

A German Shepherd dog stands in a snowy forest, looking directly at the camera. The dog has a tan and black coat. The background shows snow-covered ground and evergreen trees.

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The APDT Chronicle of the Dog

Winter 2024

The Association for Professional Dog Training International

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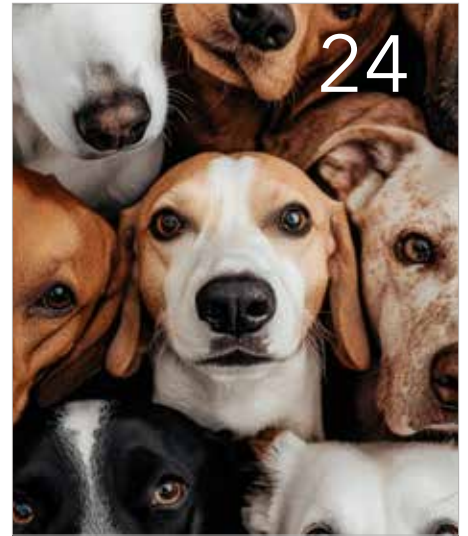
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◀ Cover Photo: This beautiful German Shepherd Dog is Gretel Maria Von Schurke Tal, owned by Beckie Elgin. She has titles in tracking, agility, obedience, and trick dog competition and loves searching for people. The photo was taken on Mt. Ashland at Ashland, Oregon. Gretel's owner found the photographer, Mary Arango, who was teaching agility when Gretel was a puppy. After training together for five years, Beckie now has her own training business, accruing hours toward CCPDT certification. She grew up at a zoo, helped raise litters of wolves, and is a talented registered nurse. Photo by Mary Fish Arango.

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The APDT International *Chronicle of the Dog*



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Farewell to 2024!

APDT International continues to evolve during 2025 and beyond



What a year it has been! The APDT International community has continued to thrive, pushing the boundaries of dog training

with innovative techniques, groundbreaking research, and unwavering commitment to ethical and humane practices. These achievements are a testament to the hard work and dedication of our community, and we are honored to be a part of this positive impact. As we look ahead to the new year, we are excited about the continued growth and evolution of our field, and we are confident that together, we can create a brighter future for dogs and their people.

And speaking of that new year, January is the time to celebrate all things in the animal industry during Train Your Dog Month. Please take this opportunity to work your social media. The big six (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X and TikTok) offer different platforms in how to reach your audience and perhaps expand further. Look for the hashtags other dog trainers are using to broaden their audience. Be sure to check out what is available to share our TYDM page (<https://trainyourdogmonth.com/>) on our website, and don't forget to include us with the hashtag #TYDM2025. More information is on page 46 in this issue of *Chronicle of the Dog*.

Need some new clothes for those TYDM videos and posts? Our Swag Shop has everything you could possibly need, all with our new APDT International logo. You can see our lovely folks modeling the clothes on pages 44-45. The shop carries everything from T-shirts to hoodies to jackets, hats, tumblers and bags to carry training gear. I can attest the tumble will keep your coffee hot for hours.

Now we'll get into the meat of this issue, our features! **Sean Will** and **Maasa Nishimuta**, both speakers at the 2024 conference, offer up a case study on how to handle separation anxiety from their two pups using their own Constructional Approach method. The first part explains that method, which begins on page 10, and the second part involving the treatment will be in the SPRING issue.

Award-winning author and frequent *COTD* author **Peggy Swager** also offers up some case studies, but these are about dogs with leash aggression. Using her own version of a modified redirection, she uses Circle into Control to help her dog Shilo deal with barking dogs on a walk. That story begins on page 16.

New *COTD* author **Melissa Breau** provides two great articles dealing with the business side of dog training. She makes recommendations on how to make a dog training website go from mediocre to great (page 20) and even how to calculate how people eventually become clients after engaging your website. And then on page 26, Melissa offers a plan on how to market your business, whether it is dog training, grooming or pet sitting. Marketing is often something that is overlooked by busy animal entrepreneurs, but marketing – or the lack of it – can make or break your business.

Sue Alexander presents an interesting conundrum on whether conflicts of interest could pop up between a dog trainer and a client. This most often happens, she explains, when a client – after spending much money to train a dog – decides that dog is not a good fit for their family and asks if you, as the trainer, to take her. Sue uses examples she has experienced to explain when that might become an issue. Check out her story on page 24.

As another year draws to a close, the APDT International family is grateful to each and every member, partner, and supporter who has contributed to another successful year. We are especially appreciative of our columnists and authors who contribute so much to the *Chronicle of the Dog*. On behalf of the entire APDT International team, we wish you and your loved ones a joyous holiday season and a prosperous New Year. May the coming year be filled with joy, success, and countless happy tails!

Devon Hubbard Sorlie,
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Drawing to a Close

A reflection on APDT International in 2024 and plans for the future.



It's hard to believe this is my final message to the membership as Chair. It has been a true privilege and honor to serve in this role, especially during a time of excitement and transition. As 2024 comes to a close, I'd like to go over what APDT International has accomplished and give an overview of what to expect in 2025 and beyond.

Accomplishments

A New Strategic Plan for 2024: We started out 2024 with a new strategic plan, focused on three main goals: **community**, **education**, and **innovation**.

- **Community** has always been a cornerstone of what we provide for our members. We are committed to serving as the umbrella for all trainers while serving as leaders to move the industry in a more humane and professional direction.
- **Education** has always been our top priority. Our annual conference in Riverside, California brought together amazing speakers, cutting edge topics, and networking opportunities like no other in-person gathering in the industry. Our online offerings are also top-notch – including the amazing webinar by Dr. Lisa Gunter and Dr. Erica Feuerbacher, “A Conversation About Research Methods Utilized in the Study of Dog Behavior and Welfare.”
- **Innovation** also played a crucial part in our strategic plan. We are dedicated to keeping our members as our top priority and exploring more ways to provide value to our members.

Rebrand: We completed a full rebrand of the name and our logo. We expanded from “of Professional Dog Trainers” to “for Professional Dog Training” and adding “International” to acknowledge the organization's presence is and has been global.

Streamlined Membership Levels: Speaking of community, we realize that training happens in many contexts – with veterinarians and vet techs, rescues and shelters, doggy daycares and the broader pet industry. We have built up our membership levels around this concept, while simultaneously streamlining the membership categories to Member, Animal Care Partner and Learning Partner.

Streamlined Website and App: Our revised website makes navigation much easier – and lays out the benefits of membership in a simple, straightforward way. Our Membership App provides a state-of-the-art way for our members to engage and learn about all of the exciting things going on in APDT International.

Strengthened Integrity of our Trainer Search: A couple of years ago, we strengthened the integrity of our Trainer Search by listing only members who attested to adhering to APDT International standards – including alignment with the AVSAB's position against aversive tools and methods. However, there was still some confusion with our multi-level membership categories. Our streamlined membership levels have taken care of this and will only serve to clarify and strengthen our Trainer Search.

Continued Leadership in the Industry: We continue to serve as leaders in the industry, including tackling the complex question of what standards should govern not just our membership but the entire profession. Even as we trailblaze, we have kept conversations open, productive, and respectful – in line with our commitment to bringing humaneness and kindness not only to the dogs but to the humans.

Gratitude

Many Thanks to our Amazing Staff: APDT International is extremely fortunate to have professional staff members who help us carry out our mission. Matt Varney, our executive director, is finishing his first full calendar year with us and has done an absolutely amazing job at keeping us not only on track, but at the forefront of the industry. Marketing and Communications Director Tricia Louque handled rebranding our name and logo with grace and finesse and strengthens our organization's voice. And Jennifer Franco, our educational programs director, continues to bring together an amazing group of speakers for our conference as well as our and online education.

Huge Thank You to our Outgoing Board Members: As I mentioned earlier, transition has been a major theme of 2024. Four of our board members will be rolling off this year, and we cannot thank them enough for their contributions. **Heather Mishefske** has enlightened the Board with her passion for nature and her experience with emBARK, a full-service daycare offering grooming, massage and training in Wisconsin. **Sandy Modell** brought her

experience as the owner of a premier training facility that was voted the best dog trainer in Northern Virginia the year after her company, Wholistic Hound Academy, opened. **Robin Bennett** kindly returned to the Board to provide us with crucial expertise and institutional knowledge while we transitioned – even as she was trying to retire from an incredibly distinguished career in which she solidified her role as the expert in dog daycare operations. And our wonderful Immediate Past Chair, **Fanna Easter**, contributed her expertise in private and virtual consultations in behavior, including special focus on separation anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder in dogs. I must give special thanks to Fanna and Robin for their leadership in recruiting amazing individuals to run for the four open Board Member positions – and for Fanna’s willingness to hold “Office Hours” to help onboard everyone.

Looking Forward to the Future

New Chair: I am ecstatic to hand the reigns over to **Ines McNeil** as she prepares to take over as Chair on January 1. Ines’s industry-leading coaching company, The Modern Dog Trainer, has been providing mentorship to trainers since 2014. Ines has a remarkable gift to innovate ways to support trainers and she has a natural ability to read the pulse of the industry. I cannot wait to see what she brings to the position of Chair and to the organization, and I look forward to supporting her as Immediate Past Chair.

New Officers: **Erica Marshall** will ascend to Vice Chair on January 1. Erica lives in Tennessee where she has worked as a trainer. She brings incredibly valuable experience of more than 20 years working with animals and as an incredibly dedicated volunteer on Membership Task Force. Many thanks go to Erica and the Membership Task Force for their hard work on streamlining the membership levels. In December, the Board appointed **Sarah Bond** to the position of Secretary/Treasurer. Sarah brings experience as a behavior consultant focusing on aggression and anxiety in Austin, Texas. Sarah has also been an active committee member, including on the Independent Ethics Review Panel.



New Board Members: With four Board Member positions to fill, our organization saw unprecedented involvement in Board Member elections this year. We are thrilled to have four amazing individuals joining our Board on January 1. Each of them has been committed to learning all they can about the organization to hit the ground running starting in January. **Lisa Potts** brings decades of experience as a trainer and

dog sports judge, and her experience with state legislative issues has been a tremendous asset to the APDT Legislative Task Force. **Mandy Eakins** with Manners Matter Dog Training and Daycare in Lexington, Kentucky has been an amazing contributor to the Education Committee. **Christopher Rohland** has decades of management and business experience and in the animal sheltering industry and other experience, including on the Connecticut State Animal Response Team. **Kim Sauer** has owned Sit n’ Stay in Orchard Park, New York since 2002, and has experience offering dog training, pet sitting, and dog walking services. These individuals with their skill sets and experience are perfectly positioned to move our organization forward in 2025 and beyond!

Same Commitment to Our Core Values: As we close out 2024, our biggest thanks go to you. As we are on the cusp of a new year, we remain committed to our core values – serving as an inclusive community for trainers and others who work with and love dogs while pushing forward and innovating the industry. And we remain committed to you, our members.

We can’t thank you enough for a fabulous 2024! We wish you and your family members – two-legged and four-legged – the very best for this holiday season. Take time to relax, enjoy, and be refreshed for even bigger and better things in 2025!

Wishing you the very best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heidi Meinzer".

Heidi Meinzer, JD, CPDT-KSA, CNWI
Chair, Association for Professional Dog Training International

Reflecting As We Look to the Future



As the year draws to a close, many of us find ourselves pausing to reflect—on the milestones we’ve reached, the lessons we’ve learned, and the moments that have shaped our journey. This season of gratitude and thankfulness is a time to look back, not just

on the year that’s passed, but on the path that has brought us to this moment. For the community of the Association for Professional Dog Training International, reflection is about more than just the past year; it is about honoring the legacy of the many years and individuals that have come before us.

The story of APDT International is one of evolution, collaboration, and unwavering dedication to advancing the profession of dog training. Since its founding in 1993, this community has grown to represent not only dog trainers but an interconnected network of professionals working toward the shared goal of improving the lives of dogs and the people who love them. Today, we stand proudly as a global organization, but we do so with full recognition that our progress is rooted in the vision and contributions of those who pioneered the field and built this organization from the ground up.

A Legacy Worth Celebrating

As we look toward the future, it’s important to pause and reflect on the shoulders we are building our plans upon. Our field did not arrive at its current standards of research-based methods, ethics-driven practices, and measurable impact by accident.

These principles were cultivated by generations of professionals who challenged outdated methods, demanded higher standards based in science, and dedicated themselves to bettering the lives of animals and their human companions. It is because of their courage and persistence that we can celebrate the progress our profession has made.

Within our own organization, the visionaries who founded APDT laid the guidewires of inclusivity and collaboration that continue to define us. Their belief in the power of community as a catalyst for professional growth has been a guiding light for more than three decades. This spirit of shared learning and mutual support remains at the heart of APDT International and is the reason why so many of us have found not just colleagues but lifelong connections within this community.

Gratitude for Today’s Community

Our gratitude, however, doesn’t end with what has come before. One of my favorite sayings is: What got us here, may not get us there. There is a delicate line between honoring or learning from the past and allowing it to limit the potential for progress. Each of you—our members, partners, and advocates—now play an essential role in shaping APDT International for today and for tomorrow. To the trainer working with clients in your local community, the researcher uncovering new insights into canine behavior, and the shelter volunteer lovingly helping dogs find their forever homes, each of your commitments make more of our collective mission possible. It is your contributions that inspire us to push forward, to innovate, and to continually seek ways to expand the value we may bring to the profession. Your willingness to share your knowledge with your peers, engage in thoughtful dialogue, and offer support to one another exemplifies the best of what this organization can be. For that, I extend my heartfelt thanks.

Building the Future Together

As we look ahead, we are reminded that everything we are building today is made possible by learning from the past and the continued efforts in the present. Our recent transition to the Association for Professional Dog Training International reflects our commitment to honoring this legacy while dramatically expanding our vision for the future. Our approach not only acknowledges the diverse and interconnected community we serve but also positions us to lead the way in advancing the profession on a broader scale.

The road ahead is filled with opportunities: to collaborate across disciplines, to elevate the visibility of our profession, and to

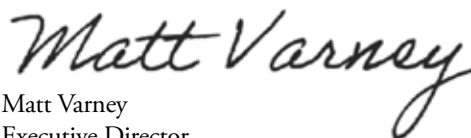
continue advocating for the highest standards of humane and effective training practices. Yet, none of this can be accomplished without the collective strength of our community. There are training communities around the world seeking something larger than themselves and connection to a community that can help them reach new heights in their career and the ability to support their clients in the best way possible. Together, we are shaping a future where APDT International members are recognized as thought leaders and essential contributors to the well-being of animals and their families.

A Call to Reflect

As you close out the year, I encourage you to take a moment to reflect—not just on your own journey, but on the connections that have supported and inspired you along the way. Reflect on the mentors who guided you, the colleagues who challenged you to grow, and the clients who placed their trust in you. Take stock of the small wins and the big breakthroughs that have shaped

your path. And most importantly, take pride in the role you play in this incredible community. The work we do is not easy, but it is meaningful. It is work that changes lives, builds trust, and strengthens the bond between humans and their dogs. As we celebrate the accomplishments of this year and set course for the future, let's carry forward a spirit of gratitude—for those who paved the way, for the community we share today, and for the potential that lies ahead.

Thank you for being connected with APDT International. Together we will forge a future that reflects the very best of who we are.
Warm regards,



Matt Varney
Executive Director
Association for Professional Dog Training International

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Using a Constructional Approach to Helping Dogs Experiencing Separation Anxiety: Two Case Studies

Editor's Note: This first part of a 2-part article will address understanding constructional approach in how it deals with separation anxiety. Part 2-of-2 will run in the SPRING 2025 issue of Chronicle of the Dog.

By Sean M. Will, M.S., Doctoral Candidate and Maasa Nishimuta, M.S., BCBA

Introduction

Living with dogs experiencing separation anxiety can be life-altering. People caring for these dogs often are forced to miss outings with friends, limit time away from home, rely on others to be with their dogs if needing to be away, and may spend large amounts of money on medications and other materials to try and help their dogs relax. Alternative approaches may be available through behavior analytic concepts and principles, which already have a long-standing history within animal training. Behavior analysis has provided the foundations of modern animal training, including the four quadrants, conditioned reinforcers, shaping, differential reinforcement, backward chaining, forward chaining, and even the term “click and treat” and the use of the word “click” as a verb comes from behavior analysis. Click and treat, and the verb usage of “click” was coined by a student of B.F. Skinner, Ph.D., and Ogden Lindsley, Ph.D. (Rosales-Ruiz, 2023). Research from behavior analysis may provide new avenues to assist dogs experiencing separation anxiety that have not been thoroughly explored.

The current article aims to share a perspective focused on applying concepts and principles from behavior analysis that has led to repeated success with dogs experiencing separation anxiety. This article will present two case studies to demonstrate a novel approach to helping dogs experiencing separation anxiety by applying the constructional approach (Goldiamond, 1974/2002; Layng et al., 2022).

It should be noted that the procedures detailed in this study originated with a friend and colleague of the authors of this paper, Chase Owens. In 2010, Owens and Will were still developing a procedure that would later become known as constructional affection with their mentor, Jesús Rosales-Ruiz, Ph.D. At this same time, Owens happened to be watching a friend's dog, who had a long history of engaging in separation anxiety when left alone. Owens recorded an impressive first application of constructional affection with this dog, which is still on YouTube ([Link: https://youtu.be/59aVwQRB_rM?si=UHn8FGmXPnu7eIxxg](https://youtu.be/59aVwQRB_rM?si=UHn8FGmXPnu7eIxxg)). Using an approach very similar

to what will be described in this paper, Owens provided the first demonstration the authors could locate on a function-based training program for dogs engaging in separation anxiety. Furthermore, it was the first constructional program designed to teach dogs engaging in separation anxiety how to spend alone, and it provided the foundation for the content of this paper.

