - 0.25). So in order to make my desired income, I need to make approximately 14k per month as a business. Now on average, I take on 10 new clients per month. Divide 14k by 10, that's \$1400. I charge \$1575 for my most popular program so my price point is good. If I want to make more than that, I'll have to raise my number of clients, raise prices, lower business expenses, or lower tax rate, which can sometimes be done by changing to an LLC or s-corp. Pick one or multiple figures to change to make more money. Play around with this formula until it looks how you want it to look.

Once you've determined your desired salary and how much to charge your clients, you need to figure out how to get that amount of clients consistently. This is where a business coach comes in handy.

Just like training a dog, there are many moving parts that go into creating the perfect results. You need to work just as hard on your business as you do your dog

training skills if you want to have a sustainable and profitable business.

Tara is the owner and head trainer at Happy Hound Dog Obedience in the Panhandle of Florida. Her company is small, currently employing two other trainers. They're famous for their "Reliable Dog in 60 Days" dog training program which is a results-based dog training program helping dog owners struggling with a wide range of dog behavior issues train their dog to be the most social and obedient version of themselves that they can be.

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Let's Be Clear

by Ralf Weber, CDT/CDTA

Not much enrages the temperaments of dog trainers more than arguing about the true nature of dogs. One would think that by now we would have settled this argument, but clearly, we haven't. And while we probably have as many opinions as we have dog trainers, most viewpoints fall somewhere on the spectrum of two major camps I like to call the pack leader group and the cooperative partner group.

I personally used to be in the former, and I am now in the latter. There are many reasons why I changed my views over the last fifteen years and when I look back at the opinions I used to hold, I have to acknowledge that while they made sense to me at the time, they were not as informed as my opinions are today. I don't view this as past failure. I view it as growth. If I wouldn't have changed my views upon gaining a deeper understanding, I would not be true to myself. We should always be open to reevaluate our opinions and modify them in face of new evidence.

I can't take full credit for everything I'm going to share in this article. I don't remember which views I adopted from whom over the years but people who have influenced my thinking significantly are Chad Mackin, Jay Jack, Marc Goldberg, Martin Deeley, Michael Ellis and Ivan Balabanov. There are others, but these are my key influences. In the past I answered the question of my influences differently.

Reading, learning and validating new knowledge through working with dogs for over a decade made me realize what was missing for me in the debate about dog's nature (call it "the missing link" if you will).

We can find plenty of dog trainer and dog owner homes subscribing to the pack leader model, organizing their homes and dogs accordingly; this works for them. We can equally find plenty of homes where this is handled differently, and dogs

are treated more like family members in a cooperative setup; this also works.

If one camp was correct and the other was wrong, one of those groups should live in utter chaos, or have dogs that are miserable. However, both approaches seem to work if executed correctly. Obviously, we also see both approaches fail miserably, which is why we all have jobs. However, this isn't evidence of one side being correct and the other being wrong. This is simply a realization that humans have a great ability to screw anything up.

So, if both approaches can be successful, it stands to reason that both teams are doing something that makes it work and it may not be what each of those groups thinks it is. What is the common denominator that ultimately determines success or failure in living with dogs correctly or incorrectly?

In my view it is clarity.

Family dogs do best when they understand how everything in the home functions. They pay attention to how each family member interacts with them, what each family member accepts and doesn't accept in their interactions, how to have the best day in the home, how to have the most fun every day, how to get food, attention, play.

Competition dogs do best if they fully understand the picture of the obedience/routine they are asked to perform--what the path to the highest level of reward looks like. "Understanding the picture" is a term used quite frequently in the dog sport world.

This is no different for people. We do best if we can predict the outcomes of our actions, and if we understand how we can influence our environment through our behavior towards others and in the world. Dogs are the same. Clarity matters for all beings.

When people refer to “being the pack leader,” what are they really saying? Cesar Millan called leadership “protection and direction.” And while in human terms leadership is certainly defined differently, if we follow this definition, protection and direction both provide clarity to the dog. By telling a dog what to do, we are reducing choices and communicating what's expected, including adverse consequences for non-compliance. This creates predictability for the dog. And what do rules, boundaries and limitations accomplish? They clearly communicate to the dog what is expected, what is not acceptable, and what is futile. The pack leader approach works because it provides clarity through structure.

People in the cooperative dog group teach their dogs how to interact through training. We usually see more rewards in this setup. Good behavior is rewarded, and bad behavior is ignored or blocked. This provides clarity through teaching. The dog will learn what is expected through training.

It could be teaching traditional obedience commands, or it could be teaching the dog to make

good choices at liberty. The latter concept doesn't resonate with everybody yet but the GRC Dog Sports, started by Jay Jack, will probably change that over the next couple of years.

