

Association of pet Dog Trainers New Zealand Inc

Newsletter

Issue 6 – Oct/Nov/Dec 2010

President's Message

Dear Member,

How true is the saying that time flies when you are having fun (or busy!) Here we are, nearly Christmas and the APDTNZ already in existence for over a year!

Your committee is meeting up in November to draw up a plan and vision for the next few years which will be reported on in the upcoming newsletter.

Courtesy of our friends at the APDT USA we can use articles that have previously appeared in 'The Chronicle of the Dog', this month it is Reinforcing Fear: Why the Debate by Pia Silvani. A must read!

If you are looking for some good books to take away on holiday, why not check out the APDTNZ library?

Happy Holidays,

Susie Londer,
APDTNZ President.

The summer has kicked off with a hiss and a roar and what fantastic weather we have had so far. Of course at this time of year there is stress everywhere, regardless of whether you are human or canine. Research shows that more people suffer stress based problems than at any other time, and unfortunately some dogs bear the brunt of it. Peak time for rescue organisations is Christmas and there are more dogs out and about on the street, leading to more dog attacks.

So as an organisation what can we actually do that is going to make an impact, and what can we do as positive trainers? The first recommendation is for people to use positive methods as much as possible to lower the stress levels of both the owner and the dog. The 'popularity' of the dominance theory is not helping to lower anyone's stress levels. Keeping calm works wonders!

We are here to educate dog owners that something can be done to help them with their dogs so they will not misbehave for the rest of their lives. Those of you involved in puppy education have to help and guide the new owner/s on what to expect from their puppy. Having a puppy can be really daunting for some, especially if the pup is challenging. We hear stories constantly of puppies being handed in because they were too hard to handle – it is more just the fact that they are being puppies and do what puppies do.

Our job is to provide dog owners with knowledge so that they can have realistic expectations about their canine friends.

Simon Goodall

Guest Editor

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Mark this date in your diary now!

APDTNZ Annual Conference

Queen's Birthday Weekend

Saturday 4th – Sunday 5th June 2011

Brentwood Hotel

Wellington

Learning Theory Article 6

Respondent Learning

For those of us involved in changing behavior, it is crucial to understand respondent and operant learning. These are the two models used to describe how a behavior is learned. Although they are manifested differently, they are still learned the same way – through experience! Let's start with respondent learning and we'll do operant learning in the next article.

Respondent Learning

Respondent learning is also referred to as Pavlovian or classical learning. You'll also often hear it called "conditioning" instead of "learning." Any of these terms are correct and mean the same thing.

Respondent learning is "the procedure of pairing a neutral stimulus (typically referred to as the CS) with a US." (Chance, *Learning & Behavior*, 5th ed., pg 453.) "CS" is an acronym for conditioned stimulus and "US" is an acronym for unconditioned stimulus.

So, what does all that mean? Simply put, it means that an animal has created an association between two events: a song popular during your "coming of age" summer plays on the radio and your eyes fill with tears; the electric can opener runs and the cat begins salivating; you hear a police siren and your heart beat increases. So, one event predicts another event and elicits a response over which the animal has little or no control – thus the term "respondent."

Respondent learning affects reflexes – pupil dilation, heart rate, perspiration, panting, etc. Again, we are responding to a stimulus and we don't have control over the response. We generally think of respondent behaviors as having an emotional basis; we think about using respondent learning when we are dealing with emotional behaviors such as fear, anxiety and aggression.

The difference between respondent and operant learning is in the contingency. The contingency for respondent learning can be stated as: When "a" happens, "b" follows. The contingency for operant learning can be stated as: If I do "a," then "b" will likely follow.

Other Factors Affecting Respondent Learning

Pairing the CS & the US

There have been a lot of studies done on the most efficient way to create that respondent association. There are four ways they can be paired:

Trace: where the CS comes before the US

Delayed: where the CS comes first, but the US overlaps it

Simultaneous: where the CS and the US come at the same time

Backward: where the US comes before the CS

It's been discovered that simultaneous and backward pairing are quite ineffective. Trace and delayed are both effective; however, the effectiveness is dependent on a variety of variables.

For animal training purposes, we generally use trace pairing and the rule of thumb is to allow as little time as possible to elapse between the CS and the US. It is probably best to aim for no more than ½ second of elapsed time.

Overshadowing

"Failure of a stimulus that is part of a compound stimulus to become a CS. The stimulus is said to be overshadowed by the stimulus that does become a CS." (Chance, *Learning & Behavior*, 5th ed., pg 453.)