The Constructional Approach

Israel Goldiamond, Ph.D., developed the constructional approach to help behavior analysts provide the most ethical and effective interventions possible (Goldiamond, 1974/2002; Layng, et al., 2022; Scallan & Rosales-Ruiz, 2023). The constructional approach is an approach to solving problems by directly building behavior repertoire, transferring behaviors from one environment to the goal environment, or reinstating behaviors rather than eliminating or reducing problem behaviors (Goldiamond, 1974/2002). The problem behaviors are seen as a symptom or a sign of missing behavior(s) rather than “pathology” to be eliminated or reduced. If there is a missing behavior(s), our job as a trainer is to directly establish the missing behavior(s).

The constructional approach addresses public and individual concerns regarding how and when behavior change programs are selected, designed, implemented, monitored, and changed or discontinued. Constructional programs consist of five components that guide the selection, implementation, and any changes to the training programs.

1) Goal setting: An observable and measurable goal is stated regarding behaviors to be acquired. Never are goals stated in terms of behaviors to be reduced or eliminated. In other words, what would we see this dog be doing when home alone if the training program were successfully implemented?

2) Starting point: Before any training begins, the currently available and relevant behaviors that the dog is already doing and the resources that can be used to achieve the stated goal are identified. A major part of this includes assessing the function of the behaviors in question. In other words, what is maintaining the dog’s undesirable behaviors (in this case, the behaviors we see when the dog is experiencing separation anxiety)? Environments where desirable behaviors or more manageable behaviors are already occurring are identified, and training starts in these environments.

3) Training steps: After clearly identifying the goal and the starting point, the next step is to fill in the steps to take us from where we are to our goal. This is the stage where the type of training program to be used will be decided.

4) Maintaining consequence: Before training, the identification of the consequences currently maintaining the undesirable behavior is identified. When solving a problem behavior, it is important to use the maintaining consequence, or the function of the behavior, to establish the desirable behaviors. In the case of separation anxiety, the consequence which has been maintaining the separation anxiety is used during the training program. When shaping brand new behaviors, identifying the consequences desired to maintain the behavior after training is required.

5) Monitor progress: The fifth and final piece of constructional programs is that progress throughout the training program is monitored through data collection. Collecting data is critical to knowing how successful we are in achieving our goals and what changes may be required to better support our animal learners.

Dr. Goldiamond and his students successfully applied constructional approaches to help individuals experiencing many behavioral challenges, such as hallucinatory and delusional behavior, overeating, several types of anxiety, catatonic states, acute psychotic episodes, borderline personality disorder, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, marital issues, and more (Goldiamond, 1974/2002; Layng et al., 2022). Dr. Rosales-Ruiz was the first person to apply the constructional approach to animal training and continues to explore the application of the constructional approach with his students and the student organization, the Organization for Reinforcement Contingencies with Animals (ORCA) at the University of North Texas.

Another key feature of constructional approaches that differentiates them from other types of training is that constructional programs are designed to leave consequences in place for undesirable behavior. As mentioned above, undesirable behavior is seen as a symptom or a sign of a missing behavior that needs to be learned. In other words, if our dogs knew they had an easier-to-do behavior that gets them the same consequences as the undesirable behavior, the dogs would have no need to engage in undesirable behavior. Through this approach, training goals can be met without needing to withhold reinforcers or apply aversives.

Extinction and Its Effects

Withholding reinforcers is commonplace in positive reinforcement training approaches with humans and nonhuman animals. However, this approach should be applied with extreme caution. Withholding reinforcers is one procedure that can lead to extinction. Extinction refers to the breaking of a contingency (Goldiamond, 2021). Breaking the contingency refers to a behavior that has previously led to a specific reinforcer, no longer producing the previously experienced result. This perspective may provide alternative ways to understand and provide training programs for dogs experiencing separation anxiety.

For an everyday example, consider driving a car. Typically, when we turn the key in the ignition, the car starts. However, a feeling of stress may quickly arrive after a few repetitions of turning the ignition and the car not starting. Now that turning the ignition no longer provides access to the reinforcer, the car starting, extinction can start having its effects. Likely, we will start turning the ignition at higher rates, stomping the gas pedal, maybe turning and holding the ignition down or performing other superstitious routines, using choice words, or become enraged and hit the steering wheel or dashboard. If you have experienced being stranded somewhere with a car that will not start, you likely remember it being an awful experience. Moreover, all the unpleasant emotions like stress, frustration, anger, and emotional behaviors resulted from having a reinforcer withheld – our car starting.

Extinction procedures have long been known for undesirable outcomes, including extinction-induced aggression (Goldiamond,

2021; LaVigna & Donnellan, 1986; Sidman, 1989). These outcomes have also been observed in shelter cats and dogs as well (Fritz, 2022; Winslow et al., 2018). When considering working with animals whose aggressive behavior can lead to being rehomed, surrendered to a shelter, or euthanized, the authors of this paper would suggest that using any procedure known to lead to increased instances of aggressive behavior should be strongly reconsidered. However, the emotional behavior observed in countless species when experiencing extinction should also be a powerful motivator to explore other methods to achieve desired outcomes without relying on extinction to influence behavior change.

Separation Anxiety

It may be difficult to imagine how separation anxiety could be related to extinction. However, the many available definitions provide a possible avenue to discuss the potential link between extinction and separation anxiety. There are many available definitions of separation anxiety. The Humane Society of the United States (2024) defines separation anxiety as: "...a disorder that can develop when a pet is away from the human or other animal to whom they are most bonded." Similarly, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (2024) defines separation anxiety as: "...the dog's problems are accompanied by other distress behaviors, such as drooling and showing anxiety when their pet parents prepare to leave the house." In research publications, the definitions are similar: "Separation anxiety is defined as excessive vocalization, inappropriate elimination, and destruction associated with the owner's absence." (Takeuchi et al., 2000). Although these definitions are slightly different, they all involve some of the same critical features, including the absence of the dog's humans being associated with the undesirable behavior patterns. If the return of humans is the maintaining consequence for the anxious behaviors, the behaviors observed during episodes of separation anxiety begin to appear very similar to behavior patterns observed during instances of extinction. This interpretation can also account for the intensity of the observed anxious behaviors. If the dog happens to be at the peak of their anxious behavior when their humans happen to come home, the intense behaviors are selected and reinforced. In the future, the dog will be less likely to waste time on the lower-level behaviors that have not met reinforcement. Instead, they will likely start directly at the most intense level of behaviors. This likely leads to more costly anxious behavior for the dog and their humans.

In cases of separation anxiety, it is plausible that human presence is the reinforcer maintaining the undesirable behavior. However,

this interpretation of separation anxiety contradicts many opinions and views in the animal training community. Outside of Melania DeMartini's (2020) book, "Separation Anxiety in Dogs," the authors have not encountered other approaches that consider the humans returning as an important variable in separation anxiety. DeMartini does not, however, consider the humans returning or attention as a reinforcer for the anxious behaviors (keep in mind anxious behaviors are not synonymous with anxiety). Adopting this point of view means that extinction may be the true culprit behind the observed anxious behaviors, and reassessing the consequences provided during training for separation anxiety may lead to more desirable behaviors and emotional states for our dogs.

Function-based Training Programs

It is possible that there are variables related to separation anxiety that have not been thoroughly examined. These variables may explain why treatments for separation anxiety have been perceived to take long periods of time to address (Martini, 2014). It is often assumed that because behavior is very intense, it must take a long time to resolve. However, no such principle has ever been validated. In fact, the exact opposite is the case. Pavlov (1927) stated: "...control the environment, and you will see order in behavior." Skinner (1967) stated that Pavlov had shown the way for Skinner to start looking for lawful relations between an organism's behavior and the environment and set the foundations for a scientific analysis of behavior. What this means for the treatment of separation anxiety, or any other behavior is that if it is taking a long time to teach, it's likely a sign that we are not working with the right variables.

By definition, the function of separation anxiety is the retuning of the dog's human or animal whose absence leads to instances of separation anxiety. For this paper, we will focus on separation anxiety related to the absence of humans. However, this means that the functional reinforcer would be the return of humans. To fulfill the dog's needs, the dog needs to be taught easier-to-do and more effective behaviors to gain access to their humans. It is likely that if, from the dog's perspective, they had other behaviors to bring their humans home, they would be doing them instead.

Identifying the consequence that maintains the behavior and using it to establish desirable behaviors during training is the essence of function-based training programs (Skinner, 1953; Sidman, 1960). Designing training programs with knowledge of the maintaining consequences has been demonstrated to be more effective than programs where the consequences were predetermined across decades

The Humane Society of the United States (2024) defines separation anxiety as: "...a disorder that can develop when a pet is away from the human or other animal to whom they are most bonded." Similarly, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (2024) defines separation anxiety as: "...the dog's problems are accompanied by other distress behaviors, such as drooling and showing anxiety when their pet parents prepare to leave the house."

Interaction Guidelines with Dogs	
Dog does	We do
The dog looks in our direction or approaches us	Show hands at the dog's eye level
When the dog is within arm's reach and all four paws are on the ground	Pet with one hand
Any paws come off the ground or the dog leaves	Pause petting
All four paws return to the ground or the dog returns within arm's reach	Pet with one hand
At any point if the dog sits or lies down	Pet with two hands, get closer, and pour lots of love!

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Figure 1

of research (Hanley, 2012). Some of the advantages of using function-based training programs are that no fading procedures to remove the consequences provided during training are required for the behavior to be maintained after training has been completed; furthermore, since the dog's needs are being fulfilled by teaching behaviors to gain what they desire, or the maintaining consequence, we can be more confident the dog is in a better emotional state.

Introduction to Constructional Affection

Constructional affection is the training program that was implemented for both of the cases being presented. Constructional affection is a shaping program that uses affection in the form of gentle petting and scratching to reinforce desirable behavior, developed by Sean Will, Chase Owens, and their mentor, Dr. Jesús Rosales-Ruiz. The use of affection in this procedure makes constructional affection a function-based program for separation anxiety since the humans returning are likely already maintaining the observed behaviors during instances of separation anxiety.

Constructional affection consists of two distinct phases. The first phase is the interaction guidelines, which teach dogs how to ask for and receive affection from humans. During the interaction guidelines, the dog learns to approach on their own, remain all four paws on the floor, sit, or lie down to ask for and receive affection from humans. The second phase is the affection loop, which allows us to bring the calm behavior established during the interaction guidelines to other conditions where it is beneficial to have a dog that is calm and relaxed.

Before explaining constructional affection, it should be noted that this is not a procedure to use with fearful or aggressive animals. This procedure is only intended to be used with animals already seeking human interaction, but perhaps they are asking for it inappropriately (jumping, barking, mouthing, etc.). The first phase of constructional affection, the interaction guidelines, consists of five guidelines (see Figure 1). These are not rules or steps. The guidelines are meant to be fluid and tailored to each animal being worked with. Think of the guidelines as whenever our dogs do what is listed on the left-side column, we will do our best to do what is listed on the right-side column. The guidelines start with waiting for the dog to approach us. When they look in our direction and step towards us, we present our hands at their eye level. When they approach with all four paws on the ground, they are pet with one

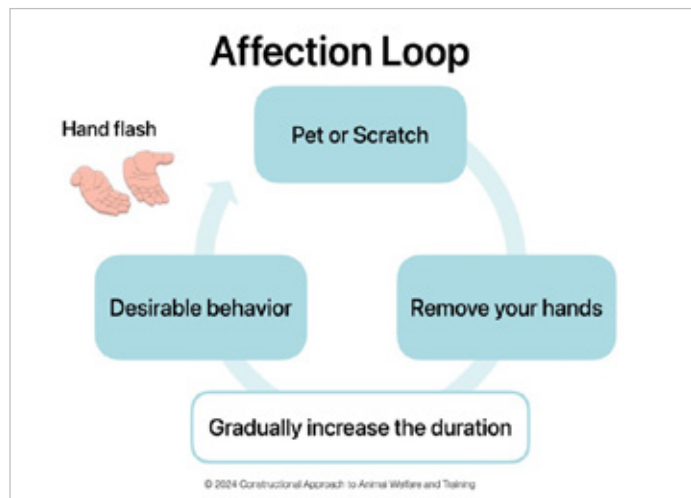


Figure 2

hand. When one of their paws leaves the ground, they walk out of arm's reach or engage in undesirable behavior, petting is paused by keeping the hands still. When their paws return to the ground, the undesirable behavior discontinues or returns within arm's reach, petting is resumed. At any point, if the dog sits or lies down, they are pet with two hands.

The way petting occurs is also important to this procedure. When petting, pet with long, soft strokes, as if trying to soothe a baby to sleep. No slapping the dog's sides or intense scratching. Additionally, the goal is never to completely withhold our affection by turning our back to the dog, removing hands, or leaving the area, but to change the amount of affection being provided based on the dog's moment-to-moment behavior. Remaining four paws on the ground leads to one hand petting; undesirable behavior leads to hands being still, and sitting or lying down leads to two hands petting. This sort of "dance" allows the dog to quickly learn how their behavior affects the amount of affection they are receiving and how to control the amount of affection they desire. When changing the amount of affection we are providing, it is important that it happens immediately with the changes in the dog's behavior. We do not want any delays or pauses when switching the amount of affection being provided. So, if the dog jumps, do not wait for a few seconds of no jumping to pet. Rather, as soon as their paws contact the floor, resume petting. The immediate changes in the amount of affection in relation to the dog's behavior set the foundation for the dog to quickly learn how their behavior affects the amount of moment-to-moment affection received.

During the affection loop (see Figure 2), the constant availability of affection becomes more episodic. That is, there are times when the dog is receiving petting, and there are times when the dog is not receiving petting. Affection loops are characterized by cycles of petting, removing our hands briefly, providing a hand flash (closed then open hands gesture), and returning to petting. We slowly increase the amount of time our hands are off before returning to pet. During the period our hands are off, we can start to include any number of routines like moving out the door, grabbing nail trimmers or a toothbrush, prepping the dog for putting on their harness or other gear, greeting people, and more.

An important piece of all affection loops is the hand-flash. The hand-flash functions exactly like a clicker in clicker training. The

clicker tells the dog they did something good and to get ready for the delivery of a piece of food. We know the clicker means something to the dog when they hear the click and start engaging in food-getting behavior. The hand-flash is the same, except it is a visual stimulus rather than an auditory one. The hand flash tells the dog they did something good and to get ready for some affection. Like the clicker, we know the hand flash means something when the dog sees it and begins engaging in affection-getting behavior. Conditioning the hand flash is a critical step to shaping more complex behavior during affection loops, especially if we are not close enough to the dog to immediately pet them.

Through constructional affection, several species have effectively learned new behaviors, including dogs (Owens, 2017), cats, equines (Nishimuta et al., 2022), birds, tortoises, lizards, penguins, and more. Types of behaviors learned include how to ask for and receive affection from people around them, receiving vaccines, medical exams, nail trimmings, grooming, IV solutions, putting behaviors on cues, and much more. In the case of separation anxiety, constructional affection has effectively taught dogs how to remain calm while being left alone.

For the SPRING 2025 issue of the *Chronicle of the Dog*, we will delve into two case studies with dogs experiencing varying degrees of separation anxiety.



Sean Will, M.S., and Maasa Nishimuta, M.S., both studied under Jesús Rosales-Ruiz, Ph.D., and earned master's degrees in behavior analysis from the University of

North Texas. While studying at UNT, Sean spearheaded the development of Constructional Affection under the instruction of Dr. Rosales-Ruiz and developed constructional shelter programs to increase efficiency in local animal shelters. Sean is currently a doctoral candidate at Florida Tech, conducting research in animal shelters relating to training behavior to increase the likelihood of adoption and volunteer and staff training.

In her master's thesis, Maasa studied the reinforcing effects of affection in the form of petting and gentle scratching with rescued equines. She modified Constructional Affection for use with equines and continues to apply Constructional Affection with animals in shelters where she volunteers.

In 2020 Sean and Maasa founded the Constructional Approach to Animal Welfare and Training (CAAWT). CAAWT is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help dogs in shelters get adopted and help dogs living with humans stay together. To fulfill this mission, CAAWT aims to remove financial barriers preventing people and organizations from accessing needed behavior support and training. CAAWT has helped develop programs that have improved the lives of animals and their caretakers across the globe—helping to resolve issues relating to hyperactivity, anxiety, fear, aggression, and more. Through connecting with trainers, shelters, rescues, zoos, and people living with

animals, CAAWT has been able to continue to reach the animals and their humans in need of behavioral and training support. To learn more about CAAWT and our work, please check out the CAAWT.com website, Constructional Approach to Animal Welfare and Training Podcast, the CAAWT Membership, the annual CAAWT Conference, webinars, and more.

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Resolving Two Difficult Leash Aggression Cases Using Modified Redirect Techniques

By Peggy Swager

PsychoLOGY describes the redirect as a strategy where you shift someone's focus away from an undesirable behavior or thought pattern towards a more positive or appropriate one, essentially "redirecting" their attention to something else. Dog trainers sometimes use the redirect technique when working with leash reactivity, often using food as a distraction. Rewarding treats while working to distract the dog, or direct the dog towards a more appropriate behavior, may also offer some counter conditioning. Although early in my career I had this technique fail when working to resolve leash aggression in a dog. I have since learned ways to get this technique to work well with leash-reactive dogs.

One of the first times I tried to use redirection on a leash reactive dog was with a foster dog. Shilo, a nine-month-old Chesapeake Bay Retriever mix, began showing anxiousness when she was walked by two Great Pyrenees who barked from behind a fence. The Great Pyrenees were recently adopted by the homeowner of a corner lot. I had to pass by this lot to get to National Forest trails to walk dogs and ride my horse. Shilo's anxiousness toward dogs quickly grew into leash reactivity.