Obedience training can provide clarity if the obedience is literal. Simply teaching interpreted obedience, like we see too often, won't accomplish the clarity goal. The training of markers provides clarity. Taking the frustration out of the leash and collar through collar and leash conditioning provides clarity. Attention exercises that motivate your dog to maintain social connection and avoid him "checking out" provide clarity.

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Clarity is the missing link. Whatever way you live with your dog, if your approach provides clarity, things will be okay in the end. Every biological being functions better if the parameters and rules of how to safely maneuver and influence their environment are understood. Whenever a person or dog (or any other animal) does not understand how an environment functions, the results are stress and often reactivity.

Many different approaches can lead to a harmonious dog household if your dogs have clarity in their environment. However, I don't think that is the only criteria that matters when it comes to training. The longer I train dogs, the more I care about their experience in training and keeping their overall stress level as low as possible in the long run.

As a result, my training has evolved from clarity through structure to clarity through training. Many of my behavioral cases involve both components but the structural components are now on the low end while the teaching component are on the high end. And in terms of structure, most of the time it

simply means to create a predictable routine in which I remove choices from the dog for a limited time period.

Ralf Weber is a Certified Dog Trainer (IACP CDT, CDTA), a professional member of the International Association of Canine Professionals (IACP), a CGC Evaluator for the American Kennel Club (AKC), trained and certified in a wide variety of dog training and canine-related fields, and author of the canine behavioral book "If Your Dog Could Talk."

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Competing Distractions

by Guy Kantik, CPT

After 10 years as a professional trainer, I have noticed one topic that seems to be lacking discussion: the concept of competing distractions. Our dogs live in a world of stimulation, occurring for them through our shared 5 senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Regardless of training methods and tools used, everything begins by getting a dog's attention and starting a dialogue for teaching. I've found it interesting to consider how different methodologies use distractions provided by a trainer to counter natural distractions.

A few examples of tools and distractions based on senses:

- touch - collars, ecollars, water spray, hands, etc.
- noise – voice, clicker, air spray, penny cans, etc.
- taste - food
- scent – food, citronella, oils, etc.
- sight – seclusion, calming hoods, distance

Some items in this list can distract through more than one sense (air can=touch and noise). Some allow more flexibility in modulating the competing distraction (a leash correction can offer light pressure or a firm correction; e-collar pressure can be fine tuned to many levels, etc.).

Many trainers start training by limiting natural distractions. There is a difference between using competing distractions and limiting natural distractions. Eventually, a dog needs to behave and listen in the real world and its constant stimulation. Having available a greater number of competing distractions can provide faster and stronger progress against the natural distractions presenting every day.

Looking at tools and methods from a “competing distractions” perspective can be refreshing. This also has allowed me to find more helpful tools, and better ways to use the tools I have. But there are further points to this to consider.

TOOLS AND METHODS

Our distractions above can also be classified as falling into **corrective**, **neutral**, and **rewarding** groups. This reflects many variations in training methods.

Our examples based on typically corrective, neutral and rewarding:

- corrective - collars, ecollars, water spray, air spray, penny cans
- neutral - collars, ecollars, clicker, seclusion, calming hoods, distance
- rewarding – food, touch (petting), voice

The reason I noted “typically” above is to remind you that each dog will define whether a competing distraction is seen as corrective, neutral or rewarding. A can stuffed with pennies (noisemaker) might be aversive to one dog (corrective), gain attention from another (neutral), and be a toy for a third (rewarding). Reading response is more important to me than a particular tool or method. In other words, the dog, not a person, should define the best tool(s) for any particular situation. Trainers that understand this will have a strong advantage over those who give priority to method or tool choice based on their own perceptions.

TAUGHT DISTRACTIONS

I view some competing distractions as being taught. Commands and bridging (although there are probably more) come to mind. Taught competing distractions always take time, teaching skill, and are generally neutral. All of this is fine, good, and often a goal.

A dog that will listen to a command vs. chasing a squirrel is a common example in my life. Of course, this relies on a human being present to tell the dog what to do (vs. what not to do). If the human's out of the process – bye, bye Mr. Squirrel.

Bridging can be defined and used in various manners by different trainers. For this discussion I simply think of bridging as a noise or verbal marker that gives a dog some piece of information. While there can be many ways to use bridging, in the end, it too is a team event where a human is required.

I sometimes hear criticism regarding reliance on human guidance for dogs as being too cumbersome, or a managed solution. I disagree. I see nothing wrong with dogs needing guidance in our human world. I would also counter that I do not see myself as my dog's manager, but its teacher and team-mate. Teams are always stronger than individual efforts, so I'm happy to be there for my dogs.

