



My Philosophy

As a dog trainer with over 40 years of experience, many credentials and as a Dog Behavior Consultant, I am dedicated to raising the standards of dog training by using scientific, evidence-based training. I do not rely on second hand information from decades past. I heartily subscribe to continuing education. Here is what I stand for as a trainer:

Regarding Dominance Theory

I strongly warn against the acceptance and use of dominance theory when working with behavior and training of animals.

Many people, including some professionals, believe that to have a well-behaved animal is to establish themselves as a “pack leader” or as dominant to whichever species of animal they’re training and living with. According to dominance theory, behavior problems are explained as the animal “trying to be in control.” The way they address these failures of behavior is to “regain the balance of power” in the relationship. Unfortunately, this mindset often leads to the use of punishment, which temporarily suppresses behavior instead of changing it. In addition, punishment-based training damages the relationship between human and animal.

Dominance is not a natural order of power between us and our pets, nor is it a healthy or scientifically supported way to approach training and behavior consulting. An animal does not have to be dominant or submissive to learn—animals learn from what reinforces or what does not reinforce their behavior.

I teach leadership. Examples of leaders are teachers, coaches, a jungle guide, pastors, military leaders etc. A good leader isn’t a bully; they have the best interests of the group at heart. Since animals are nonverbal, they can only assess our leadership by how we portray ourselves. I teach how to be and how to demonstrate to your dog that you are a fair and relevant leader. We have invited dogs into our human jungle. If an animal doesn’t feel safe with good leadership, it may think it needs to protect itself by making independent decisions and you will probably not like the decisions it makes. However, if an animal feels safe, it will look to a relevant leader for direction and this is where we guide their behavior and develop a deep bond of trust.

When faced with unwanted behaviors we must create an environment set up for success; where good choices are safe and easy for the animal to make. All behavior plans, including those for animals assessed with “dominance aggression,” should focus on an operational understanding of the function of the behavior, and how that function can be served by a different behavior, emotional response or environmental arrangement. The behavior should always be assessed based on its antecedents and consequence, and not on an anthropomorphic interpretation of intent.

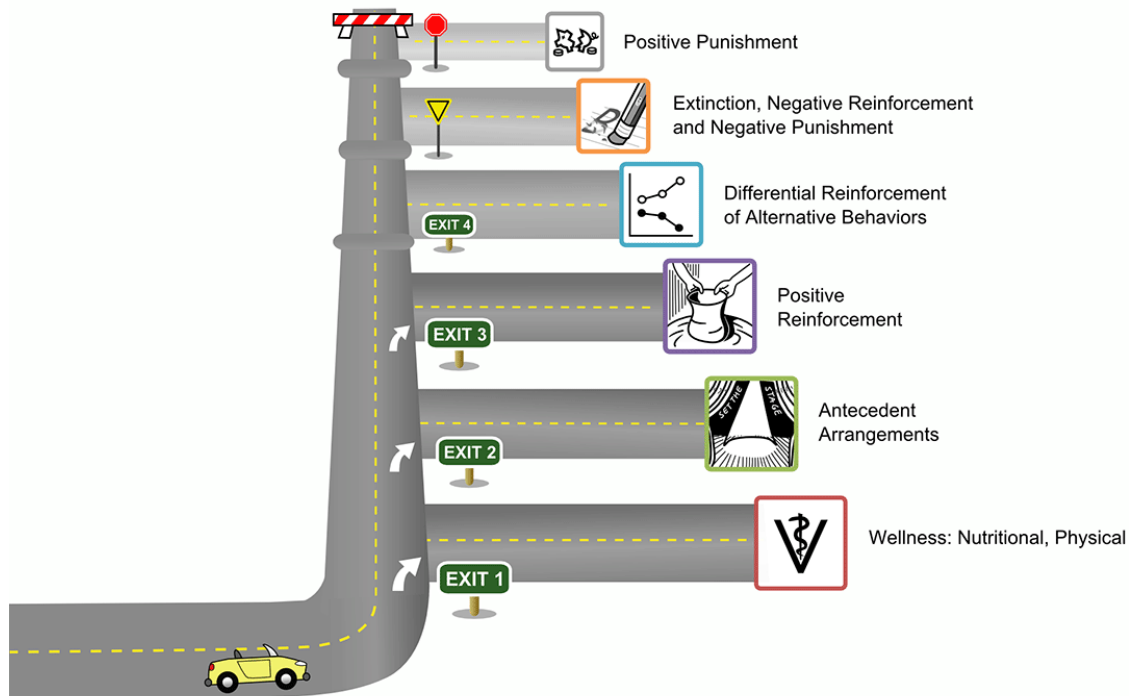
Behavior consultants and trainers should focus on teaching clients how they can avoid reinforcing problem behaviors and showing them how to be a consistent, caring teachers. To work effectively and ethically, an animal trainer or behavior consultant must have a proper understanding of the natural world, each species’ natural behaviors, and what is significant to the individual animal in our care. Misunderstood dominance theory and the punitive, harmful approaches it is used to justify has no place in modern, evidence-based training and behavior work.

Regarding how objectional behaviors are resolved

I believe in using “LIMA”. LIMA describes a trainer or behavior consultant who uses the least intrusive, minimally aversive strategy including humane and effective tactics likely to succeed in achieving a training or behavior change objective. LIMA adherence also requires consultants to be adequately educated and skilled. In the vast majority of cases, desired behavior change can be affected by focusing on the animal's environment, physical well-being, and operant and classical interventions such as differential reinforcement of an alternative behavior, desensitization, and counter-conditioning. The measure of each stimulus is whether the learner’s target behavior is strengthening or weakening, not the trainer/consultant’s intent or preference.

I seek to prevent the abuses and potential repercussions of inappropriate, poorly applied, and inhumane uses of punishment and of overly-restrictive management and confinement strategies. The potential effects of punishment-based training can include physical harm, aggression or counter-aggression, suppressed behavior that present later as increased anxiety, fear and outbursts, a negative association with the owner or handler, increased unwanted behavior and new, unwanted behaviors. Overly restrictive management also prevents your dog from being an active learner and participant. Here is a chart of how I approach behavior modification:

Hierarchy of Behavior-Change Procedures
Most Positive, Least Intrusive Effective Intervention



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Regarding discriminating against specific breeds of dogs.

Research shows that humans (including professional dog handlers, shelter workers and veterinarians) are poor at determining a dog's breed based on appearance. Further, there are genetic variations within every breed precluding determining what characteristics an individual dog may display. Many dogs are mixed breeds so judging a) what breed a dog is and b) judging how that those breed tendencies may display themselves within a dog comprised of several breeds, is beyond what anyone can predict. Therefore, the only factual information we have is that any dog can become dangerous as a result of inadequate socialization, inappropriate training, poor living conditions, poor breeding, and other factors having nothing to do with their specific breed. With the right environment, training, and care, dogs of all breeds can become equally well-adjusted family members and working partners. All dogs, like all humans need education, by an appropriately certified, positive reinforcement-based professional trainers.

I gratefully acknowledge International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants for much of the basis of my positions. I hope that my statement continues to change over time, becoming more progressive as my skills are constantly refined through continuing education -Vicki