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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.

For Those Dedicated to the Well Being of Dogs



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The IACP is proud to announce that members

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and Steinunn Gudbjorg Torfadottir**

*have successfully completed their Dog Trainer Foundation Examinations
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President's Letter

by Melanie Benware

Well, we made it through 2020, maybe a little battered and bruised, but a bit stronger, too. Although 2020 was a difficult year for many, the IACP Board and Committees were very busy and were able to work on a wide range of projects. Let me share some of the plans the IACP has for 2021.

US Conference in San Diego: We are moving forward with plans for our US Conference this fall in San Diego. We have a fantastic line up of speakers and with the help of our Event Planner, Linda Worthington, we have new sponsorship ideas, virtual upgrades for those that cannot attend in person, new networking ideas, and more. This is lining up to be the BEST conference the IACP has ever had and we look forward to seeing you there.

Education and Certification Committee: 2020 was a huge year for the ECC! We were able to grow the committee and have a good group of volunteers working hard to revamp the certification process. The new CDT program is online and available now. They are currently reworking the Dog Trainer Foundation Exam and the CDTA, and will move on to the PDTI after those are complete. They are also streamlining the requirements for CEU's and created a comprehensive grading rubric for Evaluators to follow. We owe everyone on that committee a huge thank you for all the work they have done and continue to do!

European Members Committee: I can not say enough good things about this committee! They are a group of deeply passionate and educated members that wants to see the IACP grow in Europe. The dedication they have shown is proving to be fruitful as we work towards our first European conference. As we grow in numbers in Europe, we hope to bring on more

sponsors to increase our benefit offerings to those members outside the US. This group of people are helping us put the International in IACP!

Legislative Committee: The pandemic created a pause in canine industry-related legislation, but the committee did not slow down. They worked hard on every issue that arose, and continue to help the IACP fight against potential laws that could damage the industry. They also wrote a Best Practices for Pet Dog Businesses and are working on an Ecollar Survey that will hopefully be rolled out in early 2021. I am so proud of all the hard work this committee is doing as well as our Legislative Watchdogs.

Service Dog Committee: The committee continues to work with TSA towards a Best Practice Guide for Service Dogs in Airports. As you may remember, they rolled out the IACP Public Access Test (PAT) and are now finalizing the PAT badges, complete with pictures and QR codes. The most exciting thing, in my opinion, is the online options the SD Committee is working on. They are looking to produce a pre-recorded webinar for the PAT as well as put together quarterly, virtual SD workshops through the IACP Website.

Therapy Dog Committee: This committee has been working on a Therapy Dog Evaluator Certification as well as a Therapy Dog Handler Team Test and are entering the final stages. With some new volunteers coming on to the committee and a new Director Oversight, Tracy Atkins, they are making some changes that will truly make these programs top notch. By entering the TD realm, IACP will be in front of more pet owners and we will continue to build our



reputation as THE leading Canine Professional Organization.

Website: We have outgrown the abilities of the website platform we currently have and the IACP Board found that there really was not a platform that did everything we needed. Therefore, we have begun the process with a company to build us a brand-new website from the ground up. This new website will allow us to build a robust Education Portal, complete with options for online CEUs and (wait for it!) a proper search function. It will be organized so that someone searching for a member in their area can select specific types of training they are looking for and will even be able to rank members in the search results. This means we will be able to prioritize our certified members to show up first! For this function to perform properly, we will need our members to maintain and update their profiles on a regular basis. This is just the tip of the iceberg for what we will be able to accomplish with this new site and it should be complete by the end of first quarter.

Other News: We are working on an Ecollar Standards-of-Use Policy as well as collaborating with Herm Sprenger to create a Prong Collar Knowledge Assessment Test. One will be for professionals and a separate one for clients.

Thank you! I want to thank Nelson Hodges and

Mailey McLaughlin for their time serving this organization. It has been my pleasure to serve with them and I appreciate their dedication. Mailey will still be lending her skills for the Canine Professional Journal as well as serving on the ECC.

Welcome! We have welcomed in four new Board Members and I am already impressed by what they will bring to the organization and look forward to seeing all they will accomplish. Welcome aboard Tracy Atkins (Director Oversight of the Therapy Dog Committee), Adam Gibson (Director Oversight of Growth and Retention), John Imler (Director Oversight of the Legislative Committee) and Petra Sheeley (Director Oversight of the Education Portal and Herm Sprenger Knowledge Assessment Test).

Lots of great stuff happening, folks. Stay tuned, and Happy New Year!

Respectfully,

Melanie Benware, CDT/CDTA/PDTI, President

Melanie Benware

melanie.benware@canineprofessionals.com



My Thoughts on Balanced Training

by Valerie Ann Erwin

I see this every day on social media pages: "Looking for a balanced trainer." It always gives me a moment's pause for thought. "What do they mean?" "Are they part of my tribe?" "Are we on the same page?" Personally, I have difficulty with limiting labels. They often drive me to ponder how my use of a descriptor is aligned with my colleagues'.

How do we define balanced in the context of dog training? Is it balanced dog training or balanced dog trainer? Tools? Quadrants? Methods? Philosophy? Opposite of positive? So many questions are generated by this term. I often see trainers labeling themselves or other trainers as balanced based on the tools they use, or the eschewing of philosophies they perceive as contrary to their own. Many trainers I perceive as "balanced" rarely use anything to define themselves other than dog trainer. I had never called myself a balanced trainer, because I didn't really have a solid notion of what the term means to me or my colleagues that may hear me name myself so.