If there is more than one stimulus presented at the same time, the animal will make the association with the more salient stimulus. Probably the classic example is the owner who teaches his dog to sit thinking he's teaching a hand signal, but in reality he's leaning over from the waist down and the dog recognizes the lean, and not the hand signal. The owner has overshadowed the hand signal with a more salient signal – the movement of his entire torso.

Blocking

"Failure of a stimulus to become a CS when it is part of a compound stimulus that includes an effective CS. The effective CS is said to block the formation of a new CS." (Chance, *Learning & Behavior*, 5th ed., pg 448.)

If an animal has already learned an association between two events, and the stimulus is then paired with another stimulus that the animal has not learned, the new stimulus is unlikely to become meaningful to the animal because the conditioned stimulus he already knows is the predicting stimulus. So, if you've conditioned your dog to the clicker and the clicker predicts food, if you rang a bell at the same time that you clicked the clicker, your dog would be unlikely to associate the bell with the food, because the clicker already predicts the food and he has no reason to learn the bell.

Prior Experience with CS & US

Finally, there's the matter of prior experience with the CS. If an animal has had a history with a CS, but the CS did not predict anything, then it will take longer to create an association between the CS and a US. For example, if you ran around the house clicking your clicker, but never paired it with food, your dog would learn that the clicker doesn't predict anything meaningful to him. So then, when you decide to pair the clicker (CS) with food (US), it's going to take longer for your dog to create that association than if he had never heard the clicker before.

There are many more respondent learning concepts, but these are the concepts that will most often affect your training. We'll deal with other concepts in later articles.

Practical Application

In real life, as with so many things, operant and respondent learning are very difficult to separate – as Bob Bailey says, “Pavlov is always sitting on your shoulder.” What he means by this is, even though you are using operant methods to train a behavior, you are really using both operant *and* respondent methods, and vice versa.

When you teach a dog that when you say “sit” and he puts his rear on the floor he gets a treat you are teaching an operant behavior – the contingency is “if I put my rear on the floor, I'm likely to get a treat.” However, you are also creating an association between the word “sit” and treats. So, whenever you use operant learning, you're getting “respondent bang for your buck.” (I don't know where I first heard this

phrase, but I've been using it for quite some time. If I didn't come up with it on my own, I suspect it came from Jean Donaldson, as it sounds like something she would say.)

Let's look at a sample case and see how we might use respondent learning to change a dog's behavior.

Scenario – Dog Growls at Big Hats

Let's say you have a dog that growls at people wearing big hats. Although we're making an assumption, this is a common enough occurrence that it's probably safe to say that big hats frighten the dog. Although growling is an operant behavior, it is usually an emotionally-based behavior. Because we can't readily measure the dog's reflexes, we use the growling to assess his level of comfort.

We know the dog is scared of hats, and we know that this is an emotional reaction; therefore, we know that this behavior is a good candidate for respondent learning. The thing to remember when starting a respondent learning program is the *contingency* – “a” predicts “b.” Therefore, when the dog sees a big hat, good things happen. In this case, good things are going to be yummy treats.

This is a pretty easy set-up for training. We get a helper who will wear a big hat and appear on cue. The trainer and the dog can remain in one location and the helper will come in and out of the picture. Every time the hat appears, the dog gets treats.

Because we are using the respondent contingency, the dog's behavior is irrelevant. He can growl, bark, roll over, or anything else – *it doesn't matter!* What matters is that when big hats appear, the dog gets yummy treats.

Over time, as the dog learns that big hats are followed by yummy treats, he's going to change the way he thinks about big hats. Big hats are no longer scary – they now are a predictor of good things and he is happy when he sees a big hat!

Counterconditioning & Systematic Desensitization

Counterconditioning is “the use of Pavlovian conditioning to reverse the unwanted effects of prior

conditioning.” (Chance, Learning & Behavior, 5th ed., pg 449.)

Systematic desensitization is “combining relaxation with a hierarchy, of fear-producing stimuli, arranged from the least to the most frightening.” (University of Southern Florida Behavior Analysis Glossary <http://www.coedu.usf.edu/abaglossary/glossarymain.asp?AID=5&ID=3101>)

What we’ve described in our case study is also called “counterconditioning.” We are re-conditioning (or countering) the dog’s emotional association with hats.