To address Shilo's leash reactivity, I decided to use the redirect technique. I attached a leash and loaded up with very high value treats. The dirt road we walked on was narrow. I made sure to stay

on the far side of the road to allow more distance from the target, the Great Pyrenees. I used a continual stream of treats to redirect Shilo as I worked to lead her by the Great Pyrenees. The treats helped to distract her.

The next day, I felt Shilo showed more concern as we approached the Great Pyrenees, was less interested in the treats, and harder to keep redirected. On the third day I used this technique, Shilo had no interest in my treats. At one point, Shilo stopped walking. I pulled on the leash to encourage her to move forward. Shilo jumped away, and then tried to bite me. Instead of calming as we neared the dogs behind the fence, she was now redirecting aggression towards me.

I worked with Shilo early in my career and didn't have a lot of experience with leash reactivity like I do now. One of my biggest mistakes with trying to use the redirect on Shilo was that I didn't take note that on that first redirect attempt — that although Shilo ate my treats as I led her by the Pyrs — the entire time she never felt any calmer. To achieve calming with this dog during the redirect, I now suspect that I needed more distance away from the target. But that was not possible because I was limited by the width of the dirt road.

I did try and drive Shilo by the Pyrenees lot to my walking area, but when Shilo saw the dogs out of the car window, she grew very



My husband quit walking Shilo after the dog's behavior changed from startling at dogs barking at her, to leash lunging.

anxious. So, I quit walking this dog until I could figure out how to successfully solve Shilo's reactivity. Ironically, the technique I found that worked for Shilo was one I was forced to learn a few days later when I was riding a horse by the Pyrenees' lot.

My horse was used to dogs running toward a fence and barking at her and so did not spook. But the first day I tried to go by the Great Prys, these dogs suddenly appeared from behind a clump of scrub oak. They immediately lunged in full-aggression mode toward the horse. My fear-stricken horse wanted to bolt. I knew I had to do something quick or I'd risk both of us getting injured.

Having worked with runaway horses before, I immediately pulled the horse into a tight circle to prevent a catastrophe. The tight circle kept the horse from running in panic or bucking. I kept the horse in that tight circle until she began to calm. As the horse calmed, I increased the size of the circle. If the horse again got excited, I'd again make the circle smaller until she again calmed. As it turned out, the adjustments in the circle created spirals that allowed me to gradually move out of the Pyrenees zone.

I didn't run out and try this technique on Shilo. Instead I talked to the owners of the Pyrenees, and he agreed to wait until afternoon to let his dogs out. That allowed me to safely take Shilo out on walks. It took several mornings going by the area where the Pyrenees would rush the fence for Shilo to calm down on my walks.

Unfortunately, one morning when I was passing the Pyrenees area, the dogs were out in the morning. They charged down a hill towards the fence. I knew Shilo would redirect her fear-aggression on me, and I was too far away to run out of dog's attack zone. When the dogs reached the fence, Shilo began to panic. Without thinking, I reacted the same way I had with the horse and turned Shilo into a tight circle. This kept Shilo too focused on turning to react. I kept up the circle for a very long time, until Shilo finally began to relax. I then slowly increased the diameter of the circle. It took well over half an hour of adjusting my circle's diameters for Shilo to calm enough for me to walk out of the Pyrenees' area. The entire time, the Pyrenees kept barking at the fence.



Bear was the worst of the two barking Great Pyrenees and became more aggressive towards Shilo each time she was walked by.

Since using the circles to redirect Shilo had calmed the dog, I continued using them on my walks with this dog. Although it took many training repetitions, Shilo stopped reacting to the Pyrenees barking and lunging at the fence. I now call this approach to redirecting a dog the Circle into Control (CIC) technique and have successfully used it on several dogs with leash reactivity.



The two Pyrenees continued to rush the fence and bark at Shilo, however Shilo learned to stop reacting with my modified redirect technique.

One of the challenges that dog trainers have when working with a leash reactive dog is to know when to redirect the dog. I've learned a lot on that topic since my work with Shilo. I was able to capture some illustrations with another dog I worked with years later. During my first session with Spot, a year and a half old rescue, I had put two amiable dogs in a pen about 75 feet away from my house. My goal was to evaluate and work with this dog's leash reactivity. The moment I came around the corner and Spot saw the two other dogs, she stopped and postured.



Spot would stop and posture when seeing other dogs.



The Golden pup is excited to see Spot. When Spot got closer to her trigger zone, her body language signaled to me that it was time to intervene.

Posturing is a term used when a dog uses aggressive body language to signal other dogs, generally because the posturing dog is feeling threatened. The goal of posturing is to avoid a fight. Although Spot's posture made her look like she was a "tough dog not to be messed with," she was actually afraid of these two dogs, even though the dogs were not displaying hostile actions.

When a dog is posturing towards other dogs, since the dog is using body language to communicate, this is not a good time to redirect. Posturing has the goal of avoiding conflict. I've seen other dogs successfully use posturing to diffuse aggression. For that reason, I don't interfere with this kind of dog-to-dog communication.

I gave Spot some time with her posturing, and she seemed to calm down a little about the two dogs. I then began to walk Spot toward the other dogs. My approach used an arch, rather than walking directly towards the other dogs. The book on calming signals by Turid Rugaas explains the advantage to this kind of approach.

Although Spot was not feeling secure about the other dogs when I first began my approach, she didn't display any intention of reacting. But then, Spot's body language changed. She pulled forward on the leash, lowered her head, and directed her stare. At that point I redirected her using the CIC to calm her. Strategic manipulation of my circles allowed this dog to calm enough so she could approach the dogs without lunging aggressively.

Although I've used the redirect along with the Circle into Control technique successfully on several dogs, this is not the only technique modification to the redirect technique that can bring success with a more difficult dog. I learned a different modification from a trainer who reformed a dog named Tari.

Tari was rescued moments before this dog was going to be euthanized. A Rottweiler rescue had just arrived to pick up a different dog for rehoming. To save Tari's life, the rescue decided to take Tari as well. Unfortunately, trying to rehome Tari didn't go very well. Adopter after adopter returned the dog. The problem was Tari's leash reactivity. Tari went from calm to lunging and snapping at other dogs, putting the dog handler at risk of injury. Tari gave no body language or verbal cues before she tried to attack the other dog. When a dog got into Tari's trigger zone, this Rottweiler launched into dangerous aggression.

The rescue contacted a trainer who specialized in Rottweilers. The trainer began Tari's reform by teaching two things, a watch command and a redirect command. The redirect command was a "front" command much like seen in dog obedience classes. When Tari complied with the front command by sitting and making eye contact, the trainer fed the dog a pocket full of high value treats in rapid succession. The goal was to use the treats as a reward, and to keep Tari's undivided focus on the trainer's actions. This training was proofed.

When a dog is posturing towards other dogs, since the dog is using body language to communicate, this is not a good time to redirect. Posturing has the goal of avoiding conflict. I've seen other dogs successfully use posturing to diffuse aggression. For that reason, I don't interfere with this kind of dog-to-dog communication.



The trainer carefully planned her first encounter with another dog. The trainer knew of a park where she could locate Tari in a place where other dogs wouldn't sneak up on them. This location overlooked a second trail where people walked their dogs. The second trail was outside of Tari's trigger zone, yet close enough to identify the target.

Since Tari went from calm to thrashing extremely fast, the trainer couldn't use body language as a cue. Instead, she decided to only give Tari a moment to identify the target dog. The trainer gave an example of how long she gave Tari to identify the target. The trainer held a red Coke can behind her back. Then the trainer swung the can forward, held it still for a moment and returned it behind her back. The trainer never had anyone fail to identify the red Coke can.

In Tari's first training session, the trainer only gave Tari a moment to look at the target dog, then the trainer gave the front command. When Tari moved to the trainer's front and made eye contact, the trainer did the familiar routine of rapid feeding of treats to monopolize Tari's attention, after which Tari was led away from the area.

Dog trainers need to decide if they should immediately repeat a lesson or wait for another day. Tari's first session was only done once. I agree with this idea when first introducing a completely new behavior to a dog. There is an advantage to allowing the dog to sleep when processing a new concept about how to react towards a stimulus. In Dr. Matthew Walker book "Why We Sleep," Dr. Walker explains in people, sleep the night after learning, "effectively clicks the 'save' button on those newly created files." I've observed similar advantages to allowing a sleep break when doing training, especially when a dog needs to evaluate elements of the lesson.

◀ Using the CIC to approach closer allowed Spot not to trigger into reactivity.

For Tari's next training session, the trainer took Tari to the same place to repeat this training. The trainer had stopped at the waiting place with Tari in a sit, when a dog appeared on the trail below. Before the trainer could react, Tari immediately got in front of her, sat and made eye contact. A jackpot of treats was immediately awarded and the session ended for the day with the idea that when you get that kind of a breakthrough, you heavily reward and quit. After securing the redirect in this location, the trainer worked in other locations and situations, bringing a complete reform of Tari.

I feel a successful redirection for fear-aggressive dogs needs to result in a dog feeling calmer after being redirected. Although using food to try and redirect Shilo failed for me, with some dogs this can work. But you need often to use other desensitization tools, such as distance, when working to redirect with food. Using my Circle into Control technique as a calming tool works well for me when I feel I don't have adequate distance from the target, especially if the dog is fear reactive. I felt Tari's reactivity was more a result of a strong and untrained predatory drive. I applaud the Rottweiler trainer for her successful approach that included first proofing a different response to the target, then only giving only a moment for the dog to recognize the target before redirecting. When working to redirect dogs that are leash reactive, it isn't unusual to tailor the training to the dog's specific needs.



Peggy Swager has a Bachelor of Science degree in biology, minor in education, with undergraduate studies in psychology. Over the years, she received mentoring by animal professionals, including a veterinarian, on behavior and fear issues. Peggy began teaching dog classes and working with problematic dogs since the 1990s. She is an award-winning author with multiple articles and books.

Resources

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Rugaas, Turid, "On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals," 2005



7 Mistakes to Avoid On Your Dog Training Website

Your website should help convince potential clients to work with you... if it's not, it's time to make some changes.

By Melissa Breau

Ever wonder what sets apart dog training websites that bring their clients lots of leads from those that struggle to get business off the ground? A good website can serve as that perfect first impression that helps cement for a potential client that you are the trainer they want to work with... or it can tank that impression and leave them looking elsewhere. But what factors make someone lean one way or another? And how can you tell how well *your* website is performing?

In order to determine that we need a few numbers — we need to know how many people have visited your website over a specific period of time and we need to know how many of those people then reached out to you for help via that website. If we have those two numbers we can calculate your conversion rate, or the percentage of people who visited your website that then reached out to you for help. Most web statistics research shows that a conversion rate between 2-5 percent is considered average. So if your website has a conversion rate between 2-5 percent, you're doing pretty well. If you find it's under 2 percent, it's worth looking at what you should update or change; and if you're doing better than 5 percent, you deserve to pat yourself on the back.

Good Website But Low On Leads

If the math says your website is performing well but you're not happy with the number of people contacting you for help, then there's a good chance you're simply not getting enough people to your website. In that case, it's time to look at new ways to drive more traffic to your site.

There are only six ways someone can get to your website:

1. **Direct:** They type your website address directly into their browser's URL bar. This typically happens if they come across your website address offline (for example, on a brochure at your local vet's office)
2. **Organic Search:** They go to Google, do a search, and your website appears in the search results.
3. **Paid:** They go to google, do a search, and your ad appears in the search results OR they come across an ad for your business on Facebook, Instagram, or another paid platform.
4. **Social:** Someone clicks on a post on a social media platform like Facebook, Instagram, or Blue Sky and it takes them to your website (this could be a post by you, a post by someone else, or a link in your profile).



5. **Referral:** They are on someone else's website and that other person has linked to your website and they click on the link (this includes things like APDT's trainer directory!)
6. **Email:** They get an email that includes a link to your website and they click on the link in that email (this could be an email from you, from a friend or family member who is referring them to you, or a veterinarian or other local business).

If you find that your website is converting a high percentage of visitors, but you need more leads, the solution is to choose one or more of the options above to focus on to grow traffic to your site.

Improving Website Performance

If you're not one of those who was pleasantly surprised by your website conversion rate, it's worth looking at why your website may not be converting clients. It always makes sense to start with the simplest check — testing your website form to make sure it's working and checking that your website is up and functioning correctly. But assuming that testing your form shows that aspect of your site is working correctly, and that when you visit your site it appears to load and work, what else should you consider?

Common Mistake #1: Your Service Area Isn't Obvious

The single most common mistake I see on dog trainer websites is that they don't make their location or service area easy to find. If someone ends up on your site and can't determine how far they'd have to drive to work with you or if they're within the area where you will drive to them, it's likely to give them pause. And we don't want website visitors to pause — when they pause they're likely to wind up back on Facebook or, worse yet, back on Google looking at your competitor's website! Make sure your service area

or location is obvious on your site, either at the top or the bottom of every page on your website and also in at least one place on your homepage.

Common Mistake #2: They Aren't Sure You Can Help Them

When pet owners decide to go looking for a dog trainer it's because there is something about their dog's current behavior they want to change, bad behaviors they want to prevent, or skills they want their dog to know that they don't know how to teach. In marketing we think of those things as the "problem" that your potential client wants to solve. You want your website to position you as the best person to help them solve that problem.

That means on the homepage of your website you want to make it clear what types of problems you can help with! The main headline on your homepage should provide some sense of the outcome you're able to help your clients achieve — and then beneath that, you should have information on the specific types of services you offer.

When talking about your services, write about them as problems that you can solve... for example you might write: "Have a dog barking and lunging on leash? Let us teach your dog to walk nicely instead!" Thinking about your services this way makes your content more persuasive and makes it much clearer for potential clients whether or not it's worth it for them to reach out to you for help.

Common Mistake #3: They Don't Trust You

It's not enough to tell someone you can solve their problems — there are dozens of dog trainers out there who are willing to make those types of promises. Some even offer guarantees. So how can your potential client know that you're the real deal? There are several

ways you can encourage clients to trust you. The first option is to include testimonials or reviews — better still if they're reviews via a third party, like Google or Facebook, where your potential client can trust that you haven't picked out only good reviews to show.

You can also include information about your certifications and continuing education that you engage in or awards that you may win. While pet owners may not know the differences between one training certification and another, showing that you have a certification at least lets them know that you have had your training certified by someone else. And winning “Best Dog Trainer” in your city or area through SniffSpot or a local magazine again shows someone else puts their trust in you and recommends you.

Case studies or before and after videos are also a powerful tool for building trust — they can see with their own eyes what a dog was doing before they worked with you, and then how far they came after working with you! Finally, you can include statistics or data around your training, if you have it. Information on how many dogs you've worked with or the number of years you've been training can also help build trust.

Common Mistake #4: They Don't Think You Work With “People Like Them”

In addition to showing that you can solve a potential client's problem and proving they can trust you, people want to know that you work with people “like them.” That can mean people with their budget, with their breed of dog, who are single professionals, or who have busy families. Whether or not you list your prices on your website, your site's design should give people a sense of roughly what price point you'll fall into — whether they should expect to pay luxury, high-end rates or group class prices similar to the local kennel club.

Other than the overall design of your site, it's also worth thinking about what photos you're using. Including images that show your “typical” client can be really helpful in convincing clients that they're in the right place. If you mostly help families teach their dog to be a good family dog, show pictures of families and dogs; if you work with a lot of recent empty nesters, show photos of retirement age pet owners; if you tend to work with young professionals, aim for images that show them and their dogs.

Common Mistake #5: You Never Ask for the Sale

If you've established who you work with, the types of problems you solve, and ensured that site visitors know they can trust you, it's worth considering whether you've included enough calls to action on your site. A call to action is a section where you explicitly tell clients how to take the next step in working with you. Often, this includes a button that takes them to either a registration form or your contact page so they can schedule a sales call. Every page of your website should have a clear call to action that makes it obvious for visitors where they should go next and what they should do once they get there. Your call to action is your chance to ask for the sale! It might say something like, “Start Your Training Today! Schedule Your Free Call.”

Common Mistake #6: They Get Lost On Your Site

While clear calls to action can help visitors know where to go, you also want to make sure your site is as easy for someone to navigate as possible. Again, the less we make a visitor pause to think, the less likely they are to wander off to Facebook. That means using the terms they'll expect in your menu (rather than more “cutesy” language, like “Bark at Us” instead of “Contact Us”), and ensuring pages are organized in a way that makes sense.

A good way to determine whether your website is well organized is to come up with a few tasks that a potential client might want to do and ask a friend or family member who isn't very familiar with your business to try and accomplish those things on your site. For example, you might ask them to determine your business hours, where you're located, if you help with a specific training problem, or whether you offer group classes. Then watch them try to find that information on your site without helping them find the answers. You'll learn a lot about how other people see your site and what they expect to find where!

Common Mistake #7: Not Having a Website (or, Having a “Free” Website)

While it's less common than it used to be, occasionally I'll find a trainer who only has a Facebook page and doesn't even have a website. Or, they have a website but it's on a free builder, meaning that the website address has someone else's business name in it, in addition to theirs (think business.wix.com or businessname.wordpress.com).

Other than the overall design of your site, it's also worth thinking about what photos you're using. Including images that show your “typical” client can be really helpful in convincing clients that they're in the right place. If you mostly help families teach their dog to be a good family dog, show pictures of families and dogs; if you work with a lot of recent empty nesters, show photos of retirement age pet owners; if you tend to work with young professionals, aim for images that show them and their dogs.



Calculating Your Website Conversion Rate

Want to calculate your website's conversion rate?

I like to look at either your conversion rate for the last month or your conversion rate for a full year. The longer period of time will provide you a better average, allowing random oddities to average out over time, while the more recent, shorter period will give you relevant data on how your site is performing today.

Begin by deciding which period of time you want to calculate. Then, using a tool like Google Analytics, you can look at how many users visited your website in that period of time.