I have discussed the definition and ideas of balanced training and heard many perspectives. The mildest are shrugs and questions akin to "Why does it matter?" while others have very finite descriptions of what it means to them. Many refer to themselves as balanced trainers, often particularly defined by the tools they use, usually remote collars, or as something "other than positive training," and usually in defense of their tools, especially against those who would take them away. Others have stated that balanced training is the use of all quadrants, while locking themselves into the limited scope of rigid Skinnerism. In many conversations, trainers will call themselves balanced to belong to a particular group of trainers who call themselves thus with deliberate attempt to belong, without having personally defined what it means to them. With

respect, my intention is not to negate anyone's personal perspective or push mine onto others. I have observed significant contention between dog trainers and never wish to provoke more. Many of the above listed ideas and philosophies have never felt comfortable or authentic to me, and I understand that many may not see themselves in any of them, may have their own ideas, or possibly see a little of themselves in a few or all or any combination of them. I would like to spark food for thought and future conversations on the topic. I've enjoyed my journey to re-introducing myself to a formally familiar term in a related-but-different context. I would like to share that journey with those who have honored me with reading my thoughts.

Last October, I had the honor of hosting Nelson Hodges for a workshop at my facility. In the past 4 years, Nelson and I have had many conversations about how tools fit into our dog training work. He has often described them as force multipliers. I had always accepted this to mean that they increased the sensory input at which the dog is guided by the tool, while decreasing the amount of physical force needed to be applied by the handler to reach the dog. The more I embraced this ideal, the lighter my handling became. But then, during a similar conversation last October, it came to me that I had been mistaken the entire time. The force being multiplied wasn't my physical capacity to reach the dog, but my intent--my intent to guide the dog to a healthy stable relationship, good and fulfilling behaviors, clarity with communication, and meeting the dog in occasional disagreement without conflict or elevated stress beyond eustress. With recognition of this new perspective concerning force and tools, I experienced a fairly stunning moment of personal clarity about what balanced training might mean to me.

The definition of balanced in the dictionary states: “something is arranged in good proportions; taking everything into account; fairly judged or presented; stable; having no emotion lacking or too strong.” I have had this definition on a handwritten card in my wallet for years, actually before I was a professional dog trainer. It had been given to me by one of my horse training mentors.

After my conversation with Nelson it occurred to me, that for me, the philosophy of balanced training had little to do with dog training philosophies, methods, tools or even trainers, but rather in the results we see in the dogs we work with. It took me a week to scoff at my ego for thinking I had come up with something new or revolutionary. I had only accessed the memories of what my horse training mentors had taught me was the most successful way to bring my horses to their highest potential, both in fulfillment of the horses’ needs and successful partnerships in competitive dressage and eventing. These teachers and mentors always used the term balanced in contexts that made

perfect sense. I am ashamed to admit I hadn’t connected them to my dog training experiences earlier. My October conversation with Nelson triggered a cascade of thought resulting in my determination to write this article.

In the 1970s and 80s, force-free horse training was a new and rarely accepted concept in the local training schools, but had been practiced in the Spanish Riding School in Austria for 500 years. My serendipitous meeting with Karl Mikolka in 1984, the honor of working for him for 2 years, and then moving on to study with Virginia Martin have given me a foundation of respect for good animal husbandry and a respect for all sentient beings. They taught me that a balanced animal reflects the trainer’s knowledge of the anatomy of the animal and humans, nutrition, grooming, mental and physical wellbeing and fair and effective training for relationship clarity and successful performance of jobs or sports. I have been able to apply these things to the dogs in my care, but struggled with applying the idea of



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balanced training from my horse training days to the wholistic approach I have been practicing in my dog training career.

Force-free training in the horse world wasn't about limiting tools, but rather, creating such balance with them that they were barely necessary. As Mark Rashid states in his book, "training is a delicate balancing act between how much or how little direction it will take to help the horse we are working with understand whatever it is we are trying to teach. Too little direction and our efforts might become ineffective. Too much direction and we may develop resistance and animosity between our horse and us." For me, this is one of the singular features of balanced training. A fair and effective trainer will have chosen to apply their particular methodology so that the dog has just enough direction to do while feeling his freedom of movement without oppression. Beth Baumert and Sally Swift state in their books that the ability to control a horse with balance is done through their own body, through intent, and visualizations in the mind as it works with the horse. Controlling our emotions and assessing and controlling the effect of our frustrations creates the balance which allows "the horse, who by nature, needs to feel free—free in both mind and body to express himself through movement." When the horse or dog feels that the required exercises are his own creation, he is prepared to work in a balanced, stable state of mind—in a relationship of partnership with his handler.

How we achieve these balanced horses is no different than how we create balanced dogs: "arranged in good proportions; taking everything into account; fairly judged or presented; stable; and having no emotion lacking or too strong".

Balance is not just of the body, but also the mind. I am not a physically well-balanced human any longer. I worked for many years as a volunteer trainer for the Winslow therapeutic riding program. I provided disabled students and their horses with balance. When it was my turn to be the disabled rider, recovering my mobility after a stroke through a similar program at Horses for a Change, I learned to ride again before I could walk properly.

Even without my physical balance, I am still a balanced trainer of both horses and dogs. The balance comes from our minds, our vision for our animals and the application of stability, equilibrium and humanity in our training.

Valerie Ann Erwin has been teaching, training and mentoring for most of her professional life. Her degree in Medical Technology was granted with a minor in Evolutionary Biology. She also worked as an archaeologist for 10 years after earning a BS in Art History with minors in Anthropology and Medieval History. She has an AS in Engineering.

40 years experience training and competing successfully in Equestrian 3-Day Eventing begat dog training when she started training personal service dogs and therapy dogs in the 1990s. She currently instructs at the Canine/Human Relationship Institute and is certified in the NePoPo method of obedience as a Gold School Graduate with Bart and Michael Bellon. Valerie has been an avid hobby wildlife rehabber and conservationist since childhood. She is a Professional member of the IACP, and a 3 year member of the IACP Therapy Dog Committee. She owns New Paltz Dog Training and Canine Adventures in New Paltz, NY.