Counterconditioning is the broad category for changing prior conditioning. Within counterconditioning are other, more specific techniques. The one we will use most often is “systematic desensitization.”

Although systematic desensitization is primarily used with humans and requires teaching humans relaxation techniques, the dog training world has co-opted the term and as much of the technique as possible for use in counterconditioning emotionally-based behaviors. Although we haven’t yet figured out how to teach animals relaxation techniques, when using systematic desensitization, we do our best to keep the dog sub-threshold. This means that he is kept far enough away from the unpleasant stimulus to be comfortable and relaxed.

If you go back and read the above scenario, you’ll see that there’s no discussion about the dog’s proximity to the hat. In counterconditioning, that is not necessarily a consideration. However, you will usually get faster results if you incorporate systematic desensitization into your program. Following are three good reasons for using systematic desensitization.

As a rule, using systematic desensitization will speed up the learning process. Because the animal is sub-threshold, he is able to pay more attention to surrounding events and stimuli and thus make a quicker association.

With some behaviors such as resource guarding and handling, it is safer to use a hierarchy. By starting with an object that the dog does not guard or moving your hand toward him but not touching him, you “teach him the game” before moving to more difficult objectives. If the hierarchy is arranged properly, the dog should

always be sub-threshold, and therefore comfortable with your proximity.

Finally, using systematic desensitization allows the trainer to measure the progress more easily. By beginning at a comfort level, you are able to define the dog’s baseline behavior. This is the behavior you will be looking for throughout the program that indicates you can move to the next level in the hierarchy. If you start with the dog over-threshold, it may be quite some time before you are able to see any progress. Although this does not mean that learning is not taking place, it can be discouraging for the trainer.

Be aware that systematic desensitization simply makes the process faster and easier; it is not absolutely necessary for counterconditioning. The scenario that comes to my mind is large, leash-reactive dogs living in Manhattan. They have to go out onto the street, and it is very difficult to manage that environment – there are dogs everywhere! In a situation such as this, it may not always be possible to use systematic desensitization, so simple counter-conditioning may be the answer. It may take longer, but it can still get the job done.

Although this article did not cover all respondent learning concepts, these are the concepts most useful when changing emotionally-based behaviors. Other respondent concepts will be covered in future articles. In the next article we’ll discuss operant learning.

Susan Smith’s business, Raising Canine (www.raisingcanine.com), provides remote education opportunities for animal behavior consultants, as well as business and marketing products to help their businesses, including an intensive course for beginning dog trainers. Sue is the co-author of the book “Positive Gun Dogs: Clicker Training for Sporting Breeds.” Sue is certified through CCPDT, IAABC and the San Francisco SPCA. She is an ex-Board member for the CCPDT, an active, professional member of the APDT, former Chair of the APDT Member Relations & Communications Committee, moderates the APDT list discussion group and was named APDT Member of the Year in 2004.

APDT NZ Mission statement:

To promote human-dog relationships of understanding and trust by offering education in canine behaviour and effective, up to date, dog friendly training methods and skills.

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To Crate or Not to Crate

Karin Larsen Bridge / Get S.M.A.R.T dogs

A dog 'crate' is a container designed to safely confine dogs on a short term basis. Once used only for competitions, travel, or convalescence, the crate has increasingly found it's way into the average pet home. Introduced correctly and used appropriately it can perform many valuable functions including preventing early mistakes in housetraining and destructive chewing. Used inappropriately or to excess it can become a very poor substitute for training and the development of a real relationship with your dog.

A crate IS:

A suitable substitute for the traditional dog bed or basket with the added advantage of having a door (usually open but with the option of closing as required).

Suitable for short term confinement (with the door shut) in order to achieve a specific purpose e.g. prevent house soiling for a brief period if you cannot supervise.

A tool useful to assist in the teaching of proper housetraining, good chew habits and a certain degree of self control or ability to 'settle'.

A crate is NOT:

- A punishment.
- A storage system for dogs
- A suitable long term confinement area
- A substitute for teaching your dog house etiquette

Advantages of Crate Training

Many people baulk at the idea of having a crate in their home. Depending on the size of their dog, a crate is a little more noticeable than other types of dog beds. However a crate has one great option that other dog beds and kennels do not – it has a door – giving you the option of short term, safe confinement when and if necessary. Getting your dog use to and comfortable in

a crate may prove valuable throughout your dog's life in a variety of ways:

A crate can provide confinement without isolation. There is no need to lock your dog in the bathroom or laundry for a little time out, far better to place the crate in a busy family area to expose your puppy to family sights and sounds.