Next, you'll want to look at how many people contacted you via your website for that same time period. If your website tracks form submissions, that's likely the fastest way to pull that metric, but if not, you can go back through your emails and count how many people have contacted you.

Once you have these two numbers you want to take the number of people who contacted you and divide it by the number of people who visited your website, then multiply that number by 100 to get a percentage.

So if 300 people visited your website last month and you had 30 people reach out to you for help, we'd divide 30 by 300 to get .1 then multiply that by 100 and get a 10-percent conversion rate.

While free site builders and Facebook pages are great for hobbies or personal blogs, they aren't enough if you want to be taken as a serious professional. Free sites often add ads to your website, and social media sites like Facebook limit who sees your content and how often.

Before You Make Any Changes...

Having a well-performing website makes running a well-performing dog training business much easier. It serves as your "always on" salesperson, providing potential clients with all the information they need to decide to work with you even while you're working with other clients or safe in bed for the night. By ensuring you're not making the common mistakes above, you can set yourself apart from other trainers in your area who may be making these mistakes. And if after reading this, you feel you have some changes to make, take a few minutes to calculate out your conversion rate now... and then in a few months check it again. You should see your site's performance has improved and you are enjoying the new clients those improvements have brought in.



Melissa Breau (she/her) is owner of Click and Repeat, a marketing agency that specializes in logo and website design for dog trainers. She's spent more than 15 years in the pet industry, including covering the industry as a journalist, teaching pet dog training classes at a local dog training school and competing in dog sports with her own dogs. She also has more than 10 years' experience, specifically in marketing, where she's done everything from copywriting and content marketing to leading a marketing team with a 6-figure budget. In addition to running Click and Repeat, she's the host of the Fenzi Dog Sports Podcast and FDSA's regular webinar host. Learn more about her and her work over at her website, www.ClickandRepeat.com.



Conflict of Interest? *In Dog Training? Maybe!*

By Sue Alexander, CPDT-KSA, CBCC-KA, CDBC

Most of us in the world of dog training and behaviour are acutely aware of ethics and how they apply to us as practitioners, and we are always striving to learn more and do better. Hopefully, much better! We may have heard the term conflict of interest as it relates to politicians, bankers, lawyers and doctors, but have you considered how this concept might apply to you as a dog trainer?

A conflict of interest occurs when one of your interests conflicts with another of your interests. This is really clear when you hire a lawyer to advocate for you, and they have to check and make sure that they are not also advocating for the person with whom you have to negotiate. This is much less clear when you are training someone's dog; it is not like you have to make sure that you are not also training the same dog for someone else.

The place where I often see a conflict of interest is when we are consulting with clients about dogs who have serious behavior problems. Behavior consulting is not inexpensive for our clients, and sometimes they may need to work with us for several months. I have had clients who have paid me more than \$10,000 to work with them and their dogs. This is a lot of money. And eventually, the client may come to the point where they cannot go on. Maybe they are not making progress. Maybe they cannot afford to pay for more appointments. Maybe they are just fed up with the amount of work that it takes to meet the needs of a dog with a serious behavior problem. And sometimes, we don't know why it is that the client is ready to throw in the towel.

When this happens, we are often faced with a conversation that we don't really want to have. If the client is not going to live with the dog, then just who will? It is rare that a shelter or rescue will want to take in a dog with a serious behavior problem, particularly if the problem is aggression. Finding an appropriate home for a dog with a known behavior problem is always more difficult than trying to place a puppy, or even an adult dog who does not have a behavior problem.

When talking to my clients about rehoming, inevitably they ask me if I would take the dog. This is one of the most heartbreaking discussions that a behavior consultant can have with a client. Most of us already share our lives with at least one dog. I currently have two, and my life is greatly enriched and my life benefits by these dogs. If I were to agree to take in a third dog, it would be because my life would be improved by doing so and I would benefit from having another dog in my home.

And there lies the potential for a conflict of interest. If I take in a dog and I have been paid to train him, then there is a conflict of interest. I benefited from having the dog as my client, and then eventually, I benefitted from having the dog himself. One of the heartbreaking issues we face is that some of the time, we are faced with this kind of tragic decision to make. And worse, there are clients who will try and pressure us into taking a dog in such a situation by threatening to euthanize a dog because they are no longer able to cope with him. This is going to result in us feeling bad, regardless of the outcome; we feel bad when we have to say no, and we also feel bad when a client's dog dies.

There is a pretty simple resolution to the dilemma. Purchase the dog for the cost of the training that has already been put into him. Think about that for a moment. Most of the time when a client comes to us with the proposal that we take the dog they can no longer live with, they just want out. If they threaten to

If I take in a dog and I have been paid to train him, then there is a conflict of interest. I benefited from having the dog as my client, and then eventually, I benefitted from having the dog himself.

euthanize the dog, then they are putting completely inappropriate pressure on us to take the dog. It is unlikely this is your dream dog, and it is equally unlikely the timing is exactly right for us. Also, if I had taken in every dog who had been offered to me over the course of my career, those dogs would have eaten me out of house and home; we cannot take every dog who is in need. Nevertheless, if you want this dog, you should be willing to pay for him and erase the fact that you have already been compensated for the work you put into either training him or teaching his family to train him.

This becomes a lot clearer if we are talking about an inanimate object; when talking about dogs this becomes instantly emotional because for the most part, we love our client's dogs almost as much as they do. Consider how this would sound if instead of talking about a dog in need, you were a mechanic, and you had done thousands of dollars of repairs on your client's car. Imagine that you had done several upgrades and paint jobs, and then one day, out of the blue, the client had said to you "that's it. I hate this car, and I am going to give it to you." In that case, they are giving away something that is inherently valuable. You, the mechanic, could then turn that car around and sell it, and it would be easy to see that you had made money on the repairs, and then made money on the sale. You would have two clearly conflicting interests. I think that sometimes we don't see taking a client's dog in as a conflict of interest simply because a dog with a serious behavior problem is usually not worth anything financially. If the dog were a personal protection dog, a competitive sports dog, a trained tracking or hunting dog, or a medical service dog, then the value would be more apparent; those types of dogs can be worth tens of thousands of dollars.



As dog training and behavior becomes more professionalized, we are going to see more and more questions about our ethics, and setting appropriate boundaries is going to become ever more important. We need to understand the issues and think about them ahead of time. We are in a helping profession, and this means that often we need to say yes when a client asks for something. When we need to say no, we need to be prepared to understand why we are saying no, and have a plan for how we will say no. When I have been presented with this offer, I say to my clients "wow. I am really flattered that you would think of me, but I would not be the right home for your dog. I already have two dogs,

and they take up all of my time. Furthermore, I feel it would be a conflict of interest to have been paid for the work we have done together, AND to have such a special dog for free." By being clear, compassionate, and grateful for the compliment, I rarely have any pushback from my clients.

I will share that there are a special few clients who become dear close friends over time, and if they ask, I usually will agree to help rehome their dog in the event of their death. This is a situation I have only faced once, and the dog stayed with me for about six months while we tracked down his breeder. That is a case where I might in fact end up with a client's dog in my care, but most likely only for a short period of time.

I see a day when issues like this are more clearly examined in our ethics statements from the organizations to which we belong. Until that day, it is up to you about where you stand on this issue. You may already have benefited from a dog your client no longer wants. You may feel that this is a different situation than a mechanic being given a car he had been paid to repair. In some respects, that is the fun of ethical dilemmas; there is no one correct answer. There are endless shades of grey and things to think about, and we each get to choose the side of the argument that we feel right about. It just helps when we have thought about the issue and made a decision before we have to answer the dilemma.



Sue Alexander has been teaching and consulting about dog training and behavior since 1993. Sue has an extensive speaking portfolio including speaking at the Canadian Association of Professional Pet Dog Trainers National Conference in 2009, presenting at the Dogs in the Park Service Dog Conference for six years, and being interviewed on countless podcasts, television shows and radio programs.

Sue has mentored more than 20 individuals through the CPDT-KA exam, as well as developing and overseeing a dog behavior rotation for fourth year veterinary students. For the past two years, Sue has devoted her energy to consulting in the dog training industry, helping other trainers to learn, grow and optimize their dog training professionalism. She and her husband, John, co-founded Dogs in the Park, Guelph, Ontario, Canada.



More than A Goal: Creating a Marketing Plan to Make 2025 Your Best Year Yet

If running your business feels like a rollercoaster ride, a strong marketing plan may help smooth out the ups and downs.

By Melissa Breau

Being self-employed can often feel like a rollercoaster ride that you never bought tickets to — it's a cliché, but there's a reason it's such a common saying. Typically, business owners pour effort into their marketing, get busy, stop marketing because things are going well (and they don't have time) and then, unsurprisingly, see business dry up! Getting off the rollercoaster feels impossible; but establishing an efficient marketing plan that allows you to maximize your return on the time and effort you put into it can help smooth out the ups and downs and make life a lot more sustainable.

As a business owner it's important to understand the role marketing should play in your business — a good marketing plan should feel a bit like a money making machine... you spend time or money on your marketing and can reliably get new clients (and new revenue) as a result. So what goes into a good marketing plan? There are two key concepts it's important to understand in order to answer that question:

1. The Customer Journey
2. The Marketing Funnel

Understanding the Customer Journey

A customer journey is the route of one individual who makes a purchase, detailing each touchpoint (or interaction with the business and decision point) along that path to purchase. For example, if someone were to acquire a new puppy and then go to Google and search for “puppy training near me,” which caused your website and a class you offer to come up in their search results, and then they opted to sign up for your class, that would be their customer journey.

However, while many of your clients may go through a similar customer journey, their paths can also vary drastically. While the client above may have turned to Google and found you, another client may ask their vet for a recommendation or come across a post a neighbor shared on Facebook talking about your classes.

Even though a specific client's journey may be different than that of another client, every client will go through four key steps along the way. Customers begin as random strangers, then take some action (or some action takes place) where they learn that you and your business



exist. Then they do something that puts them on your radar... and then decide to buy (although sometimes the thing that puts them on your radar IS their decision to buy).

Understanding these four stages allows you to think about which stage you're targeting with each element of your marketing. It can help determine what type of information will be most useful and which marketing tactics you should use.

Understanding the Marketing Funnel

In addition to understanding the idea of a customer's journey, it's important to understand what happens when we begin to look at many customer journeys at once — when looking at many customer journeys anonymously and in aggregate, marketers think about them as a marketing funnel.

The marketing funnel also adds a bit of important realism to the picture — the idea that not every random stranger who learns that you exist will take that next step and reach out. It acknowledges that what we're looking to do with our marketing is convert as many people at each stage in the funnel as possible and recognizes that we'll never truly hit a 100-percent conversion rate. That means that we need to target the many activities at the top of the funnel if we would like to see customers making it through the bottom of the funnel.

Why Do These Concepts Matter?

These two concepts together raise one more critical point: At every stage of your marketing, you want to be thinking about what the "next step" should be in your client's customer journey. You want to make that step as easy for them as possible and as clear as you can, to encourage them to take it. If, for example, Facebook is a key marketing tactic that you use extensively for your business, you want to think about how you're using Facebook to help random strangers come across your Facebook posts.

Are you creating content that gets shared by others in the community? Are you tagging other local businesses so you appear on their Facebook feed and get shown to their followers? Are you posting in Facebook groups for your city or neighborhood, so new people

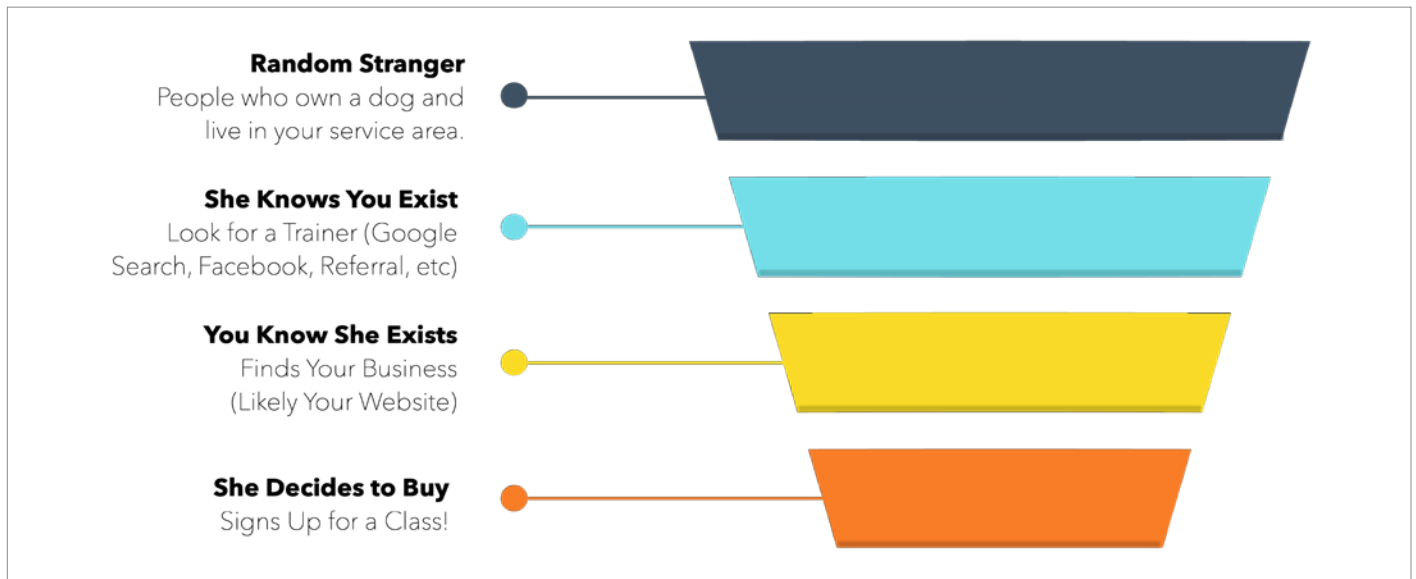
learn that you exist? Have you tried creating Facebook Reels, which Facebook shows to non-followers? These are all options that you can use to help random strangers learn about your business on Facebook. Once they've learned about you, then you need to encourage them to follow you (and, in the case of Facebook, engage with your business page since Facebook uses engagement to indicate whether they should show your content to more people).

Then you want to think about the next step in that journey. Most likely you want them to visit your website to check out your offerings and decide which makes the most sense for them and their pup. That means you need to be strategic with your content so that it encourages them to go from Facebook to your website. How? You can do that by advertising to people who follow you or by boosting a post. You can share a link to your site directly (though Facebook doesn't love links that take people off of Facebook and is likely to show them to a smaller percentage of your followers). You can use something like manychat.com, which allows people to comment to get a link sent to them via direct messages (DM). Or maybe you share a video where you talk about your classes and services and pitch them, then verbally tell them how to find you via the web. Think through the options you have available and choose which ones you want to implement based on how they map to the four stages of the customer journey. This will help ensure your marketing is more effective.

Turning All of This Into a Marketing Plan

When creating your marketing plan for the new year, you'll want to think through the four stages of a customer's journey and apply it to each marketing tactic you decide to employ. And the marketing tactics you decide to employ should reflect the ideas behind the marketing funnel.

You want to choose several options that will let you expose your business to random strangers. Then you want to choose a few options that help you turn those random strangers into leads you can actively follow up with. Finally, you'll want to think about how you'll convert those leads into paying clients. Choosing a few marketing channels that can cover multiple points in the customer journey (like the Facebook example above) can help reduce the overall number of



marketing channels you need to use. Overall, you and your business will be best served by the marketing tactics you feel you can do most consistently, rather than by trying to do everything. Just like in dog training, consistency is essential in achieving results.

A Fictional Case Study: Fido's Best

Let's create a sample marketing plan to bring all of this together for a fictional business that we'll call Fido's Best Dog Training, run by a fictional owner named Ruth. She is the only trainer at Fido's Best and wears all the hats — Ruth handles marketing the business, making sales calls, admin, training dogs, and more. That means she needs to streamline her marketing as much as possible.

Ruth decides that for 2025 she'll focus on Search Engine Optimization (SEO), to encourage new clients to find her via Google as one of her marketing tactics. Specifically, she's going to work to improve her Google Business Profile, since that's one of the free tools that can really improve local SEO results. She's planning to ask past clients for reviews and to review her profile to make sure it's really filled out completely.

Further, she's going to work on creating blog posts on her website about local places people can go with their dogs. She'll share one post a week, either reviewing a local dog-friendly business or creating a list of fun places or things people might want to do with their dogs. When someone is looking for things to do in her town with their dog, she wants them to end up on her website. Coming up in search results should help random strangers find her business and then she'll let her website do the job of convincing them they want to work with her.

In addition to SEO, she's going to focus on Facebook because when she reviewed the list of clients she's worked with recently, several said they found her via Facebook. She was excited to hear that — she'd begun focusing on Facebook earlier this year, and it seems to be yielding good results. On Facebook she's been sharing the same type of content she's planning to blog about in a local Facebook group. She'll keep doing that going forward, so that she can reuse the content itself in both places.

However, she really wants to look at new options for encouraging people to go from the Facebook group to her website... so she's considering putting some of her most popular previous posts into a PDF that people will be able to download on her website. She's hoping that she can link to that at the bottom of her posts reviewing local businesses.

Finally, since she's relying on her website to be a key player in convincing people to reach out for help, she's planning to invest in a website review. She wants to get someone else's feedback on her website content to make sure it's written convincingly. She's also hoping for feedback on any changes she can make to further help with her SEO efforts. She plans to review how things are going at the end of the first quarter and update her plan as needed based on the results.

Doing Less, But Getting More

While Fido's Best and Ruth may be entirely fictional, the basic marketing plan above is a good example of how even just a few marketing tactics can create a strong foundation for a robust plan. It covers all the steps in the marketing funnel in a strategic and well-thought-out way. If you spend the time to think through your marketing choices strategically, you can do less and get more for your time and money.