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The Role of Nutrition in Dog Training

by Lauren Turner

Part 1 of 3: How to Integrate Nutrition Education into your Training Programs

Educating your clients on proper canine nutrition is an effective way to elevate the value of your training programs and boost the overall success you and your clients experience. Nutrition is a powerful tool that can transform a dog, synergistically working with your behavior modification and training programs to produce a healthier, more stable, more biddable dog. If training is like the seeds we plant into a garden, nutrition is surely equivalent to the quality of the soil—and my experience in the pet-dog world is most dogs only have rocky ground by which to farm!

Unfortunately, if I see nutrition included at all in many training programs, it is discussed only as an afterthought or a *nicety* with clients rather than the *necessity* it should be. Teaching clients *how* to feed their dogs a high-quality diet and *why it matters* should be as foundational and mandatory as educating them on the importance of setting fair boundaries in the home and properly exercising their dogs. Over the last few years, I made nutrition education a central pillar in all my training programs. Every one of my clients are required to switch to an approved, high-quality diet before or at the beginning our training program. I have been fortunate enough to observe firsthand how powerfully this change, coupled with good training, boosts the overall success of the program.

This is the first of 3 articles over the next few issues of the IACP Journal to better equip YOU as the dog professional to consider integrating nutrition as a foundational piece of your dog training programs. The first article will discuss practical steps to take to include nutrition education into your programs, the second will talk about raw and/or lightly processed diets, and the final article will be about how to “supercharge” diets comprised mainly of kibble.

There are four main steps to take to help integrate nutrition education with your current training programs:

1. ***You must believe that nutrition has a powerful impact in dog training.*** If you have never seen it with your own eyes, the transformation of a dog swapping from a low-quality, ultra-processed diet to a fresh, balanced, biologically appropriate one is absolutely magnificent. I have had the pleasure of observing my personal dogs, foster dogs, and countless client dogs make this switch themselves and watch the subtle yet profound changes the dog experiences. Dogs usually show physical changes within a few weeks of the transition—trading body fat for lean muscle mass, displaying more apparent color saturation of the fur, brighter eyes, and softer, shinier coats, as well as decreased “dog smell”—among a multitude of other things. The majority of dogs also have a shift in overall stature—their energy levels are more stable throughout the day, they display more confidence and willingness to participate in training, they have increased biddability, and they show more critical thinking skills.

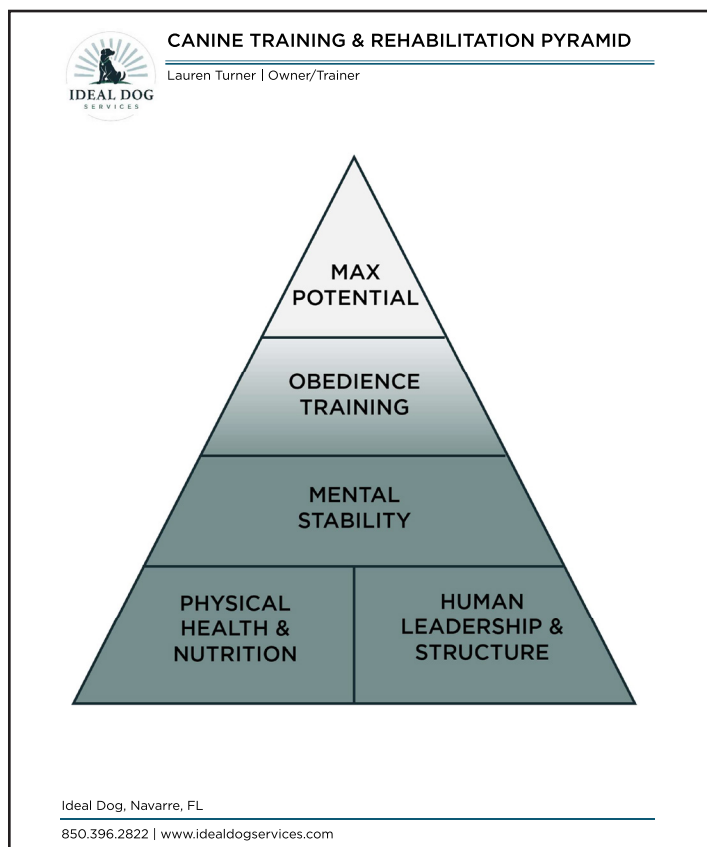
These beneficial results make sense on a theoretical level as well. Abraham Maslow, a historical American psychologist, is most notably remembered for his depiction of human needs as a 5-tiered pyramid. He proposed that needs on the lower tiers—physiological needs like food, water, shelter, and safety—must be met before needs on higher tiers can be attended to—psychological needs like relationships and fulfilling work. Using Maslow’s Hierarchy as my inspiration, I created a simplified version for dogs that I give to all my clients (FIGURE 1). This gives them a visual depiction for our overall methodology for maximizing their dog’s potential as a companion. As you would expect, nutrition is one of those foundational, physiological needs that must be

met prior to attending to needs in higher tiers, like obedience training. A dog who is in poor health will have little, if any, motivation to learn how to “down” on command. Correspondingly, if we increase the quality of physiological fulfillment, the dog’s capacity to attend to the higher-tiered needs will also increase. Meaning, if we transition a dog from a low-quality food to a high-quality food, its capacity for stability and obedience training (a higher tier) will increase as well—and in my experience, that’s exactly what I have observed. Maximizing the quality of the dog’s diet has proved to be the catalyst that smoothly paves the way for a successful training program and long-term change in the dog.

2. Let clients know upfront that nutrition education and transition requirements are part of your programs. Practically speaking, I tell clients about the requirement for feeding an approved diet during training—and require they agree to those terms—THREE TIMES before I accept any payment towards a training program. These notifications should be as conspicuous and transparent as notifying clients what your

payment requirements are and what training tools you may use in your program. For me, the first notification is given prior to scheduling a free phone consultation with me (which is required for all new training clients), the second is when I give them their formal training outline and price quote via email, and the third is when they officially sign my training contract and waiver prior to paying their initial training invoice. With these protocols in place, I have only experienced gracious clients who consider the requirement added value to their overall training experience.