For puppies, the crate can be moved to a bedroom at night allowing you to provide comfort, companionship and supervision while restricting free range. It also allows you to maintain toileting protocols taking the puppy outside if necessary.

A crate can provide a time out and/or safety zone for your dog for a variety of reasons such as – when visitors first arrive, escape from small children, safety from another visiting dog or at any time when you may not be able to supervise.

A crate allows you to limit puppy destructiveness by providing and promoting the development of appropriate chew toy habits e.g. developing a desire and focus on stuffed kongs or bones.

A dog that is crate trained is likely to feel less stress when confinement is necessary at other times e.g. at the vets, a boarding kennel, or to travel by plane or train

A crate is an ideal 'home away from home' when travelling, staying with friends etc. who may not appreciate a free range pet.

A crate is ideal for periods of convalescence after injury or illness.

Introducing a Crate

Step 1

Set up the crate in a well socialized part of the home with the door open. Place some appealing soft bedding into the crate and rotate a variety of chew toys, treats and smelly items of clothing such as your socks into the crate as well. Limit the number of interesting items available outside the crate. The dog should come to associate the crate with good things and comfort. Don't be in a hurry to close the door. Ideally, your dog will be seeking out the crate to have a rest even before you ever attempt to close the door. Feed the dog in the

crate multiple times throughout the course of the day. Provide long lasting chew toys in the crate. Have water in the crate (there are water bowls that attach to the side of a crate as in a bird cage to prevent spillage). Sometimes, put food in the crate and lock your dog out for a brief period, when you open the door he should be keen to rush in and access the 'prize'.

Step 2.

Toss a treat into the crate with an exaggerated arm move – eventually this will become your signal to enter the crate. Repeat until your dog is moving in happily. At this point you may wish to add a word as well such as 'In you go' at the same time as your arm gesture. Next, repeat arm gesture but withhold treat until after your dog is in the crate and has turned around then reward again – in the crate.

Step 3

When your dog is happily obliging entering the crate, shut the door for just a few seconds and treat through the door. Open door and release. Next step is to keep the door shut just a little longer. If the dog is quiet praise, toss a few treats inside then release *before* he begins to whine or bark.

Step 4

VARY the duration of the confinement starting with just a few seconds and building slowly to about 15 – 30 minutes. When first asking for longer periods, set yourself up for success by playing with your dog or going for a walk beforehand and/or throw in a very desirable chew toy as well – so your dog should be happy to comply. Note VARY means just that – don't always make it harder – sometimes confine for shorter periods so your dog never knows how long to expect. Next, take the crate to different rooms in the house to make sure your dog is comfortable in the crate in different areas.

Be careful never to: -

- release your dog from the crate while he is barking or whining – wait until there is a quiet moment then praise and release. If your dog is barking or whining a lot you have probably rushed the introduction and need to go back to shorter periods of confinement. Build only on

success – when you have a quiet, contented dog in the crate – release.

- give your crate 'emotional baggage' by using it as a punishment tool. e.g." Bad dog! Into the crate you go!" While it is ok to give your puppy a little time out in the crate if he's sending you crazy – don't add any negative emotions to it – simply place him in the crate with a small chew toy in a pleasant way, shut the door and give yourself a chance to relax.

Using a crate to Houstrain your dog.

Crates are probably most often recommended as a way to train or retrain a house soiling problem. The crate 'supervises' your puppy when you cannot working on the theory (true in most but not all cases) that a dog does not like to soil it's own bed. Every hour on the hour take your puppy outside to pee. If it does praise and reward with a food treat. Bring the puppy inside and let it play free for a half hour or so then put it back in the crate before repeating the cycle again. If the puppy does not pee when taken outside, it gets no free play but is popped immediately back into the crate for about 10 minutes when you try again. By confining the puppy at this early stage, you are ensuring your dog will earn the right to have much greater access to the home as he matures.

Precautions when using a crate.

- As with any training tool certain precautions are necessary:
- Do not crate a puppy wearing a collar or head halter.
- Crates should be placed in well socialized parts of the house where you are able to supervise your puppies behaviour and stress level.
- Place crates in areas free of drafts and/or excessive heat or cold
- Never use your crate as punishment.
- Never allow children to tease or play with a puppy or dog confined in a crate.
- A puppy or dog should never be confined for a period longer then its next expected toilet break.
- Water should be provided if a dog is likely to be crated for longer periods.
- Crate confinement of 12 hours a day or more should not be a way of life for a companion

animal. Severe behavioural problems can develop due to excessive confinement.