Melissa Breau (she/her) is owner of *Click and Repeat*, a marketing agency that specializes in logo and website design for dog trainers. She's spent more than 15 years in the pet industry, including covering the industry as a journalist, teaching pet dog training classes at a local dog training school and competing in dog sports with her own dogs. She also has more than 10 years' experience, specifically in marketing, where she's done everything from copywriting and content marketing to leading a marketing team with a 6-figure budget. In addition to running *Click and Repeat*, she's the host of the *Fenzi Dog Sports Podcast* and *FDSA's* regular webinar host. Learn more about her and her work over at her website, www.ClickandRepeat.com.



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Your New Year Business Success Starts with Reflection

By Veronica Boutelle, MA, CTC and Harriet Alexander

It's easy to fall into a reactive approach in the dog industry. When clients call, we often jump, especially if a dog needs help. Worried about growth? We hastily post on TikTok or design Instagram Reels. Noticed a skill gap? It's tempting to sign up for every webinar or course out there, without time to implement what we learn. If you're worn out from a year of bouncing between business needs, it's worth carving out time to reflect and plan for a more balanced, productive 2025. Wherever you are in your business journey, setting meaningful goals will help you bound into the New Year with purpose and confidence.

Looking back to look forward

Before you set your goals, stop to look back and identify where you are on your dog business journey. A 'retrospective' gives you a chance to explore strengths and weaknesses and find ways to improve as you move forward. The 4L approach, initially developed by Mary Gorman and Ellen Gottesdiener, is a simple and popular technique to help you get started. It's a great exercise for both teams and one-trainer shows. You could even connect with a fellow colleague and do it together. The 4Ls ask you to explore what you **loved**, **lacked**, **learned**, and **longed for** during the past year. These can be practical and emotional elements - both are key when designing a business and life you love.

Loved

Reflecting on the past year, what made you excited to start your day? Maybe it's helping dogs cope better while home alone (and restoring freedom to their humans), delivering talks to your local rescue, or the joy of running outdoor group classes in local parks. If there are clients, training areas, or business tasks you love, pay attention to this signal. Did you implement a new online booking system that made scheduling a breeze? Or perhaps you made time for advanced scent work training with your own dog? For those just starting out, which ideas thrilled you most? It could be the concept of virtual puppy classes or the excitement of booking your first in-home training session.

Lacked

Give yourself permission to vent your frustrations. What challenges did you face? Difficult interactions with clients expecting instant results, concerns about inflation affecting your pricing, last-minute cancellations, emotionally taxing cases, working holidays, feeling isolated - list out what's been troubling you. Try categorizing these issues. Do they revolve around client retention, adapting to hybrid training models, or inspiring commitment to longer-term training plans? Identifying pain points will shape your future goals. Remember, there are innovative solutions to many common issues dog pros face, especially with the right support network.

Reflecting on the past year, what made you excited to start your day? Maybe it's helping dogs cope better while home alone (and restoring freedom to their humans), delivering talks to your local rescue, or the joy of running outdoor group classes in local parks. **If there are clients, training areas, or business tasks you love, pay attention to this signal.**

Learned

At dogbiz, we champion continuous learning. Running a successful dog business requires ongoing skill development, and it's easy to overlook how far you've come. What were your 'aha' moments this year? Maybe you mastered virtual consultations, improved your social media marketing skills, or found ways to include more enrichment ideas into your training programs. Perhaps you learned the hard way about the importance of clear cancellation policies or discovered a knack for specializing in reactive dog training. List any insights that shifted your approach or methods.

Longed for

If you caught yourself thinking 'if only I had...' or 'if only I could...', now's the time to write it down! Create a wish list for your business and life that will help you thrive. It might be operational, like longing for a more efficient way to track client progress. Or it could be personal, like wishing for more networking opportunities with fellow dog professionals. Maybe you simply yearned for more downtime, better work-life balance, or more playtime with your own dogs. The more frequent a 'longed for' appears, the higher it should rank on your list.

Next steps

Once you've completed your retrospective, it's time for action! Here's how to make the most of your reflection:

- **Amplify what you loved:** Identify one or two items from your 'loved' list that you want to expand. For instance, if you enjoyed running puppy classes, consider developing an advanced curriculum or adding a "Puppy Graduate" program. If you loved working with senior dogs, you might create a specialized service package aimed tailored to their needs.
- **Address what you lacked:** Choose the most pressing issue from your 'lacked' list and brainstorm solutions. If you struggled with time management, you might set a goal to implement a new scheduling system or hire a virtual assistant. If client retention was an issue, your goal could be to develop a loyalty program or create a series of follow-up training sessions.
- **Build on what you learned:** Your 'learned' list is a goldmine for professional development goals. Did you discover a passion for working with aggression issues? Set a goal to obtain an additional certification in that area. If you learned the value of video content, aim to launch a YouTube channel or create a library of training tutorial videos for clients.
- **Pursue what you longed for:** These items often point to your most meaningful goals. If you longed for more work-life balance, set a concrete goal like "Take two consecutive days off each week"

or "Limit evening appointments to two nights per week." If you wished for more peer connection, your goal might be to attend two industry conferences, start a local dog trainers' networking group, or **join a supportive business learning community such as THRIVE!**

Once you've set your goals, break them down into quarterly milestones and monthly tasks. This approach makes your big-picture goals feel more manageable and allows you to track your progress regularly. Remember, goal-setting is not a one-time event. Schedule monthly check-ins with yourself (or a business accountability partner) to review your progress, celebrate your wins, and adjust your approach as needed. Be prepared to pivot if circumstances change or new opportunities arise.

Don't forget to plan rewards for yourself as you achieve your goals. Whether it's treating yourself to a new piece of training equipment, taking a day off for a hike with your own dogs, or attending that workshop you've been eyeing, celebrating your successes will keep you motivated and remind you why you started this journey in the first place. By thoughtfully setting and pursuing your goals, you're not just planning for a successful 2025 – you're laying the foundation for long-term growth and fulfillment in your dog training career.



Veronica Boutelle, MAEd, CTC is the author of "How To Run a Dog Business: Putting Your Career Where Your Heart Is," and co-founder of dogbiz, whose business is to help yours succeed. Harriet Alexander is content curator for dogbiz. Learn all the ways dogbiz can support your success at www.dogbizsuccess.com.



Trials and Tribulations of Research and Publishing

By Melissa Bain, DVM, DACVB, MS, DACAW
Professor, Clinical Animal Behavior
University of California School of Veterinary Medicine

For someone who does research, publishing papers is a huge source of stress! How do I fund the research? Who do I hire to help? Is this a student or resident project? Where do I submit the paper? How will it be perceived by my colleagues, especially when I go up for merit and promotion? Expectations of what is considered creative scholarship are lower for me compared to faculty in other tracks, as 70 percent (or more!) of my time is dedicated to seeing cases and teaching students and residents in the clinic. It's not required that I have a fully funded and dedicated research program, supervise doctoral students, and publish multiple original research papers per year. Book chapters, resident and student research projects, review papers, and articles like this count toward my 'creative scholarship.' And yet I still publish quite a bit and have even supervised a post-doctorate fellow in addition to all of the residents coming out of UC Davis.

Where to start?

Since I don't have a dedicated stream of research, I am freer to research what interests me, a student, or a resident. Often I have to temper expectations of myself and students as to what can be completed in a reasonable amount of time with

little to no money. "Survey all dog owners in California" vs. "Survey dog owners that visit a large pet store in Yolo County within a two-week time period." "Identify obstacles for access to veterinary care in California" vs. "Survey dog and cat owners utilizing a free veterinary clinic in Sacramento for four weeks in the summer on their utilization of veterinary services." While this makes my research more feasible, it limits the scope and applicability.

Show me the money!

Or not. In order to accomplish research goals, you need funding. Where does the money come from? Often my research is self-funded from discretionary funds or internal grants, meaning, it's done on the cheap. Surveys, limited clinical studies, and retrospective studies are some that can be done with limited funds. More funding is needed to do more elaborate studies. As an example, in order to perform a randomized double-blind placebo-controlled clinical trial of patients, the clients cannot pay for the appointment, as there is a chance that their pet will receive a placebo. Therefore, I would have to "buy out" appointment slots, as funding would have to cover the appointment fee for all enrolled. This doesn't include paying people to screen for enrollment, complete data collection and follow-up, and perform statistical analyses.

Then how do these clinical studies get done in veterinary medicine? Well, often they don't because of the cost. One recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed the estimated median research and development cost per drug successfully brought to market for humans was \$1.1 billion...with a B...when accounting for the costs of failed trials. When they are done, they usually have a relatively small number of participants, narrower scope, or other limitations. Veterinary drug companies must go through the same exact process as for human health products, from initial investigation to Phase 3 trials, with a lower chance of recouping the money.

That isn't saying that studies aren't funded by outside agencies. But you have to ask yourself...who is that outside agency funding the study? Non-profit agencies, such as the American Kennel Club or Morris Animal Foundation, are such sources of funding. While non-profit agencies may have their own motives for funding a study, the findings of the study do not result in profit for the agency.

For-profit companies also fund studies, and therein lies a potential conundrum. Some company-sponsored research will only be published if it has a desired outcome, resulting in publication bias (only publishing positive results and not negative results). Published scientific literature should always state where the funding came from, and then it's up to the reader to determine whether the study is valuable to them. We received a small amount of funding several years ago from a company to undertake a placebo-controlled study. When the results showed the active ingredient did not have any greater effect than placebo, the company asked that the study not be published. However, before the money was granted to us, we had an agreement stating we owned the data and that the study couldn't be held back from publication.

This highlights the importance of having research funded by public agencies, who are currently impartial to what is funded. Otherwise, when human and animal research is more heavily funded by private companies, it will result in a higher likelihood of publication bias.

Raise your hands/paws if you want to be included!

Participant selection needs to be done before enrollment and is important to do this early rather than later. Depending on the targeted subject(s), the study must be approved by one, if not two, regulatory agencies. If the study directly involves animals, it must be submitted to the IACUC (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee) for review. This committee evaluates the three R's of research: replace (do you need animals?); reduce (do you need as many animals?); and refine (how do you provide for proper welfare of the animals?). If the study involves people, including surveys, it must be submitted to an IRB (Institutional Review Board) for human-subject studies. This committee evaluates how the research affects people. Even though the majority of survey-based research is considered low risk, we still must demonstrate how participants are selected and how confidentiality is maintained. If a study were to target a protected population group, such as children or those incarcerated, or if there was an intervention, such as collecting saliva for testing, a higher-level evaluation is needed. Both IACUC and IRB require the researchers to maintain current certification.

Some municipalities or universities have additional requirements. In the state of California, we are not allowed to do research on shelter animals. Sounds good, right? However, this means if I planned a study on animals in a shelter, even if the purpose of the study was to directly benefit them (i.e. environmental enrichment), I would need to go through additional justification to show why I have selected this protected population. Hence, guess which animal population I currently avoid studying.

Skiping past the research... getting it published

Obviously ignoring the huge gap of how to design the study, hire people, perform the research, and do statistical analysis, I'm jumping to how to get the results out. Often, but not always, the research is done with a potential journal in mind. Each journal has its own requirements, from focus, to layout, to reference formatting. If only reference managing software could read my mind, my life would be easier.

Journal selection is important, as there are many journals that are considered "predatory." These journals utilize misleading information, do not perform standard peer-review, and charge a lot of money to publish.^a I received six emails last month from these types of journals asking me to publish, and another email asking me to be an editor of a journal in Urology(!).

Another consideration is to identify the focus of the journal. Will it reach a large number of veterinarians (such as the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* or the *Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association*), or is it more focused on those in academia (such as the *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* or the *Journal of Applied Animal Behaviour*)? Does the journal have a high impact factor such as *Nature*, which is important but not imperative, especially in our field? We also have to consider the cost for submission. While many journals do not charge a fee for publication, the ones to which we routinely submit require \$1,000 or more to have them published. This is in addition to the sizable subscription fees they receive from universities.

Last, but not least, turnaround time from submission to acceptance and publication is important, especially for someone like a resident who needs a research paper accepted before being able to take their board-certifying examination. A researcher submits their paper to a selected journal, the paper goes through a review process, and then it is accepted for publication, if not rejected or withdrawn. I recently submitted a paper for publication; it went through two rounds of reviews, and despite us making all suggested changes, it was rejected. Now we are on to journal #2.

There are some hopeful changes coming about regarding publication. A professor from University of California-Los Angeles filed an antitrust complaint against six academic publishers, accusing them of requiring researchers to only submit to one journal unless rejected, mandating uncompensated peer-review, and preventing researchers from sharing their manuscripts until after publication.^b One major publisher, *Elsevier*, demonstrated a greater profit margin than even Apple or Google.

In summary, there are many things to consider when doing research, aside from actually doing the research, from securing funding, to undergoing mandated reviews, to selecting an appropriate journal. When looking at the research (next article will be on how to objectively evaluate a paper), try to give grace to those in the trenches navigating these obstacles.



Dr. Melissa Bain is a veterinarian and Professor of Clinical Animal Behavior, and is board-certified by both the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and the American College of Animal Welfare. She received a Master's degree in Advanced Clinical Research from the UC Davis School of Medicine in 2007. She is a past president of both the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, and is currently on the board of the American College of Animal Welfare. In 2016 she was selected as the Bustad Companion Animal Veterinarian of the Year, awarded by the American Veterinary Medical Association, and in 2019 she received the Companion Animal Welfare Award from the World Small Animal Veterinary Association.

References

^a <https://predatoryjournals.org/>

^b <https://fingfx.thomsonreuters.com/gfx/legaldocs/lbpglkzeyvq/Uddin%20v%20ELSEVIER%2020240912.pdf> <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/69156717/uddin-v-elsevier-bv/>



Navigating New Family Dynamics: Dogs and Babies

By Jen Shryock, CDBC, and John Visconti, CPDT-KA



THE CALL

You sit down to listen to voicemails. Some messages are about puppies; some are fairly straight-forward training requests for adult dogs. But there is one distress call that creates a pit in your stomach. A mom is in tears because her 6-year-old dog snapped at her 18-month-old child. She and her spouse are scared and considering rehoming, but the dog was their first ‘child’ so there’s a powerful emotional attachment. They desperately want your help. To make matters even more challenging, the caller states that she is six months pregnant.

How would you feel after hearing this message? Comfortable? Anxious? Unconfident? Unfamiliar with children at this age? Able or unable to relate to this family? Able to counsel them in the most empathic way possible while also advocating for the dog?

THE FACTS

There are more than 52,000,000 dogs in the United States alone. Roughly one-third of all homes have a dog as a pet. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), approximately 800,000 dog bites requiring medical attention occur each year. More than 50 percent of all dog bite victims are children (half of those under the age of six). While only 12 percent of adults require medical treatment, 26 percent of all children need to go to the emergency room or see a doctor. The majority of child bites are to the face, neck and head. The most likely place for the attack to occur is in the home of the victim.

According to the CDC, dog bites are a greater health problem for children than measles, mumps and whooping cough combined. They are more common than injuries from bike accidents, playground injuries, mopeds, skateboards or ATVs. Dog bite treatments cost more than a billion dollars each year.

THE OPPORTUNITY

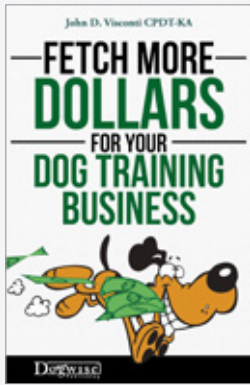
Cases like these can be challenging and take quite a bit to unpack, which is what makes them fertile ground for trainers seeking to expand their businesses by helping people in need in their community. Given the statistics cited above, this training niche offers undeniably fertile ground. While many trainers shy away from these cases, they are typical for Family Paws LLC Licensed Educators (www.familypaws.com). Through education, handouts, online resources, and offering programs to new and expecting families *before* they have a problem, Family Paws LLC has been dedicated to keeping families safe since 2002.

QUESTIONS AND MYTHOLOGY

- “We have been told that bringing our baby’s blanket home for our dog to sniff is important. Is this recommended?”
- Our dog has always slept in the bed with us. Do we need to keep him out of the bedroom?
- How do we introduce our dog(s) to the baby?
- We’ve heard that carrying around a doll baby will help our dog to acclimate to our newborn. Is that true?
- Should we stream videos of babies making noises, including crying, to help our dog acclimate to our baby’s arrival?

THE QUESTIONS FAMILY PAWS LLC ANSWERS FOR TRAINERS

- Why is it better to view the baby coming home as a ‘home coming’ rather than an introduction?
- What are Grumble Zones? What are Growl Zones?
- What are the five different types of supervision?
- When might it be time to rehome a dog?



FETCH MORE DOLLARS FOR YOUR DOG TRAINING BUSINESS

Written by John D Visconti

Published by Dogwise
Publishing, Wematchee,
Washington; Released
February 2015; 120 pages;

Where to purchase: Dogwise, \$19.95; Amazon, \$19.95
paperback, Kindle, \$18.95; Barnes and Noble, \$9.99 ebook.

At last, sales coaching for dog trainers!

Dog trainers generally don't think of themselves as salespeople many in fact recoil at the thought! However, when you define selling as the process of communicating the benefits that your services can provide to owners and their dogs, you realize that you must be an effective salesperson to have a successful business. Author John Visconti takes the mystery and fear out of the selling process in this book which belongs in the toolbox of every professional dog trainer. Meet your own personal sales coach!

Thank Goodness! At long last, an approach that focuses on the people-motivating aspects of the business of pet dog training. It doesn't matter how good you are at training dogs, if you lack sales savvy and people skills for promotion, few dogs will benefit from your experience and expertise. I love this book. I really like the style well written, catchy and always straight to the point.