3. Educate clients and give them your specific recommendations. With the requirement in place that clients feed a high-quality diet to their dog comes the responsibility to educate your clients on *why* it matters and *how* to do it. Remember, most clients think their dog’s behavior problems are simply a standalone issue rather than a nuanced, interconnected web of symptoms presenting as a consequence of the way they live and interact with the dog. In other words, most clients believe their garden isn’t fruitful because



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they purchased faulty seeds or because they overwatered the sprouts; rarely do they begin training understanding their soil has improper levels of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium! However, in my experience, once this analogy is presented to them, they have a wonderfully open mind about seeing how something as simple as changing their food can have such positive impacts on their dog overall.

For clients purchasing a board & train program, I have a consultation (included with their program price) about 4 weeks prior to their start date. Clients purchasing a private lesson package or who attend classes receive this information during our first lesson or class. The main goals I have for clients is threefold: Present the idea that nutrition has an impact on the way their dog behaves, educate them on what a dog would ideally eat on a daily basis (which is information I'll write about in Part 2 and 3), and give them specific diet recommendations they can select depending on their budget and lifestyle. Clients are then responsible for selecting a diet and transitioning

their dog to the new food. Every client gets a hard copy of my diet recommendations, which clearly organizes options by type of food (raw, dehydrated, cooked, kibble), where they are able to purchase the food, and its price per pound. All of this information is presented with the goal of educating and working as a team to help the client's dog rather than dwelling on what they currently feed their dog or how they made that decision. I make it abundantly clear that every family's diet decision is personal and based on their budget and lifestyle. This ensures an open dialogue to determine what product would be the best fit for them.

4. *Support them throughout the transition.*

Finally, the diet change should be considered an ongoing topic of conversation with the client throughout training. Just as you make sure to support clients by asking them how the dog is doing with their obedience practice, you want to make sure to ask how the new food is working for them. Ask them what changes do they notice in their dog, good or bad? How is the dog's stool?

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What about the dog's appetite? How are *they* feeling about the transition (this is particularly important if they switch from a kibble-based diet to a raw or fresh-food diet)? All of these questions will encourage the client to remain open with you and reinforce the idea that the nutritional piece of their dog's training is equally important as their practicing loose-leash walking.

I cannot encourage you enough to integrate this into your programs as well to reap the same benefits I have seen over the years:

- ***You can charge more for your programs due to added value and more impactful results.***
- ***Your clients become more dedicated, more loyal, more motivated to their dog's long-term success.***
- ***You see behavioral training results more rapidly.***

- ***You fix some behavioral issues passively, which makes your overall training easier.***
- ***You produce more satisfied clients.***
- ***You attract clients who are more dedicated to their dog's overall wellness rather than individuals looking for a "band-aid" fix.***

Lauren Turner is the Owner and Trainer of Ideal Dog in Navarre, Florida. She specializes in companion/pet dog training and behavioral modification, with a particular emphasis on canine nutrition and coaching the owners to ensure lasting training results. Lauren is a Certified Dog Trainer by the IACP, is certified in the NePoPo System of Obedience as a Gold School graduate with Bart and Michael Bellon, and she holds a Bachelor's of Science degree in Behavioral Science from the United States Air Force Academy. Previously a Special Agent in the Office of Special Investigations with the U.S. Air Force, Lauren is now a full-time trainer, lovingly supported by her husband and son. Lauren can be reached via her website at www.ideal dogservices.com or email at ideal dogservices@gmail.com.

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Choices and the Path

by Chad Mackin

My entire career, I have felt like there had to be a unifying theory of dog behavior and training, an idea, or set of ideas, that could be applied to explain all effective training approaches, as well as spontaneous behavior that could arise at any time. For the past (almost) 28 years, I have been hunting for it. Several times, I have mistakenly thought I had found it. Or, if I did find it, it was so hopelessly vague that I didn't believe it had any practical purpose. But over the past few years, there has been a straightforward idea that has stuck with me no matter where my journey took me. It's not the holy grail I have been looking for. Or maybe it is, but it's just so damned obvious that I can't accept it that things are truly that simple.

Like every other creature on the planet, the dog will always choose the path he believes will be most rewarding. Our job then is to convince him the direction we want him to take is the most rewarding one available at that moment.

Try as I might, I can find no exception to the rule, assuming it is properly understood. And it's that phrase "properly understood" that makes all the difference.

Which brings me to my other great struggle as a teacher: finding ways to take something incredibly complicated and stating it succinctly yet clearly enough to be a valuable roadmap for others. If my little mantra above were that, there would be no need to write anything else. However, there is so much more to this idea than meets the eye.

The mantra used to be longer. The last bit used to be, *"With reinforcement or punishment, we are merely adjusting the dog's expectations of how rewarding an outcome will be,"* which is true, but somewhat misleading. As we will see, while reinforcement and punishment are great ways to

change a dog's expectations, they don't represent the whole picture. In the simplest of applications, we can use reinforcement to make a behavior more rewarding or punishment to make a behavior less rewarding. And that sums up the bulk of the most common approaches to dog training. If you take away the theories and philosophies surrounding many (most?) training ideologies, at their heart, you'll see this simple model at play. Whether we are shaping, molding, using a clicker or a prong collar, the underlying premise remains the same: make the path you *want* him to take more rewarding, and/or make the path you *don't* want him to take less rewarding.

In that sense, punishment and reinforcement are two sides of the same coin. We apply them to adjust the dog's expectations of outcomes. However, such a statement might be interpreted to mean that as long as we get where we want, it doesn't matter which path we use. It is at this point we first run into a problem. Which path we choose matters a great deal. The difference between the dog working to gain something or working to avoid something can (and should) have a tremendous effect on the finished dog.