- Crates are not a substitute for unresolved behavioural problems which require behaviour modification and training.

Conclusion

There are definite advantages to training your dog to accept short term confinement in a crate which can be both a useful 'settle spot' and safety zone in the home and a transportable 'home away from home' when travelling. The important thing to remember is that, as with any tool it should be used with thought and care to *enhance* not replace a strong relationship with your dog.

Types of Crates

There are more types of crates available today than ever before.

Airline Crate – a plastic box mostly enclosed with a wire screen door. Best for travel.

Metal Crate- strong, well ventilated, easy to clean. Great for teaching crate training due to its strength. Disadvantage: ungainly to move around, heavy, and less attractive than some of the canvas options.

Canvas Crates

Can be zipped up for very light portable use or with aluminium frames – assembled quickly, easy to transport and carry. Good ventilation/view. Attractive. Disadvantage: if dogs are not use to being crated they can be easily destroyed.

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APDT NZ Vision statement:

All dogs are effectively trained through dog-friendly techniques and therefore are lifelong companions in a relationship based on mutual respect and trust.

Reinforcing Fear: Why the Debate?

Pia Silvani, CPDT-KA

Editor Terry Long, CPDT-KA

This article first appeared in The Chronicle of the Dog in May/June 2009

Long ago, I sat at seminars hearing the same comments repeated over and over. "Do not give your fearful dog attention or you will reinforce his fear." "Do not tell a fearful dog 'it's okay' since you are giving him praise or permission to be fearful." "Never pick up a fearful puppy or small dog since you are reinforcing his fear." "Do not pet a dog that is fearful since you are rewarding his fear and he will become more fearful."

I must admit I did believe that if you pet your dog during a fearful period, he would become more fearful. This is what "they" told me. Never wanting to close the door to anything new, I decided to listen, use some critical thinking, and sit back and decipher how I felt about it—while also researching the topic and talking to the experts.

What is Fear?

Before deciding if fear can be reinforced, what actually is fear? Is it a behavior or an emotion? According to Dr. Patricia McConnell, fear is a basic emotion that all living beings deal with. "Fear is a system that helps to keep us safe; it is genetic. Our ancestors had it, or we wouldn't be here. It is complicated, primitive and all over the place." (McConnell, 2006) When asked if fear is really that basic, she chuckled and said "No, if it only were!" Fear is only one kind of emotion, and emotions are the result of brain chemicals, learned associations, and genetics. "Emotions are messy" according to John Ratey (2001).

Fear is complex since there is an interplay of emotions and physiological responses (Reid, 2000). In order to thoroughly study fear in animals, we need to identify the triggers that cause the animal to react. However, "fear in animals is inferred by observing the behavior of the animal in response to a potentially harmless stimulus and assessing related physiological response." (Wright, et al 2005), (King, et al 2003), (Salzen, 1989), (Gray 1987)

Animals' brains have a larger amygdala and a smaller cerebral cortex than humans. Since the amygdala modulates emotion, and the cortex governs rational thought, we can assume that animals feel emotions on a much more intense scale than we do. They are also not able to process rational thought in the same way that we do. It follows then that rational thought, which is suppressed in humans by the neurochemicals that are released during fearful episodes, are completely shut off in animals. (Lindsay, 2000)

Is fear a necessary emotion? In the wild, fear is an adaptive behavior and serves to help animals survive. Most living beings are hard-wired to respond to dangers in order to survive and/or avoid injury. The expression of fear is linked to emotions and is not always under our control. The key words are "emotions" and "not under our control."

Rational Thought vs. Emotional States

When we say that an emotion (e.g., fear) can be reinforced, we are confusing two completely different types of learning: classical and operant conditioning. As you know as a trainer seeking to elicit behaviors, operant conditioning is about obtaining a behavior and following it with a consequence. Operant conditioning focuses on an interactive reward-punishment structure with a particular goal or outcome. The dog does not necessarily need to be relaxed or alter its behavior. For example, if you are attempting to get your dog to target an object by using shaping through successive approximation, you are going to reward the dog for the appropriate behavior by using a marker, followed by a reward. If the dog is not performing the appropriate behavior, there is no reward. You are not focusing on the emotional state of the dog. The dog can be aroused (sometimes a good thing) or frustrated (not uncommon for crossover dogs). Further, you are not focused on changing the emotional state of the dog. You are simply focusing on teaching a behavior.

