

TIPS FOR TRAINING

Change can be difficult

Not too long ago the common belief was dogs were to be subservient, and whatever training practices used to accomplish this goal were justified. To make a dog subservient required that you be proficient at applying training techniques of force. To the unskilled practitioner these techniques appeared to work, the dogs would usually submit to what you wanted, but at what cost? Often, these dogs were stressed and suffered from anxiety, especially when complying with a demand from the trainer. Dogs that experienced this forceful style of training would often shut and chose not to offer any behavior in fear of making a mistake.

Learning a new way

Years ago, I too used aversive techniques. Not because I didn't love dogs, I wanted what was best for the dog and believed that making a dog subservient during training was the most effective way. It wasn't until I became frustrated with the results that I began to question everything I had learned and practiced thus far, especially this theory that you must be dominant over your dog. Thankfully, my transition became a reality due to the abundance of scientifically sound research that had been done by so many scientists in and around the field of dog behavior. Their work helped me to realize the errors in my ways and be able to help dogs and their owners in the most humane and effective ways.

Science knows

Surprisingly enough old theories still exist today especially with the popularity of TV personalities who base their knowledge on anecdotal experience. That theory believes that dogs are to be compliant and that we must be dominant to be the leader of our dogs. The belief that you need to be dominant can lead to the justification that aversive techniques are needed in order to be able to control the dog. Thanks to science we know that dogs are complex creatures. We also know that aversive training has negative consequences. Some may claim that a shock collar or pinch collar makes a dog obedient, but an obedient dog can be a stressed dog, a dog who is afraid to offer any behavior because of negative consequences. These consequences can also lead to irreversible physical damage to the eyes, neck and larynx of dogs, caused by the use of pinch collars and choke chains.

Old theories die hard

With all the information known about dogs today the question begs why do old theories still exist? One of those reasons may have to do with the fact that change is hard and that it can be difficult to admit what you are doing is wrong, especially when it appears to be making the dog obedient. For others, sadly, there may be some unconscious pleasure in having control over another being. Other factors have to do with our society and being accustomed to quick fixes and not wanting to invest the time in learning something new. Dominance or intimidation in dog training may have the appearance of success but in reality it is only suppressing behavior. True success is measured by understanding what the underlying motivation for the behavior is and changing it.