Choices are generally the result of many factors, often involving complex motivations, but most behaviors can be categorized as moving towards an outcome or away from one. Two people at the gym doing the same exercise might have completely different ideas in their heads. One may be trying to get healthy, and the other might be wanting to be less fat. It might sound like a bit of word-play, but I am convinced the distinction matters.

We are more reliable about doing things we *want* to do than things we *have* to do. People who only want to lose weight are more likely to skip the gym than skip a piece of delicious cake. But people driven to live a healthy lifestyle are more likely to

skip the cake and head to the gym. We find excuses not to do things we would rather not do, but will often move mountains for things we want.

The first time I drove a manual transmission car was also the first time I drove on icy roads. I did this in Texas, where they don't have salt trucks, and almost no one has experience driving in such conditions. I also was going into the heart of a town known for giving teen drivers a hard time. Pretty stupid, right? Why would I do such a foolish thing? Well, it was to meet a girl. During that same period of my life, 5 minutes of rain on a 90-degree summer day was enough for me to decide it was too wet to mow the yard. In the first case, I was looking for any way around whatever obstacle was in my way. In the second, the slightest bump in the road would be enough to convince me it was a good idea to wait.

While we might throw ourselves headlong into a project we enjoy, things we *have* to do usually get as little effort as we can get by with. This is why a person who can happily spend \$100 on a dog

bed will complain about a \$75 prescription for the same dog.

"Because I want to" feels a lot different than *"because I have to."*

Of course, it's not always possible to make the dog like to do what we want or need. Sometimes, "because I have to" is the best we are going to get. Sometimes, we have to make the wrong choice less rewarding. But, unless it's an emergency, I want to put in a ton of work motivating the dog towards something before I start adding "or else."

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The *towards* response generally produces more reliable and enthusiastic behaviors than the *away* response.

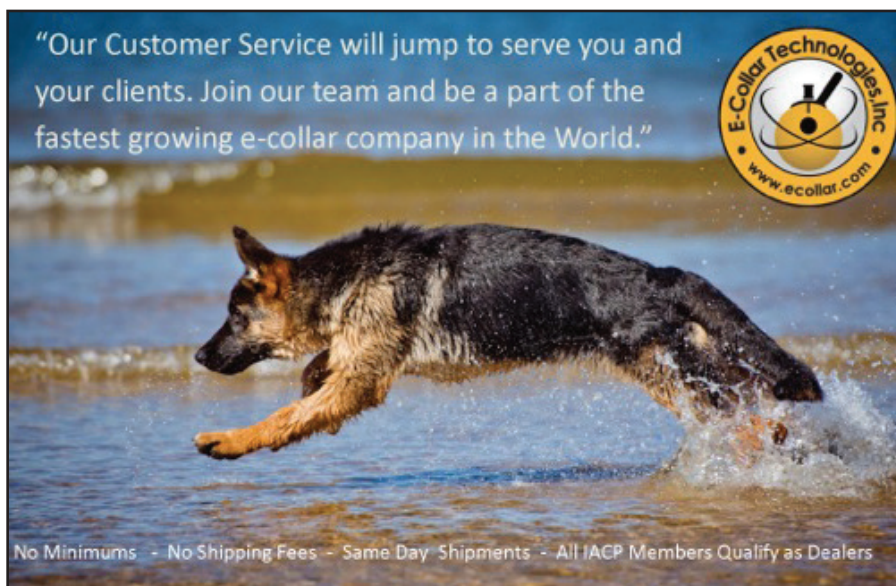
So, while punishment and reinforcement work by adjusting the dog's expected outcomes, they aren't necessarily equal.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to helping the dog decide the path we want is the best one. Reinforcement and punishment, in and of themselves, exist only because of the dog's emotional response to them. While it is (mostly) true that consequences drive behavior, it is emotion that makes consequences relevant. How the dog *feels* about something decides whether it is reinforcing, punishing, or neutral. Not only does how a dog feels about a particular thing determine its value, how the dog feels *in general* can have a great deal to do with what choices the dog can choose from in the first place.

For any emotional state a dog is in, there is a palette of behaviors they can choose from. This "palette" doesn't determine what choices the dog will make, but whatever they choose will fit into certain behavior classes. For example, fear will produce, freeze, fight, flee, posture, or submit behaviors. They may vary in intensity. Instead of a full-on freeze, a frightened dog may move more slowly. Or they may blend. A dog may growl (posture) while cowering (submit). There are countless combinations and variations depending on the individual dog, the intensity of emotion, and the particular situation. Still, everything the dog does in that emotional state will be painted with colors from that palette. The stronger the emotional state, the harder it will be for the dog to choose how to respond or even see options.

By creating a different interior landscape, we can change their ideas about what behavior seems most rewarding. A frightened dog will have different priorities than a dog who wants to play, and their behavior will reflect that. A less frightened dog will have more freedom than one who is more scared. Learning how to condition and reframe emotional responses is one of the most valuable tools a trainer can develop.

Another factor that affects a dog's perception of what is most valuable is the strength of habit. Habit formation is the most primitive type of learn-



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ing, and it has been demonstrated that habits can be created even in people who have no short-term memory. In other words, habits are not built on memory, per se, but on repetition and reward. Habits usually begin as conscious choices, but become almost involuntary behaviors once created. Most people aren't aware of them, but once the habit is cued, there can be tremendous pressure to complete the associated routine. An open habit loop can give a dog a sort of tunnel vision, making everything else less interesting until it's closed again. A behavior that begins as a response to fear or uncertainty will often persist long after the fear is gone. Often, we need to work not only on the emotion but also address the habit.

Of course, instinctual behavior plays a huge role in what the dog sees as rewarding. A bloodhound will likely enjoy sniffing more than a greyhound, for example, but I think most trainers have a decent understanding of those ideas. But it bears repeating. As Linda Kaim says, "Nature always gets a vote."