AND THEN THERE'S THIS...

What if a competing distraction doesn't work at all? Good question. Do you remember my comments regarding distractions can be corrective, neutral or rewarding? Well, in my experience, corrective distractions generally work in more situations – probably because they can be adjusted or modulated. Conversely, rewarding or neutral distractions generally lack such ability, so they may not be effective with strong natural distractions.

Trainers using e-collars as pressure on/off tools see this every day. That's the reason e-collars have adjustable levels, and the reason no single level is right. I tell all of my clients using e-collars that the right level is a moving target. What remains consistent is dogs that are not distracted always take lighter stimulation levels than ones that are highly distracted. Sometimes this variation in a given dog is great, sometimes it's modest. It's not the number, it's the dog's response that is important.

I've had dogs that totally disregard firm training collar corrections (even with a prong), but respond very well to light e-collar stimulation. As before, the dog defines whether the competing distraction a trainer uses is noticeable (effective) or not. Don't get hung up on what you think should work; look and see what actually does work!

If you're not comfortable using competing distractions that pressure or correct, that's fine.

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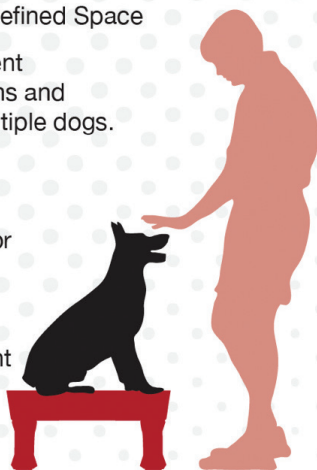
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But you will definitely need to work on ways to limit natural distractions. Delivered distractions vs. natural distractions – you have options on both sides of this equation. At some point, however, you will need to prepare the dog for life around those natural distractions.

WHAT TO DO WITH A DOG'S ATTENTION

So far I've discussed ways to gain a dog's attention through competing distractions. But what do you do once you have the dog's attention? Well, that's where teaching begins. You need a clear plan or path or you won't move things forward. Competing distractions alone are often nothing more than interruptions.

Again, overall methods often come into play here, so there is no single answer. In fact, I would suggest there are often many good answers. Good trainers should be looking for more than one path for progress. Nothing wrong with trying a few different things to see what works best for a specific dog, situation, and owners. Flexibility is a good thing.

FINAL THOUGHTS

One seminar I attended by Tyler Muto discussed rewards and corrections using an e-collar. Before that seminar I never considered how removing e-collar pressure was part of the reward cycle for a dog. It is – along with your praise. There are frequent discussions on removing training tools over time, as this is almost always a desired goal.

Whether the competing distractions you choose to use are corrective, neutral, or rewarding, think about final goals with a dog. If done well, removing corrective competing distractions can be a rewarding part of the process for a dog. But removal of competing distractions that are rewarding is not going to be seen the same way. Food for thought as you develop a plan.

Guy Kantak is a Certified Professional Trainer and owner-operator of "The K9 Guy." He provides one-on-one visits in home for obedience, behavior modification, off-leash training, confidence building, puppy consultations and owner education throughout the Central Ohio area.

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Critical Thinking

by Mailey McLaughlin, M.Ed., CDTA/PDTI, Editor

We are in the midst of very uncertain times.

None of us ever knows what the future will bring, of course. But when things are going well, we imagine the future will be more of the same, of things going well. While we can understand on a base level that this isn't guaranteed, but merely a wish, we still enjoy believing it and that belief helps us make sense of our world.

When things take a turn for the worse, as they have right now, it's so hard to hold onto that rosy outlook. But what is the alternative? Believing the worst? What would happen to our ways of life, our economy, our businesses, our future, if we simply gave up?

Here's what would happen: nothing. And that is simply unacceptable to me. I don't want "nothing" to happen.

So much good can and will come out of this morass. Look at it with larger eyes. Embrace your current feelings of fear and anxiety and see them for what they

are. Then think new thoughts. Acknowledge that we are all hurting, and we might be hurting for a while. Then take action to change your thinking because you cannot afford not to.

Suffering comes from resisting pain. So, don't resist. Acknowledge, then move. Don't let nothing happen. Spend your downtime the next few months learning something new, and when this lets up, you will be ahead of the game. Take breaks to relax while you learn; let what you take in soak into you.

You got this.

Mailey, The Pooch Professor, is Editor of The Canine Professional Journal as well as the electronic Bulletin, and is past Vice President of the IACP. She has worked professionally with dogs and their people for 35+ years, holds a Masters in Education, is a CDT/CDTA and PDTI through IACP, and is Behavior and Training Manager for the Atlanta Humane Society. Read more at www.carpek9.blogspot.com.

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