– Dr. Ian Dunbar, Founder of The Association of Professional Dog Trainers.

In this playful and incredibly enjoyable book, John Visconti shows readers many qualities that they already possess to sell their training services effectively and with heart. No longer will sales be a dirty word and trainers who read and apply the wisdom from this book will relish in their confidence and happily realize their goal of helping more dogs and owners. – Malena DeMartini-Price, author of Treating Separation Anxiety in Dogs

I'm thrilled to finally see this helpful information in print! The profession of dog training will benefit from all dog trainers learning the simple selling techniques John outlines in his book. You don't have to be a car salesman, but you also don't have to give away all your services for free. There is another way and John highlights it in this easy-to-read and understand book. Get it now and help more clients by learning the techniques John teaches! – Robin Bennett, author of All About Dog Daycare - A Blueprint for Success

- What is a 'Success Station'?
- How does supervision/management change as the baby grows older? What are the key developmental stages?
- What are the Four Pillars of dog awareness?

THE GOAL

Through a series of upcoming columns, we'll address the topics noted above as well as others, with the goal of helping trainers to build Dog Aware Generations, a program from Family Paws Parent Education that aims to create families where children and dogs live safely and harmoniously. Spoiler alert: Bringing the baby's blanket home from the hospital for your dog to sniff isn't all it's cracked up to be. In fact, there are many disadvantages to doing so.

See you in the next column!

recognized new and expecting parents' needs for support and education, she began developing resources for families and dog professionals. These passions fueled her creation of Family Paws™ Parent Education, which now offers programs across the United States, Canada, and beyond. By combining her special education experience, passion for supporting new families with her skills as a Certified Dog Behavior Consultant, she was able to create programs that support parents looking to prepare for life with a dog and baby and dogs and toddlers.



Jennifer Shryock is a Certified Dog Behavior Consultant (CDBC) and Licensed Family Dog Mediator as well as the owner of Family Paws® LLC in Cary, North Carolina. In 2000, her family adopted their first German Shepherd rescue dog. That inspired her work with the rescue organization as a counselor and trainer. There, she discovered families with babies or young

children who found their situation overwhelming and were often on the verge of surrendering their cherished dog. Once she



John D. Visconti, CPDT-KA is the owner of Rising Star Dog Training Services, LLC and Rising Star Dog Training, LLC, based in Cary, North Carolina. His first book, "Fetch More Dollars for Your Dog Training Business" was the 2015 winner of the prestigious Dog Writers Association of America Maxwell Award reference book of the year. His most recent book, "Pepper Becoming," recounts his eventful and unlikely journey with an abandoned, unwanted shelter dog. John has written several columns for BARKS from the Guild and Association for Professional Dog Training International's Chronicle of the Dog. He has also served as a chair for the APDT International's business subcommittee and presented several coaching lectures and webinars to dog training schools and force-free organizations.

Solutions for Classroom Challenges

Voices from the Training Community

By Jamie McKay, CPDT-KSA



Ask 10 trainers a question and you'll get 10 different answers! If you would like to contribute a response or a suggestion for a topic to be covered in this series, please email jamiemckay@optonline.net. If you would like to contribute a response or a suggestion for a topic to be covered in this series email jamiemckay@optonline.net

This challenge was suggested by Jamie McKay CPDT KSA:

Do you ever look at a team in your group classes and think to yourself that this is a bad match? I started thinking about it when a student in my husband's agility class told me she had a working spot in an upcoming seminar (not agility), and she felt the presenter was going to say that she and her dog were a mismatched team. Recently, I had a team in my foundation manners class where the dog was a large mixed breed and the owner I can best describe as a frail older gentleman. The dog was not comfortable with other dogs in his personal space, according to the owner. What might you do when a team that you consider a poor fit for each other attends your classes?

Abby Harrison CPDT KA
Welcome to Sit Dog Stay
Houston, Texas

Tough question. Often at that point, the deal was done, and they aren't looking for my opinion. Another issue is then trying to "give me" the dog because they don't trust shelters or rescues and you know/love my dog. That has happened several times to me (thank you but no). I have offered a free class on how and what to look for in a dog. I talked about the owner's lifestyle, the dog's, exercise needs (do not think that getting a dog will be all it takes to for you to start a walking exercise program), costs (vetting, food), grooming and even if you have or desire children in the future. I'm sorry to say I got no takers.

At best, I try to focus on how the dog is struggling in this situation and perhaps it is not the one that brings out what they love about their dog. And, hopefully, that leads to a discussion about what are those "better for the dog" situations. And maybe the handler will be thinking more about this.

Recently, I helped out with the AKC My Dog Can Do That Intro to Agility at a local dog show. A family came by with a one-year-old Springer Spaniel with a leash wrapped around his body. They were trying to make it into a harness because the dog was pulling and wanted to greet all of the dogs he saw. Rather than try agility when the dog was only interested in the other dogs, I switched gears and showed them how to get the dog to walk more nicely with treat drops. This started working and the family thanked me.

I will talk about another case that has the happy ending. An elderly guy called me. We had a conversation about training his new Lab puppy and setting up lessons. He called me later that day in tears to cancel the lessons. He had taken the puppy to the vet who yelled at him as being irresponsible for taking on a puppy at his age. It was "No dog for you!", according to the vet. His adult granddaughter later called me and said the family would step up and help meet the puppy's needs to help it stay with him. It was a win-win. The granddaughter attended all but one class (her mother sat in for continuity of knowledge). She took daily long walks with the puppy after she finished work. We did a lot of training. But this was a family helping someone they loved to keep a perhaps not the best of matches but one he wanted and all were willing to figure out various plan B, C and D.

Elizabeth 'Kizz' Robinson CDBC, CPDT-KA, Family Dog Mediator, PumpkinPups Dog Training
Brooklyn, New York

In a class setting I try to have a private conversation, and I start with questions. In the case you use as an example, I would ask about how walks are going or, if they have reported in class about other places where the dog and person are having trouble, I might ask about those things. Based on that information, I could go on to ask if the person was concerned, if they felt safe. Then we could brainstorm solutions or tools they could use. Are there other family members who can help? Are there situations where we could adjust — say, if it was rainy or slippery out, can the dog get exercise and eliminate in a yard and walks don't happen?

If the goals of the person feel deeply mismatched to the dog, I could address them with curiosity, "Your pup is still quite young. We don't expect them to be reliably trained in real life situations for several months, maybe longer. Do you feel safe getting through this part of their training with the tools we've started implementing?" Oftentimes, opening up the conversation like that will reveal that the person is aware of the mismatch and also wondering if

it's sustainable. At that point we might have a conversation about rehoming, if there aren't other options available to support the mismatched team.

Kristina Carpenter, CPDT-KA
Rock Hill | No Leash Needed
St. Louis, Missouri

When seeing a mismatched team in group class, it can be a delicate conversation, but all we can do is offer to help to the best of our ability. It amazes me sometimes when it really works out with a mismatched set, but other times it really does not. If I'm meeting the team in my group class and feel the need to step in because it feels weird, I'll often offer them either private lessons where I can focus on them a bit more if the clients want to be more part of the training or my day training option so I can jump start the dog before teaching the owner. I also love to remind them that I'm a resource outside of group class if need be. Five minutes on the phone is free for quick pointers, but private lessons can be set up if we need to talk about more day-to-day things or building other skills we may or may not cover in the group class. I often tell all my clients to keep notes for me so I can address issues everyone is having in class or can grab clients at end for more specific things. If it really isn't working out at all, I've had some tough conversations about rehoming, but often if it comes to that the client isn't surprised or may be asking me.

Jamie McKay CPDT KSA

www.McKay9.com

Harrison, New York

Every situation is different and sometimes you have to think out-of-the-box to help clients. My husband is an agility instructor. In his novice level sequencing class, there is a team of a very large energetic Golden Retriever and his senior handler who has limited mobility. I wouldn't say they are a mismatch in life but maybe agility is not the sport for them, yet the handler enjoys the class and the dog does, too. They take obedience classes, but the excitement of agility often has him leaving his handler and looking for toys (especially if he has seen another dog playing with one or one out on a table) and grabbing cones. In between his turns he rests quietly in a crate but out on the floor he's a different dog.

My husband has tried various things (helping them to work distance skills, walking agility....mark and reward after each obstacle, rewarding after a short sequence, higher value treats and using a toy reward). His owner would try something new and even if it helped after a few classes, she would revert back to what she had been previously doing (and was comfortable with) without success. My husband asked if he could run him for one turn. The dog stayed with him and ran well. So he's now running the dog in class every week with the owner on the floor for the end of run party. The owner is happy to see her dog run with my husband, the dog had fun and after his ball is thrown always brings it to his owner. So probably not an ideal solution, but in this case it works and all are happier.

Recently, I had a team in my foundation manners class where the dog was a large mixed breed and the owner I can best describe as a frail older gentleman. The dog was not comfortable with other dogs in his personal space at the dog park, according to the owner, but said the dog loved going there. I have the space to have teams maintain a distance of several feet from each other and use folding barriers when necessary to decrease visual distractions. I was able to keep space between this team and other teams enrolled.

The dog was calm in class and was very comfortable with me. I helped the owner when necessary and sometimes demonstrated the exercise we were working on to him by handling his dog (in his class area). This also gave me a few minutes to talk to him privately. I discussed how that even though the dog enjoyed the dog park area, a bad situation could occur if his dog reacted to another dog coming into his space. I suggested he see if there were any neighbors with a securely fenced yard that he might borrow for a little off-leash exercise or maybe even a fenced tennis court early in the morning when not in use. I suggested he consider hiring a dog walker who could give his dog a brisk walk once a day. I tried to be honest with him about my concerns that he could fall if the dog pulled him. The dog did wear a harness that fit well. I suggested he switch the leash attachment to the front clip.

I had them leave class a few minutes ahead of anyone else so he could take his time going down the stairs. I told him to arrive at class a few minutes before everyone. I have a half hour in between classes so by arriving early he would have a clear passage up the stairs. In many ways, this pairing was not a total mismatch as the dog was very comfortable with the owner and visa-versa, but the size and strength of this dog and a frail senior citizen had me concerned.

Not a mismatch but something funny that often happens in puppy class — owners who have had a beloved dog of a certain breed and that dog led a long and happy life. When the dog passes, some owners decide to get a puppy of the same breed. Currently, I have a Wheaten Terrier puppy in class, whose owners had lost their beloved Wheaten Terrier at age 15. The wife is a wreck!! They have totally forgotten what it's like to have a puppy!!!



Jamie and her husband, Stephen, CPDT-KSA, own McKay9 Dog Training, LLC.

Jamie McKay, CPDT-KSA, gained her early experience at the Humane Society of Westchester teaching safe handling skills to volunteers to enhance the adoptability of shelter dogs. Jamie teaches group classes at Port Chester Obedience Training Club in New York. She is a Canine Good Citizen evaluator and competes in agility and rally obedience.

APDT International offers regional workshop in New York City



Ferdie Yau



Amanda Gagnon

Calling all New York area dog trainers and behaviorists (or those who want to visit the Big Apple, anyway)! APDT International is offering a half-day Regional Workshop Saturday, April 5, in the Upper West Side of New York City. Dog trainers and behaviorists interested in learning how to help their canine clients adjust to an urban environment may want to attend the half-day in-person workshop, with presenters Ferdie Yau, M.A., CPDT-KA, and Amanda Gagnon, CDBC, CCPDT. This workshop will equip dog owners with the knowledge and tools to help their canine companions thrive in the often noisy and bustling city. It will be held from 1:30-5:30 p.m. at The Culture Center, 410 Columbus Ave., New York, N.Y., which is across the street from the American Museum of Natural History/Hayden Planetarium, and just a block from Central Park West.

The workshop will focus on issues involving high arousal and reactivity in an urban environment, including strategies to help dogs comfortably interact with other dogs and people in urban settings, fostering a harmonious and enjoyable city life for both pets and owners. The learning objectives, which may receive CEUs from CCPDT, IAABC and KPA, include:

- **Urban Reactivity Levels Training** - An urban approach to working with hyper-arousal and reactivity.
- **Urban Resilience** - Building resilience to stress in the city for reactive and anxious dogs and incorporating that into your training program.
- **Safety in the City** - Safety management and creating a sense of security for dog-handler teams in an urban environment.
- **The last hour of the session will be demonstrations outdoors, weather permitting.** In the event of inclement weather, those demos will be held indoors.

The cost is \$125, which is limited to no more than 25 people. To register, go to the APDT.com website and click on Education and then Webinars and Courses. Type in NYC Event in the search bar, or click the link: <https://www.pathlms.com/apdt/courses/89391>

APDT International Board discusses 2024 achievements, goals for 2025 and beyond



As 2024 comes to a close, there are still a lot of irons in the fire to prepare for what is to come for 2025. Some of those plans and aspirations were teased out during the APDT International 2024 Alignment Meeting conducted by Zoom on Dec. 11. APDT International Chair Heidi Meinzer and Executive Director Matt Varney outlined the accomplishments over the past year and plans for the future.

It also offered an opportunity for the membership to be introduced to members of the board, since nearly all were in attendance. "I couldn't

be more excited to have all of these new board members who are going to bring fresh ideas and energy and drive to continue moving this organization forward," said Ines McNeil, who will serve as the Board chair for 2025.

Besides Ines, the 2025 board officers will consist of Erica Marshall as vice-chair, Sarah Bond as secretary/treasurer, and Heidi Meinzer as immediate past chair. Newly elected directors joining the officers are Mandy Eakins, Lisa Potts, Christopher Rohland and Kim Sauer. Leaving the board will be Robin Bennett, Sandy Modell, Heather Mishefske and Fanna Easter.

"For those of our board members who are rolling off – Heather, Sandy, Fana and Robin – we can't thank them enough for all of their leadership and guidance and getting this new crew ready and up to speed as we head into 2025," Heidi said.

Matt said volunteerism is the strength upon which APDT International thrives, providing the strongest ambassadors and advocates for the profession and the greatest source of ideas, and then representing the future impact of those decisions. APDT International's standards are

widely recognized in and around the profession by creating alliances with the most forward-thinking organizations and community, but at the same time is not exclusionary, he added.

ADPT International's mission reflects that goal: To serve as the industry leader for dog training and behavior education, community and advocacy. "Our vision is a world where all dogs and the people who love them live their best lives together through innovative and humane training," Matt said.

Having Core Values that align with APDT International's Mission and Vision statement is critical to the organization, Matt explained.

Those values are:

- The special relationship between dogs and humans benefits the individuals involved and all humankind.
- The professions of dog training and behavior consulting hold a fundamental value to society.
- Treat human and dog clients with honesty, care and respect.
- Dog training and behavior modification should always be based on critical thinking, open inquiry, shared knowledge and standards of practice.
- Reward-based training enhances the human-animal bond.

Heidi Meinzer, who has served nearly two years as the chair for APDT International, discussed the strategic priorities going forward. "Our first priority, of course, is always our members,"

Heidi said, "and enhancing member engagement and community building, whether it is an in-person conference or one that's online. We've got a new book club that is starting up, and some regional events that will be coming in 2025." APDT International members have several ways to become engaged with their organization, such as serving on a committee or working group, volunteering at conferences (i.e., Border Collies) and serving as ambassadors for the profession, she pointed out. Those priorities are:

Priority 1: Enhancing Member Engagement and Community Building. Our foremost prior is to strengthen the bond within our community of stakeholders. Focus on implementing initiatives that foster a sense of belonging and active participation among our members and parents. Create dynamic online platforms for knowledge sharing, networking events and collaborative projects. Tailor our programs, resources and events to ensure a diverse, accessible and inclusive environment that supports the professional growth of everyone within our community.

Priority 2: Innovation and Thought Leadership in Dog Training and Behavior. Act as a catalyst for positive change in the field of dog training and behavior. Partner in cutting-edge research, technology, and methodologies. Forge and strengthen strategic partnerships with experts, researchers, and industry leaders to stay at the forefront of advancements. Develop and advance ethical standards and humane practices within the profession. Foster a culture of continuous learning and position our organization as a trailblazer in the evolution of the field.



APDT INTERNATIONAL: ONLINE HYBRID EDUCATION COURSE

Behavioral Neuroscience for Dog Trainers

January 29 - March 5, 2025



8 - 12.5 CEUs

Dr. Marsha Penner,
Ph.D., KPA CTP,
CPDT-KA



Register at APDT International's Learning Platform:
www.pathlms.com/apdt/courses/27484

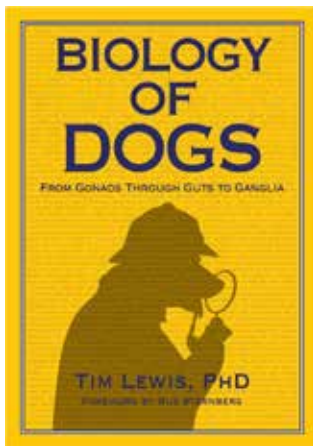
Priority 3: Diversifying Revenue Streams and Financial Sustainability. Prioritize the development of diverse revenue streams in addition to growing revenue from traditional membership fees. Leverage non-dues revenue opportunities through partnership, sponsorships, and enhancing our educational offerings. Leverage digital platforms and developing premium content for a wider audience. Maintain financial sustainability and reinvest in quality education, resources, and community support.

Besides the rebranding of APDT's name and logo to the Association for Professional Dog Trainers International and spiffing up its website, other accomplishments included putting on a Virtual Business Seminar last spring and streamlining the membership categories down to three:

- **Member, \$175:** Open to dog trainers, veterinarians, veterinarian behaviorists, dog behavior consultants, CVTs, assistant trainers, part-time trainers, all of whom will attest to APDT International Standards.
- **Animal Care Partner, \$100:** Trainers working to become compliant with APDT Standards, dog daycare staff, dog groomers, non-certified veterinary staff, pet sitters, dog walkers and other allied professionals.
- **Learning Partner, \$50:** Rescue/shelter staff and volunteers, students and pet owners.