Similarly, physical and emotional health can significantly affect a dog's perception of, well, everything. Ensuring a dog is healthy and biologically fulfilled is often the difference between friction and freedom in training.

However, the most neglected way to adjust a dog's expectation of outcomes is changing access. Value is related to scarcity. If diamonds littered the beaches like sand, no one would care about them. By increasing or decreasing access or opportunity, we can make things more or less appealing. When I was a kid, the chance to eat candy was a high point for me. We didn't keep candy in the house, and aside from Halloween and Easter, candy was a rare treat in my life. There was never a time when the opportunity to eat it didn't appeal to me. As an adult, I can buy candy as often as I want, but I rarely do. Having almost unlimited access has made candy a mildly interesting prospect instead of a crazy exciting one.

And here, as I'm reaching the end of this essay, I find myself wanted to add more details, more examples, and more things to consider. The more

I write, the more bottomless this topic appears to be. I cannot hope to exhaust the subject in a few short paragraphs. I do hope, however, I have been able to give a few readers some "aha" moments, and perhaps inspire some new solutions to old problems.

In the end, the one thing that matters most is this: The goal never changes, whether we are stopping an unwanted behavior, creating a new one, or cleaning up an existing one: convince the dog that his advantage lies in the path we want for him.

Do that, and success will surely follow.

Chad Mackin is a trainer, teacher, seminar presenter, podcaster, mentor, and muse to many. Founder of Pack to Basics, he is always seeking ways to provide clarity to dogs and people. He is also past President of IACP and knows a choke hold. It is possible that he is 7 feet tall, though no one has ever asked. Look for him on Facebook.

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A poster for the Canine-Human Relationship Institute. The background is a close-up, grayscale image of a dog's fur. At the top, the text "Canine-Human Relationship Institute" is written in a serif font, with the website "www.chrinstitute.com" and a small note "(top here to register)" below it. The poster lists four courses: "Course 3-Puppy Development & Human Psychology" (Blue Ridge, Texas, February 14-21, 2021), "Course 2-Trainer Instruction" (Blue Ridge, TX, March 6-16, 2021), "Course 1 Relationship Based Behavior Modification" (Blue Ridge, TX, March 19-21, 2021), and "Fearful/Feral Dog Workshop" (Las Vegas, NM, March 30/31, 2021). At the bottom, there is a quote from Alison C. RBBM, Hutto, TX: "So sad this weekend is over. Everything I knew about dogs as I knew them was blown out of the water...but now I know how to get into their world and see/relate from their perspective." Below the quote is a logo consisting of a blue triangle with a white circle inside it.

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Spaying and Neutering Pet Dogs

by Julie Hart

Discussion on Spaying and Neutering Pet Dogs while Reviewing “Neutering Causes Behavior Problems in Male Dogs” in *Psychology Today*

A 2018 article in *Psychology Today* by Dr. Stanley Coren claims that neutering dogs causes increased aggression. After reading the article and the cited works, I was confused. I had always thought, along with many other dog professionals, that neutering assists with certain dog-to-dog behaviors and with urine marking. I also support the practice of “fixing” our pets from a population control standpoint. I have witnessed hundreds of dogs being spayed and neutered through dog rescue and rarely (as in two dogs) noticed a change in behavior afterwards. Many experienced dog trainers agree that altering helps some behaviors like dog-to-dog aggression, marking, and mounting behaviors. Bob Maida, dog trainer of forty plus years, had this to say about spay or neuter causing aggression, “It’s just coincidental... those spayed females via the elimination of progestin may move on the aggressive end...many years ago veterinarians used female hormones to treat aggression but they stopped because it was cancer inducing. Neutering cuts down on testosterone, so to say it increases aggression doesn’t make any sense... Those anecdotal cases are just coincidental.” Many trainers believe neutering can assist with dog-to-dog aggression issues but not dominance towards humans. There are other experienced, respected dog trainers believing that neutering does cause increased aggression in male dogs. After reading an article that questioned what I thought to be true for years, plus all the responses to that article, I decided to do a little research for myself. I used scientific journals to research studies on spay and neuter, including the two articles Dr. Coren cited for his statement article “Neutering Causes Behavior Problems in Male Dogs.”

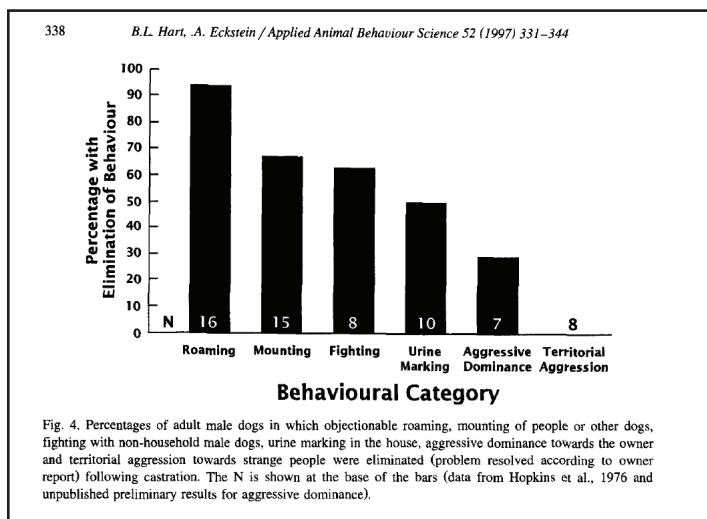
There are two factors to consider when spaying or neutering a dog besides birth control. One is the health aspect and the other is the behavioral aspect. Tackling the behavioral side first, often spay and neuter is recommended to curtail behavior such as mounting, marking, and aggression towards other dogs or dominance towards humans. The 2017 *Psychology*

Today blog article “Are There Behavior Changes When Dogs Are Spayed or Neutered?” by Stanley Coren, claims “results of these studies is that spayed and neutered dogs actually show considerably more aggression.” When I looked at the studies Dr. Coren cited, I found a few holes in the studies’ research. A researcher contradictorily stated “findings do not demonstrate clear behavioral outcomes after surgical castration in male dogs. Moreover, these studies suffered from methodological limitations; they tended to be descriptive, subjective (owner-based)...used small sample sizes and without control groups.” (E.Garde et al) I searched for studies that were peer reviewed, had a control group and was not based on owner opinion. I found only one study that fit those requirements, so I had to include owner-based research that didn’t have control groups in my investigation.

The only study that fit my desired criteria was conducted on free-roaming dogs in Chile. The effects of sterilization, both chemical and surgical, was observed on dogs were free to do what they pleased without human intervention and is the only study NOT to rely on owner feedback. The researchers followed and videotaped the dogs before and after the procedures and had a control group that was not sterilized. The findings found “no detectable change in our scores for our dog aggression factor” for the surgically sterilized dogs. The study also tracked testosterone levels and found no association between testosterone levels and aggression. The dogs also maintained the same roaming behavior before and after sterilization. The only group to show an increase in aggression was the chemically sterilized dogs. (E. Garde et al)

There are several other studies that rely on a smaller sample of dogs and the owner’s observations of the dog’s behavior. Since humans can be biased and neutering may have a placebo effect on the human’s opinion, the researchers acknowledge that possibility in their findings. One study from 1997 uses 42 dogs ages two to seven when neutered that already displayed aggressive or problem behaviors before neutering. (Neilson et. al) The findings were that neutering reduced behaviors of urine marking, mounting, and roaming significantly in 25% to 40% of the dogs, and

somewhat in 65% to 80% of the dogs. (Neilson et al). There was no improvement on fear. Aggressive behaviors towards other dogs were improved, but only a small amount in a small percentage of dogs. No



improvement was made on territorial aggression. Age made no difference in effect of the neuter on behavior, excluding neutering under one year of age. (Neilson et al)

An older study suggests that treating inter-male aggression, marking, and mounting with progestagens is effective, which would lead us to believe that reducing testosterone would possibly help aggressive behavior. But that contradicts the more recent study by E. Garde et. al. The study did note that “progestagen influence on behavior are not understood” and needs more research. Once discovered, health risks of added progestagens proved high and the study was discontinued. (Knol et al)

There is not as much information regarding behavioral effects on female dogs after a surgical spay. One article I found stated “bitches most likely to show an increase in dominance aggression were puppies under one year (when spayed), already showing some aggression” (O’Farrell) compared to unaltered females. An explanation of the aggression increase could be timing of a spay procedure after a heat cycle. After a heat cycle, progesterone, which is calming, is high and sudden removal of these hormones may cause some aggressive behavior. Based on this information, waiting at least two months after a heat cycle to spay a dog is recommended. (Hart, B. L et al).

Now let’s look at the references Coren cites for his article claiming neutering causes aggression. One of

the studies Cohen cites for his article is a Powerpoint presentation “Non-reproductive Effects of Spaying and Neutering On Behavior in Dogs” by Duffy et. Al. This reference states, “spayed female dogs tend to be more aggressive toward their owners and to strangers than intact females, but that these effects of spaying on behavior appear to be highly breed-specific.” (Duffy et al). The presentation also states spayed and neutered dogs are more aggressive towards people and dogs, more sensitive to touch, more fearful and less energetic. It did find neutered males are less likely to urine mark. All the data gathered for the Duffy presentation was done by an owner questionnaire called the Canine Behavioral Assessment and Research Questionnaire (C-BARQ). The second reference by Farhooody et. al. cited in the Psychology Today article also used the C-BARQ questionnaire for data.

Let’s take a detour to learn about the C-BARQ. The C-BARQ is a “standardized behavioral evaluation tool” “originally designed to measure the prevalence and severity of behavioral problems in privately-owned and working dogs.” (<https://vetapps.vet.upenn.edu/cbarq/about.cfm>). It covers a range of behaviors such as aggression, dog rivalry, fear, separation issues, chasing, and energy level. The questions asked would uncover a lot of behavior problems, but the portion about signs of aggression are lacking, especially if filled out by puppy owners. The only choices of aggression behavior the C-BARQ offers are obvious signs like growling, snapping, biting, or lunging. This limitation is a MAJOR problem. As a trainer, I know dogs give many subtle, warning behaviors before taking action involving their teeth. These warning signs include jumping, hard eye contact, stillness, and “mouthiness” (especially in puppies). I also know most pet owners don’t realize there is a problem until an obvious act like biting, takes place. Therefore, pet owners are unlikely to rate their dog aggressive if it was showing one of the more subtle communications like staring, jumping, or stillness especially since the directions omit these behaviors. Precursors to aggressive behavior seen in puppies may include “play-biting,” elevating on furniture, jumping, controlling space, guarding, and hard stares. Future fear-biters can be quiet and withdrawn, which is often not noticed by pet owners as a problem. The fact that the C-BARQ instructions and questions completely neglect subtler signs of aggression like jumping, stillness, and staring invalidates the entire aggression section and any research drawn from it.

I am a prime example of a former average pet owner not recognizing potential aggression in my dog. My dog Annie was a well-behaved puppy, but was withdrawn from strangers. She would also sit in the yard and watch the yard. At the time I thought she was just entertaining herself. Looking back on it, she was guarding the house. I would have never thought she was aggressive if I answered the C-BARQ when she was under a year old because I didn't recognize her immature territorial behavior.