The Board also reconfigured the number of committees and panels. They now include the Independent Ethics Review Panel, Membership, Nomination, Executive and Finance committees and the Education Advisory Panel.

"APDT International will set the course and lay the foundation for a future that we may not be a part of ourselves but are very impactful to the conditions of the trainers of tomorrow and members of tomorrow of the organization," Matt said. "So these things are very important and I think it's something that we want to continually talk about because we are very much an organization of members, for members and by members. And the way this moves forward as an organization is absolutely in the hands of that membership collectively. We depend on it and we're looking forward to encouraging more of it in the coming year. We are all better together and that is something I think is the foundation of membership organizations like this. The message we want to effectively spread around the world is [APDT International] is a bigger opportunity for everyone individually to be part of something larger than themselves that they can influence and that they can benefit from and they can grow from within. And that's something I think is core to our mission and core to our vision and the potential that we hold as an organization. And so we're very excited to see membership grow and excited to see more people join the conversation and expand our partnerships with other organizations. We are very excited to include as many people as possible who want to be a part of it," Matt concluded.



APDT International Offers a Book Club as a Members-Only Benefit

Unleash the power of paws and pages with the Ultimate Dog Trainer's Book Club! Tailored for canine enthusiasts and professional trainers, this book club dives into the best training techniques, behavior insights, and industry trends. It's more than just reading—it's about forging connections, swapping training secrets, and elevating your skills through engaging discussions and expert-led sessions. Join the pack and transform the way you train, one book at a time.

Joining a book club can offer significant professional and personal benefits for dog trainers. Reading and discussing books on dog psychology, animal behavior, and canine cognition can broaden an understanding and refine training approaches. Book clubs also foster a supportive

and collaborative environment where trainers can share experiences, discuss challenges, and learn from each other's insights. This peer-to-peer learning can spark new ideas, improve communication skills, and enhance an ability to connect with clients on a deeper level. Engaging with literature can also reignite a passion for learning and personal growth, keeping trainers intellectually stimulated and motivated to continually improve their skills and provide the best possible care for their canine clients.

Format: Each week there are scheduled chapters to read. Discussion questions will be posted with each week's reading schedule. Participants can post their answers, thoughts, and questions to the group on the discussion board. There is an assigned moderator to keep group discussions on track. At the end there is a scheduled live meet and greet with the author of the selected book. This is the time when participants have the opportunity to ask the author questions and engage in thought provoking conversation.

Our inaugural book, *The Biology of Dogs: From Gonads Through Guts to Ganglia* by **Dr. Tim Lewis**, explores the incredible science behind canine physiology and behavior. To learn more about APDT International membership levels or to become a member today, go to APDT.com and click on the Membership tab.



APDT International: Shaping the Future of Dog Training

Be part of the mission. A global movement committed to humane, science-based, and effective training practices. Together, we can build a more compassionate and informed world for dogs and those who care for them.

Learn more at **apdt.com**





SWAG SHOP HAS SOMETHING FOR ALL WEATHER CONDITIONS!

If you're looking to upgrade your training wardrobe, the APDT International Swag Shop will fill all your needs. From summer Tees to winter vests and jackets, and even a year-round thermal mug that works for all seasons. Top it off with a hat and a backpack that will hold all of your treats and training equipment. **For additional details, check out the Swag Shop at APDT International's website (apdt.com).**



OGIO Ladies' Limit Polo with the new logo (blue, black or gray), XS to 4XL \$42.00



Frenchie conference logo (blue only), XS to 4XL, \$42.00



OGIO Limit Men's Polo with 2024 French conference logo, blacktop, S to 3XL \$54.00



Gildan Heavy Cotton V-neck T-shirt in charcoal, black or heather navy in XS to 3XL, \$29.00



Threadfast Apparel Unisex Triblend short-sleeve T-shirt in black only, XS to 2XL, \$32.00



Bella+Canvas Unisex Jersey short sleeve T-shirt in aqua or oxblood black, XS to 2XL depending on color, \$32.00



American Apparel Fine Jersey Unisex T-shirt with 2024 Frenchie logo in royal blue, asphalt and eggplant. XS to 3XL, \$28.00



American Apparel Fine Jersey Unisex T-shirt with the new APDT International ogo in royal blue, asphalt and eggplant. XS to 3XL, \$28.00



District Women's Featherweight French Terry Long Sleeve Crewneck, rose heather, gardenia, washed coal, XS to 4XL, \$44.00



District Perfect Tri Fleece Crewneck Sweatshirt, heathered coal or navy frost, XS to 4XL, \$54.00.



Fruit of the Loom Adult HD Cotton Long-Sleeve T-shirt, black, chocolate and crimson, S tp 3XL, \$34.00



Bella + Canvas Unisex Sponge Fleece Full-Zip Hooded Sweatshirt, pink, dark grey, military green, XS to 3XL, \$64.00.



Bella + Canvas Unisex Sponge Fleece Full-Zip Hooded Sweatshirt in 2024 Frenchie conference logo, XS, S, XL to 3XL in pink; XS to LG, 2XL in black; \$64.00.



Fruit of the Loom Adult SofSpun Hooded Sweatshirt, black or forest green, S tp 3XL, \$49.00



Threadfast Apparel Unisex Ultimate Fleece pullover Hooded Sweatshirt, charcoal heather, royal blue or black, XS to 4XL, \$54.00



CORE365 Ladies' Prevail Packable Puffer Vest, carbon, black or navy, XS to 3XL, \$75.00



Sport-Tek Women's Sport-Wick Fleece Full-Zip Jacket, black, iron grey or navy, XS to 4XL, \$69.00



Champion Adult Packable Anorak Quarter-Zip Jacket
Champion Adult Packable Anorak Quarter-Zip Jacket, black, gold, navy or white, S to 3XL, \$69.00



Adidas 3-Stripes Full-Zip Jacket, grey or black, S to 4XL, \$109.00



Big Accessories reflective Accent Safety Cap, \$29



Flexfit Unipanel Cap, olive or dark grey, \$32.00



Port Authority Ideal Twill Convention Tote, \$24.00



OGIO Bullion Pack, black and silver, \$89.00



Doggie Skins – USA -Made Doggie Bandana in white, \$28.00



Prime Line 20oz Sovereign Insulated Tumbler with 2024 Frenchie conference logo, royal or red, \$16.00





January is Train Your Dog Month

Use this opportunity to get your message out about the importance of dog training

It's that most wonderful time of the year – and I'm not referring to the holiday season, but APDT International's annual Train Your Dog Month, which celebrates dogs and stresses the importance of canine training among pet professionals as well as families with four-legged members during the month of January. APDT International is challenging our members and partners to share the value of training dogs on social media outlets. Be sure to include our tag (#TYDM2025) along with your postings on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok and YouTube. Education is our core mission, and Train Your Dog Month is our version of a public service announcement and enables more canine professionals to better service their clientele and help more pets and people live better, happier lives together.

Please visit www.TrainYourDogMonth.com to see the free resources for pet lovers, like tips on kids and pets interacting; considerations for multi-pet homes; understanding training methods and busting dominance myths; plus how to find the right trainer for you and your pet's needs. Many thanks to our members who helped create these insightful references. Those resources on our website may be found at apdt.com/petowners. Encourage shelters and other animal organizations to also promote TYDM. Dogs with just the basic training are less likely to be turned into shelters, and with a little knowledge, their owners can find out what they are doing to cause reactive behaviors in their animals.

More information about TYDM will be out soon, and if you need new duds to spiff up your selfies or guest appearances on television, check out our Swag Shop on our website, or turn to pages 44-45 for a few of our items featuring our new APDT International logo.

So with apologies to composers Edward Pola and George Wyle and singer Andy Williams:

*It's that most wonderful time of the year,
With the dog trainers training
And everyone telling you that January is near,
It's the most wonderful time of the year.*

*It's the busiest Train Your Dog month for all,
With social media greetings and all those Zoom meetings,
When clients come to call.*

*It's the busiest Train Your Dog month for all!
There'll be puppy classes for hosting,
Facebook entries for posting,
And Instagram selfies in the snow.
There'll be many good stories,
About the tales of the glories of LIMA for all to bestow!*

*There will be much lure-based training
And pups will be glowing as sniffing walks endear.
It's the most wonderful time of the year,
As revising your Locate A Trainer draws near!*



GIFTING YOUR PET SITTER THIS HOLIDAY SEASON?

PSI's recent survey data reveals professional pet sitters and dog walkers' preferences surrounding holiday gifts.

By Meghann Evans, Pet Sitters International



Should you give your pet sitter or dog walker a gift for the holidays—and if so, what? Pet Sitters International (PSI) kicked off the holiday season by answering this question, based on results from its 2024 Pet-Sitter Holiday Survey. PSI, the world's largest educational association for professional pet sitters and dog walkers, recently surveyed more than 450 member businesses, gathering data on holiday topics like last-minute bookings, holiday surcharges, and gifts.

“Professional pet sitters and dog walkers don’t seek gifts or special recognition from their clients, but for pet parents looking to show service providers that they care, holiday gifts can be a meaningful way to demonstrate their appreciation,” said PSI President Beth Stultz-Hairston. “While pet parents may know the specific likes and preferences of their pet sitter, our survey data also provides helpful insight for those unsure of what to give.”

Common gifts for pet sitters

The majority of survey respondents (82 percent) said their clients typically leave them holiday gifts. Common types of gifts these pet sitters said they have received included:

- Special cash tip (92 percent)
- Gift cards or gift certificates (81 percent)
- Chocolates or candies—store bought (72 percent)
- Home-baked goods (60 percent)
- Household items—e.g., candles, pillows, picture frames, etc. (48 percent)
- Wine/liquor (41 percent)

Pet-sitter gift preferences

When asked which types of gifts they prefer to receive:

- 47 percent of pet sitters said they have no preference.
- 48 percent indicated special cash tip.
- 23 percent gift cards or gift certificates.
- An assortment of other gift ideas received responses of anywhere from 2-to-8 percent.
- Only 4 percent of pet sitters said they would prefer clients not leave them gifts.

“The holidays are incredibly busy for pet sitters, so it is always a treat when a client leaves a gift of appreciation,” said PSI’s 2024 Pet Sitter of the Year Bobbi Wilson, owner of Peace Love Paws Pet Sitters, LLC, in Columbia, Missouri. “Examples of gifts that have been left for us are baked goods, gift cards and personalized gift items. While each gift makes us smile, they are not expected!”

Professional pet sitters like giving holiday gifts as well, according to the survey. Most respondents (73 percent) said they typically leave holiday gifts for their clients and/or their pets—48 percent for certain clients and 25 percent for all clients. The most common holiday gift these pet sitters reported they had left for clients was dog or pet treats (76 percent). Pet sitters (66 percent) also reported sending holiday cards to some or all of their clients.

For other data from PSI’s 2024 Pet-Sitter Holiday Survey, including booking deadlines and common holiday surcharges, view PSI’s first release of holiday survey data. To search for a professional pet sitter in your area and to download PSI’s free Pet-Sitter Interview Checklist, visit www.petsit.com/locate.

*Founded in 1994 by Patti J. Moran, author of *Pet Sitting for Profit*, Pet Sitters International (PSI) is the world’s largest educational association for professional pet sitters, with member pet-sitting businesses in the United States, Canada and more than 15 other countries. PSI members have access to the widest array of business services and educational resources available in the professional pet-sitting industry. PSI’s Pet Sitter Locator is the largest online directory of professional pet sitters, and pet owners can visit petsit.com/locate to find local professional pet sitters. pet sitters, and pet owners can visit petsit.com/locate to find local professional pet sitters. For more information about PSI, visit www.petsit.com.*



2-year program at Ohio's Hocking College offers associate's degree in Canine Assisted Services

By Cynthia Conner, Director of Canine Board, Grooming and Training, Hocking College

Editor's Note: As the Association for Professional Dog Training International expands its reach to beyond dog training, there are many opportunities for those interested in working with dogs in other animal-related careers. In the article below, Cynthia Conner, the director of Canine Board, Grooming and Training at Hocking College, in Nelsonville, Ohio, will explain the 2-year associate's degree program called Canine Assisted Services.



the 2-year college. Dr. Young, who loves dogs and had shown and groomed dogs in her early years, and I built the program on the areas that we feel all pet professionals should be familiar with to keep our canines happy and healthy. We combined my 30 years' experience in grooming, veterinary medicine, and training, as well as nutrition, breeding, handling, rescue, etc., to build a program. I worked with

Hocking College, in Nelsonville, Ohio, began in 1968 as a vocational school to give students a hands-on learning experience. Hocking President Betty Young, who holds a doctorate degree in higher education, as well as a law degree from Capital University Law School in Columbus, Ohio, suggested creating the Canine Assisted Services Program at

◀ Kirsten Brotherwood, another of Cynthia Conner's students who also passed her Sporting Group Certification, groomed Roni. The NDGAA holds private testing events at Hocking twice a year.

veterinarians, other experienced dog trainers through the Council of Professional Dog Trainers (CPDT-KA) and the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC), positive reinforcement/science-based trainers, veterinary technicians and certified master groomers through the National Dog Groomers Association of America (NDGAA) to focus on the "whole dog" in the curriculum.

The degree focuses on preventative health and vaccines as recommended by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and Companion Animal Parasite Council, and positive reinforcement training as recommended by the Certification Council of Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT) and compliant with Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) training methods, and grooming to the standards of NDGAA. I do this also, so when it becomes law (sooner than later, hopefully) all groomers and trainers need to be certified, my students will be already there. It is also in the best interest of our canine companions.

The program includes more than 300 hours of hands on-training towards certification with the NDGAA and the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CPDT-KA). We also have a small training, grooming and boarding business where the students get paid internships, learning additional hands-on training and business skills.

In addition to our associate degree program, we offer short-term certificates in Professional Canine Training and Professional Pet Grooming. The certificates can be taken in addition to the associate degree or on their own. All students learn in a hands-on, in-person environment with their dogs in classes and with the animals in our new grooming, training and boarding facilities, all under the guidance of professional and certified groomers and trainers as instructors.

They learn how to train and team with dogs in scent, therapy, service and assistance work, so they are prepared to combine animals into a career such as teaching, social work, or many other professions. This is a great place to learn the canine side of these professions and about consent and welfare of the animals.

Hocking College offers all-inclusive pricing and works with students to ensure they have complete funding and opportunities for their NDGAA and CPDT-KA certifications. By the time they graduate, they have acquired a collection of books and tools to help them succeed in the career of their choosing. Emergency and First Aid certifications are also



Hailey Richards grooms Bert at a National Dog Grooming Association of America private testing event at Hocking College in November. Hailey passed her Non-Sporting Grooming Certification after getting her Sporting Group Certification.



Cynthia Conner with her three dogs, Bert, left, Roni and Scruffy, right, who are often groomed by students at Hocking College. The dogs all go to training and grooming classes and do their part in the students' learning

part of the program and they recertify for this every two years. We focus on our limits as pet professionals, and when to refer to specialists, such as veterinarians for lumps, bumps, infections, behavior, etc., that we do not diagnose. The students learn when not to train or groom and to always put the animal first. We practice humane and fear-free training, boarding and grooming. We do not do Fear-Free certifications, but work on that basis. I am also working on finding a way to work in professional training memberships in their course fees, as I want them to get all of the benefits those memberships provide.

The curriculum with brief descriptions, consists of:

Animal Grooming & Styling I – Basic Maintenance Grooming.

Animal Anatomy & Physiology

Professional Canine Trainer I – Body Language, all the training techniques, terms, timing etc.

Professional Canine Trainer II – Canine Good Citizen (CGC) skills

Pathway to Prosperity – Professional development

Applied Math

Boarding & Canine Emergency Care – Husbandry, enrichment, common emergencies, first aid and CPR.

Canine & Feline Nutrition and Genetics – Nutrition standards for all ages of dogs and cats. Genetics/breeding and the importance of genetic testing and breed standards for full breed dogs.

Canine Scent Work & Search and Rescue Techniques

Dog Handler Training & Customer Service – Our students teach a class open to the public.

Professional Canine Behavior Modification – Counter-conditioning and Desensitization, thresholds, Fears vs. Phobias.

English Composition I

AAT for Diverse Populations & Settings – Intro to Therapy side and Healthcare Associated Infections (HAI).

Inclusive Leisure Services – How to train different tasks for canines in therapy teams with medical professionals

Professional Canine Assisted Therapy – Visitation skills and standards.

Canine Sports & Agility Training

Natural Resources Practicum – Work in the attached business for other canine professions and interns

General Psychology

Assistance & Service Dog Trainer I – Ethics/Laws and standards for as well as task training.

Assistance & Service Dog Trainer II – Continuation of above

Professional Dog Training Mod II – Resource guarding, aggression, etc., and when to refer to a veterinary behaviorist, and how to work towards becoming certified as a dog behavior consultant

Animal Assisted Therapy Assessment – Capstone

Introduction to Entrepreneurship – How to start your own business, creating business plans, etc.

Speech

Pathway to Prosperity II – Professional development and job interviews, final resumes, retirement plans, etc.

If they choose to have a grooming career also they can take *Artistic Grooming in Animal Grooming & Styling II* and *Animal Grooming & Styling III*, where we focus on breed standards and NDGAA certification standards.

Cynthia Conner, CPDT-KA, CG, LVT, VTNS, Pet First Aid Instructor, AKC -CGC Evaluator Canine Program and Facility Manager, is Hocking College's Canine Program and Facility Manager. She is a Licensed Veterinary Technician with more than 30 years' experience in Veterinary Medicine, Grooming, and Training. She is a member of the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America, the Association for Professional Dog Training International, certified with the National Dog Groomers Association of America and the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CPDT-KA). She is also an AKC Canine Good Citizen (CGC) Evaluator. She may be reached at Hocking College through her email, connerc31052@hocking.edu.

The ASPCA Recovery & Rehabilitation Center

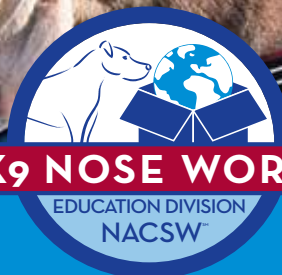
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Thanks for joining us at the 2024 APDT Conference

APDT members get a 10% discount using promo code APDTPRO10



THANKS FOR JOINING US AT THE 2024 APDT CONFERENCE!

Thank you to everyone who stopped by our booth at APDT 2024 in Riverside, California this year. Our authors were delighted to sign your books and discuss dog behavior and training with you. We always love to talk with you to discuss books and help you grow your library! Check out the titles below to see which books were best-sellers at this year's conference! Remember that APDT members get a 10% discount using promo code **APDTPRO10** during checkout at www.Dogwise.com



Order online at dogwise.com or call 800-776-2665.

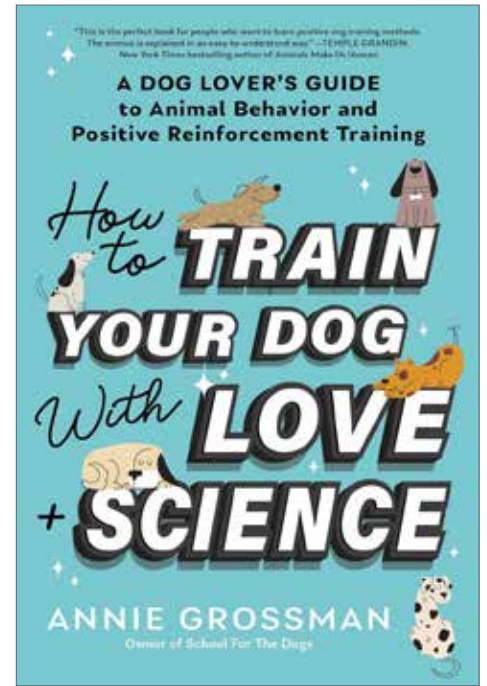
Editor's Review

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DOG WITH LOVE + SCIENCE

A DOG LOVER'S GUIDE TO ANIMAL BEHAVIOR AND POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TRAINING

Written by Annie Grossman, CPDT-KA, KPA CTP

Published by Sourcebooks, P. O. Box 4410, Naperville, Illinois; Released September 2024; 352 pages; Where to purchase: Dogwise, \$17.99 paperback; Amazon, \$16.19 paperback, Kindle, \$7.99; Audio CD \$40.55; Audiobook 99 cents; Barnes and Noble, \$17.99 paperback, \$9.99 ebook; Target, \$15.97 paperback and Walmart, \$16.19 paperback.



If there is ever a need to convince a dog parent (or trainer) that there is no need to “dominate” a dog, then just hand them Annie Grossman’s book: *How to Train Your Dog with Love + Science: A Dog Lover’s Guide to Animal Behavior and Positive Reinforcement Training*. Annie, a journalist who has been writing for years about dogs for publications such as the *New York Times* and *Boston Globe*, put her knowledge to use when she opened The School for Dogs in Manhattan’s East Village in 2011. She also hosts the *How to Train Your Dog with Love + Science* Podcast. And along the way, she earned her CPDT-KA and KPA CTP certifications.

The 352-page book is broken down into four sections with subheads and includes an extensive products, books, notes and index:

- **Part One: How We’ve Been Getting It Wrong**
 - o People are Weird with Dogs
 - o Let’s Stop Whispering
 - o Dog Training Science Deniers
- **Part Two: The Better Way**
 - o What We Have in Common
 - o Learning by Association: This Equals That
 - o Fear and Counterconditioning
 - o Come and Drop It
 - o If This, Then That: Learning by Consequence
 - o Negative Reinforcement: Not an Oxymoron
 - o Punishment
 - o Positive Reinforcement: Feel the Love
 - o Getting Rid of Behaviors Without Using Punishment
- **Part Three: Do Try This At Home**
 - o Dog Language, Part One: Give Me Space
 - o Dog Language, Part Two: Happy Bodies
 - o The Training Triad: Good Management, Good Rewards and Good Timing
 - o Capturing Good
 - o Good Cueing
 - o Good Chaining, Generalizing and Shaping
- **Part Four: Good Going Forward**
 - o The Least We Can Do
 - o The Future of Good Dog Training

Just reading the section titles gives a pretty good insight into the depth Annie outlines in her book. So let’s jump ahead to the one about the Future of Good Dog Training, especially since there is so much noise on social media these days about positive reinforcement vs. “balanced” dog training methods. Annie admits there are challenges in offsetting positive reinforcement methods that do not provide instantaneous solutions that clients crave and some dog trainers promise. Yet training a dog with positive reinforcement is easier than other alternatives, she notes, because it’s easier than dealing with the inadvertent fallout from using more aversive methods. “We don’t have to be better people to be good dog trainers, but good dog training will make us better people,” she explains. Annie believes technology will likely drive the future of dog training. She prefaces her remarks by recalling how the renowned behaviorist B.F. Skinner watched his daughter’s fourth grade class during a math class and noting the different levels of interest. The students had no idea if they got the problem correct and were certainly not rewarded for it. So he invented his “teaching machine” described as a cross between a typewriter and a Rolodex, that rewarded a child for getting a correct answer immediately before moving on to the next harder problem. Parents were aghast at that concept back in the 1950s and ‘60s. But now it is a teaching tool I’ve seen myself in the classroom as an occasional substitute teacher. Operant conditioning training as developed by Dr. Sophia Yin, a veterinarian and applied animal behaviorist, resulted in the Treat & Train device (with Sharper Image developers, no less) that rewards dogs for not barking. The Treat & Train has a direct link to B.F. Skinner by way of Bob Bailey, who taught chicken training to Dr. Yin and to Karen Pryor of clicker training fame, who consulted with Dr. Yin on the project.

Technology has made it easier for trainers to remotely reach clients in the comfort of their own homes so their dogs can learn in the environment in which the behavior manifests. Should trainers be concerned about losing their jobs to technology? Most likely they will benefit from the ability to create training plans for people who will use apps or training machines to achieve their goals. “The more time I spend thinking about our relationship with dogs, the more I see the fluidity of who is controlling whom, and how control can be graceful and good,” Annie says toward the end of the book, adding she commissioned an artist to make a mosaic that includes a picture of her beloved dog Amos, next to her favorite Skinner quote: “What is love except another name for the use of positive reinforcement? Or vice versa.” And that says it all. — The editor



THE KID YOUR DOG DIDN'T ASK FOR!

FOSTERING HARMONY BETWEEN YOUR CHILD AND THE DOG YOU LOVED FIRST

Written by Nicole Skeehan, CPDT-KA

Self-published by Nicole Larocco-Skeehan, Philly Unleashed, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Released May 14, 2024; 102 pages; Where to purchase: Dogwise, \$9.95; Amazon, \$14.99 paperback, Kindle, \$9.99.

When my niece told me in October she is expecting her first child, her joy was tempered by worry on how her two dogs would adjust to a baby in the household. She had Harlow, an older Labrador/Beagle/Coonhound/Aussie mix, and a younger Airedale/herding dog mix named Auggie, who has protective tendencies. She has valid concerns, and serendipitously, I had an answer for her on the pile of books to review. Nicole Skeehan's second book: "The Kid Your Dog Didn't Ask For: Fostering Harmony Between Your Child and the Dog You Loved First."

Nicole, a Certified Professional Dog Trainer – Knowledge Assessed, owns and operates Philly Unleashed, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She wrote her first book more than six years ago, “The Teaching Dog: Partnering with Dogs for Instruction, Socialization and Demonstration in Your Training Practice.” The idea for her second book came after six years of counseling new parents whose dogs were understandably stressed by that bundle of joy that made weird noises, pooped in its pants, or turned into that “terrible twos” toddler stage. And for some parents, their concern about the reaction from their dog were for naught, as the dog accepted the new family addition.

For her new book, Nicole broke the 102 pages down into nine chapters on how expectant or new parents can prepare their fur

babies to the new addition, or bringing a new dog into a family with young children. They are:

- The Baby Isn't Here Yet
- Bonus Preparations
- Your Baby Arrived!
- Post-Potato Babyhood
- Toddler Hell
- Children Ages 3 to 6
- Choosing the Right Dog for Your Family
- “Let's Play vs “Stay Away”
- When Disaster Strikes

“My goal with this book is to make this incredibly emotional process as easy as possible for you. I'm going to mythbust some of the things that dog trainers who have not gone through this have told you to do. And I'm going to give you real-life advice on what works and what doesn't. And how to get your entire family through this massively crazy time with as little effort as possible,” Nicole writes in the introduction. She also points out the counseling she did before having her own son was very different than the advice she gave to new or expecting parents after having her own child.

In the first chapter, Nicole outlines what expectant parents can do to teach their dog before the baby arrives, such as get/stay of the furniture, settle while humans sit, extinguishing demand behaviors (visions of Golden Retrievers' needy paw pats on baby's tender head); go to place and stay; stay in a room without the owner or stay in a crate, known as the Zen room; loose leashing walking with a stroller, and hands-free interspecies communication. Nicole explains “the why” and “the how” for each skill. For example, the hands-free interspecies communication teaches your dog to sit or stay without hand signals in the event you are holding the baby. For expectant parents, using a swaddled baby doll can help them practice getting their pup to do what they are told without finger pointing or hand waving.

For the Bonus Preparation chapter, she suggests playing the sounds a baby would make, or noisy baby apparatus (a pox on whoever gives you that horrible Fisher-Price Corn Popper push toy that has balls in a bubble that makes popping sounds). My own mother-in-law gave my toddler son a small-scale fire engine with a SIREN and PULSING lights that terrified my cats and sent my sensitive Golden Retriever Carmel into hiding. Her mother, Brandy, however, wasn't bothered a bit by the noise since her desire to be near Cameron superseded her own self-preservation. So get that baby walker or swing and let your dog get used to the sound, Nicole suggests.

What makes the book so relatable are the stories Nicole tells of her own situation with her baby, Dean. Concerned her dogs wildly barking anytime someone rang or knocked on the door would disturb her sleeping baby, she left a very stern note on the door NOT TO RING THE DOORBELL OR KNOCK. And of course, while Dean was napping, a delivery person did ring the doorbell, and the dogs responded with crazy barking. To Nicole's surprise, Dean slept through the commotion, probably because he heard the dogs barking so much in utero, she surmised. Seems plausible to me.



Nicole warns a new parents' anxiety about bringing baby home will transfer to the dog. That anxiety – whether it be on how the dog will react or just anxiety that exists by having a baby – will manifest in the dog. So rather than being shocked that sweet Daisy who loves people and children might show signs of stress over the new family dynamics, Nicole explains being prepared for possible stress will do wonders in dealing with it. In my own household, Brandy accepted Cameron immediately. After all, that noisy thing that threw Cheerios all over the floor wasn't a bad thing, right? Yet her daughter Carmel, who joined the family after Cameron was well into his "terrible twos" stage, was fine with Cameron, but not his toys (i.e., aforementioned Corn Popper and fire engine). Same breed and even mostly the same genetics, yet different responses.

Nicole also explains the science of your dog's stress, which makes for a deeper understanding of your pet, which is a good thing. If the dog suddenly seems to be acting possessive of his things, it could be resource guarding, or signs of stress. And if that includes being a bit possessive of Mom or even the baby, then it might be time for a certified trainer to help decode the dog's behavior.

So jumping ahead to probably the most vital chapter of the book, helping your dog survive those "toddler tornado" years, Nicole stresses parents need to be the guardian angles of their pets, protecting them from grasping hands and wet mouths. It's also a good idea, she writes, to teach the dog it's OK to vacate the premises until that thing with the wobbly walk goes down for a nap or is contained.

As children age, their idea of playing, such as wrestling, may not be enjoyed by your dog, so take a walk to wear out both the child and the dog. It's an easy solution to allow the child to be with the dog while not mauling it with affection.

When it comes to adding a new pup into the home, Nicole can't stress enough that picking the right dog is vital to the success of expanding the family. She goes through all of the important points in picking that puppy, whether as a rescue or from a breeder. Pay attention and don't pick the most boisterous pup or the shyest one.

Her top breeds for families include Newfoundland, Labrador/Golden Retrievers, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel for those who want a smaller dog, and for those interested in a non-shedding breed, a Standard Poodle (but not one of any of the doodle mixes). Her final chapter delves into what happens when despite everything, disaster still strikes: your sweet fur baby just snapped or bit your human baby. All is not lost, Nicole says, when that happens. Sometimes it's the warning necessary to keep better track of the child and supervise their time together, especially during the "toddler tornado" years. Using the Dr. Ian Dunbar bite scale, Nicole says the Level 1 bite isn't a big deal other than letting a parent know to better protect the dog. The same for a Level 2 bite, which may pinch the skin, but no puncture wounds. A Level 3 bite, however, where there are one to four puncture wounds, it's time to get a certified trainer involved. With a Level 4 bite, where the dog made puncture wounds, held on and shook his head for a few seconds, Nicole says run, not walk, to the nearest certified training or animal behaviorist. And keep the dog and child separated.

Beyond that, for the Level 5 and 6 bites, where the dog has exhibited more than one Level 4 bites, well, at that point, Nicole admits the answers won't be found in her more light-hearted book. A growl or nip to warn the child to back off is doable. But one that warns with such severity will likely continue to do so. At that point, hard decisions must be made whether the new parents can handle the situation and keep both the dog and child safe. There are options, Nicole says, but the best option is having anticipated and prepared to keep the worst-case scenario from happening. And by reading her book, new, expectant and those already with children are able to do what is necessary to ensure a smooth transition when adding baby or puppy into the family. This is the perfect book for trainers to offer when they counsel their own nervous expectant or new parents. — The editor



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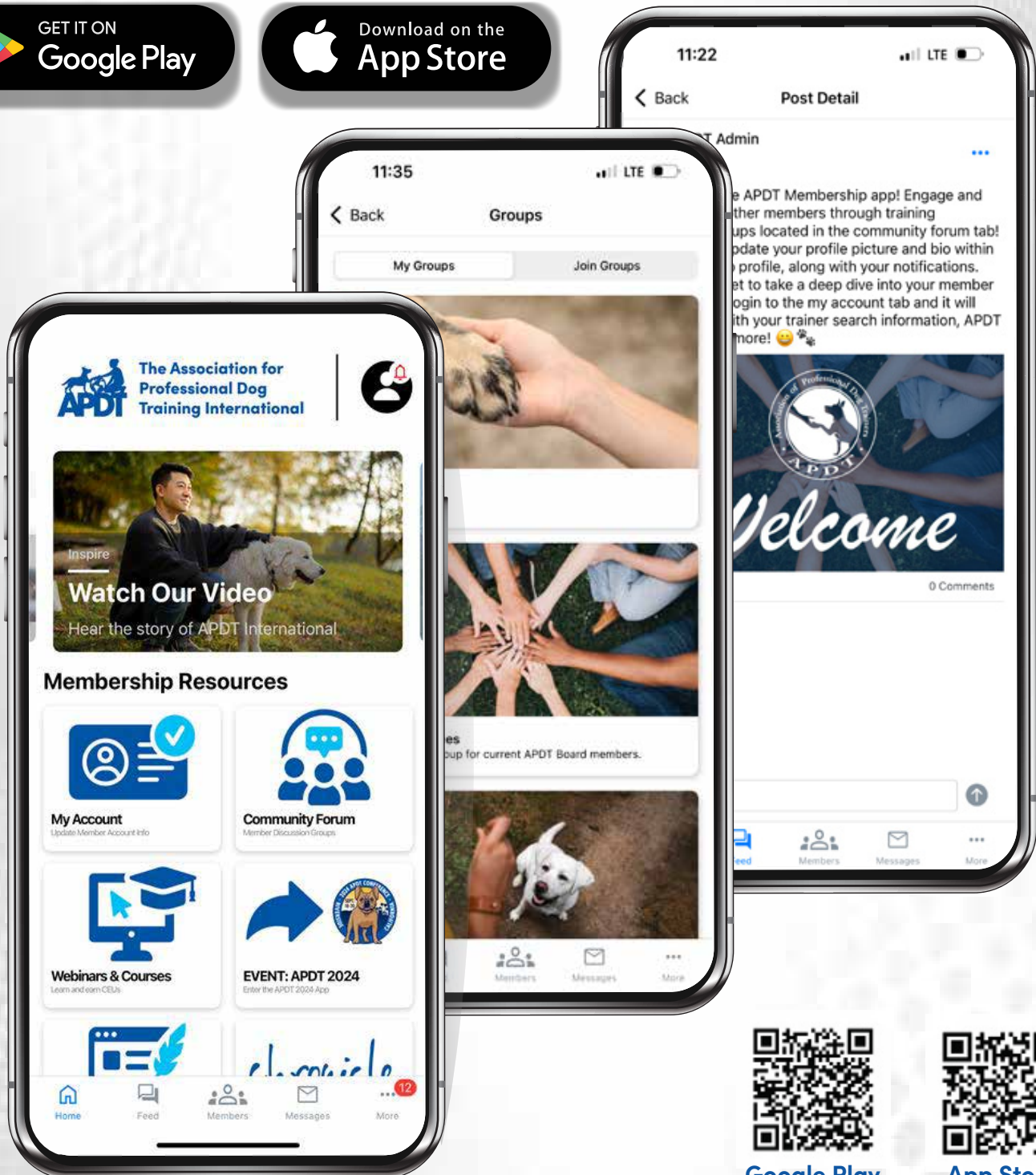
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