Now let's examine the main reference for the Psychology Today article, "Aggression toward Familiar People, Strangers, and Conspecifics in Gonadectomized and Intact Dogs" by Farhooody et. al. This study found no significance from the affects of spay/ neuter or lack there of on aggression. Yes, that's right. Even though Coren used the Farhooody study to back up his article claiming neutering causes aggression, the Farhooody study found no significant behavior differences before or after neuter. This study used 13,795 dogs and the

Section 2: Aggression

Some dogs display aggressive behavior from time to time. Typical signs of moderate aggression in dogs include barking, growling and baring teeth. More serious aggression generally includes snapping, lunging, biting, or attempting to bite. By clicking on the following scales, please indicate your own dog's recent tendency to display aggressive behavior in each of the following contexts:

Selected dog: Annie

Context	NO AGGRESSION	MODERATE AGGRESSION	SERIOUS AGGRESSION	NOT OBSERVABLE
9. by	No visible signs of aggression	Growling/barking, baring teeth	Snaps, bites, or attempts to bite	NOT APPLICABLE
10. wa				
11. When approached directly by an unfamiliar child while being walked/exercised on a leash.				

C-BARQ questionnaire. The conclusion was "neither gonadectomy or age at gonadectomy showed an association with aggression towards familiar people and dogs. However there was a low but significant increase in the odds of moderate or severe aggression towards strangers for all gonadectomized dogs...but this effect was entirely driven by the data for dogs gonadectomized at 7-12 months of age, which were 26% more likely to demonstrate aggression towards strangers." (Farhooody et al) Farhooody's research found numerous previous studies found altering raised aggression levels. But Farhooody also found just as many studies that indicated altering lowered aggression. Farhooody wonders why "our analysis demonstrated a significant increase in aggression towards strangers in dogs gonadectomized between 7 and 12 months of age." Farhooody concludes it may be caused by errors in the data or perhaps the surgical experience "creates a lasting fear-response to strangers." Personally I think the error lies in the

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C-BARQ's lack of questions about subtle aggressive behaviors in puppies and adolescent dogs.

The causation for aggressive behavior in Coren's *Psychology Today* article is neutering, when it's possible the dogs have shown pre-cursors to aggression entire time and no one noticed. Farhooody's study also cites many other studies with reasons why dogs may exhibit aggressive behavior. These reasons range from skin disorders, the owner's profession, the dog being kept outside, sex of the owners, and the purpose for getting a dog. The overall message from the study and research is that "no single factor is responsible for the aggressive behavior of dogs" but there are "multiple environmental and genetic factors that contribute to aggressive behavior." (Farhooody et. al) The article in *Psychology Today* poorly translates and misrepresents Farhooody's study.

The other big factor in deciding if and when to spay or neuter your dog is health reasons. Many are concerned that early spay/neuter may cause harm to a dog's structure such as joints and ligaments, along with increasing other health concerns. I looked at several large research papers on the subject and found that neutering holds very little health benefit for male dogs except reduction of a small risk of testicular cancer, prostate problems, perianal fistulas, and diabetes. On the flip side, neutering a dog before one year of age greatly increases the risk of bone cancer. Neutering at any age can also increase the risk of hypothyroidism and doubles the risk of orthopedic disorders, as well as a small increasing risk for other health concerns. (Sanborn, M.S.)

Health risks and benefits of spaying a female depend on the age and breed of the particular dog. If the dog is spayed before 2.5 years of age, the risk of mammary tumors are greatly reduced and pyometria, which can affect 23% of intact female dogs, is nearly extinguished. (Sanborn, M.S.) The risk of perianal fistulas and reproductive system tumors is also reduced.

If spayed before one year of age, a dog's risk of bone cancer greatly increases. If a dog is spayed before her first heat (puberty), her risk of incontinence increases between 4-20% and increases the risk of continuing vaginal and urinary infections. Orthopedic disorders also become a larger risk in spayed dogs.

In a study of German Shepherds, it was found that spay or neuter before the first year increased risk of joint disorders from 7% to 21%. Increased risk of joint disorders were found in altered Golden Retrievers as well. (Hart, B.L. et al.) The conclusion on health related concerns is "The traditional spay/neuter age of six months as well as the modern practice of pediatric spay/neuter appear to predispose dogs to health risks that could otherwise be avoided by waiting until the dog is physically mature, or perhaps in the case of many male dogs, foregoing it altogether unless medically necessary." (Sanborn, M.S.)

Having an intact dog that can pro-create is a big responsibility that needs to be taken seriously. Dog over-population is still a serious localized problem in the United States today. If you decide not to spay or neuter your dog, expect other dogs to find them interesting or single them out because they smell "different" than most altered dogs these days. For intact females, be prepared for a female's heat cycle every six months, learn how to recognize it, and ensure she is not around intact male dogs at that time. If you decide you want your dog spayed or neutered, the research indicates waiting until after one year of age will reduce your dog's risk of health problems. For females, allow the dog to have one heat cycle, then wait two months after that heat cycle to spay her to avoid a sudden drop in hormones and possible incontinence. Neutering won't solve most behavior issues, but research does support it may help with marking and dog-to-dog aggression. I have witnessed huge improvement in dog-to-dog aggression and marking with neutering in a few dogs, but not all.



As canine professionals, we owe it to the public and our peers to thoroughly investigate claims in the media, whether we agree or not. I enjoy investigating references used to support hypotheses to better educate myself on the full spectrum of information. I encourage everyone to read the list of references below, and read references for any article or study they run across. Finding the facts behind the headlines may not be easy, but it is the only way to present accurate knowledge to our clients and those that depend on us for advice concerning their beloved dogs.

Julie Hart began fostering dogs over ten years ago. She started her business, Hart to Heart Canine Training, LLC a little over five years ago. She consult with several rescues and volunteers at small rural shelters in New Mexico. Julie is founder of 501c3 Rescue Dogs Responsibly, with a subdivision called Fearful Feral Dog Task Force, which is a free service to educate adopters and dog rescues. She has started an online learning site at <https://rescuedogsresponsibly.uscreen.io/catalog>. She is honored to serve the IACP membership by being on the Board of Directors.

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