Emotional responses are more easily influenced through classical conditioning. This is because cognitive abilities are impeded by neurochemicals that ready the body for fight or flight during times of high emotion. To react to something that is a danger (i.e., the scary event) your heart rate has to increase so that you have

enough blood to your brain while your legs are running! This is achieved by those neurochemicals. While this is going on, you are in pure reaction mode, incapable of a more rational thought.

Is Behavior Operant or Classical?

The word "behavior" seems to confuse many trainers. The key to remember is that behaviors can be learned through conditioning (operant), association (reflexive, i.e., salivation, elimination), or emotions (classical, i.e., fear, arousal, excitement). When trainers discuss behavior, they immediately think of operant and focus on consequences. While this is partially true, reflexive behaviors fall under the category of classical, not operant, and have nothing to do with reinforcement from an operant standpoint. Bob Bailey reduces complicated academic definitions of behavior to "anything the animal does" and that would include both behaviors resulting from classical conditioning or operant conditioning. Thus, it bears remembering that "behavior" isn't only what we as trainers purposefully train. Classical conditioning produces behaviors as well. However, the difference in behaviors produced by operant and classical is critical to understand. How are they learned?

There are times when unwanted behaviors, such as aggression and avoidance, just to name two, are symptoms of an underlying emotional state, such as fear. These emotions are influenced by classical conditioning: The dog has learned to make an association that triggers a fearful reaction and that fearful response causes the dog to behave by hiding behind the owner or lunging and growling, both very clear behaviors. Unless the dog has grown up isolated from the world, you can do quite a bit to help a dog get over its fears and, thus, change behavior. When we attempt to change or alter behaviors that are classically conditioned, we attempt to reduce negative emotional behaviors and replace them with positive emotional behaviors. We want to improve the dog's emotional state and change the fear response. (Wright, et al 2005)

So, let us take a closer look at the debate by looking at ways to help dogs overcome their fears. Counterconditioning is one of the most popular ways to help animals change their emotional and behavioral

responses. There are two types of counterconditioning that we use: classical counterconditioning and operant counterconditioning.

Classical Counterconditioning – A feared stimulus is presented to the dog and linked with something pleasant. The goal is to replace the anxiety or distress response with that of being calmer. When we look at classical counterconditioning, we are not concerned about what the animal is “doing” at the time. The objective is to change the emotion, not the behavior. For example, a dog might be fearful of another dog, resulting in growling, barking, panting and more. If the neutral dog is presented at a comfortable distance from the dog enough times (typically used with desensitization), the dog’s fear should begin to switch. The dog has made a new association over the old one. The neutral dog is no longer a threat. Instead, it produces something good. If the dog expects something good at the sight of the other dog, the emotional state should switch. As a result, the growling, barking, and panting should begin to subside. I recently used petting as a means of changing the emotional state of a dog since play and food was not motivating enough for the dog—touch was.

Operant Counterconditioning – Our focus is to condition a behavior that is incompatible with the undesirable behavior. Basically, what you are doing is providing reinforcement for a different behavior and not providing reinforcement for the old behavior (Tarpay and Bourne 1982). The dog is taught to engage in an entirely different behavior than it did in the past.

With both types of counterconditioning, it is critical to keep the dog under threshold at all times to avoid setbacks. Basically, I tell clients to “train”-- don’t “test.” It is important to differentiate between classical and operant counterconditioning when dealing with behavioral changes. Emotions drive behavior. If we can change the emotional state of the animal first, behavioral changes should be easy.

Laboratory examples of counterconditioning involve mostly food. Yet, others may use activities such as play to successfully treat anxiety, fear, and anger. (Spiegler and Guevremont 1993). Dr. Daniel Tortora (1998) argues that play should be used as often as possible

over food when treating distress or anxiety since play is more emotionally incompatible with fear than eating.

Dr. Pamela Reid has used play with her own dog that exhibited extreme fear when going through an automated car wash. She found that after several repetitions of playing with her dog, the dog’s fearful reaction decreased greatly. He did not become *more* fearful as a result of her playing with him. However, when she gave the dog his favorite treats, it had *no discernible impact* on his fear. The dog still exhibited anxiety and shivered. (Wright, et al 2005) Note that neither food nor toys, i.e., reinforcement, made his fear *worse!*

Play obviously would not be the treatment choice for dogs if they do not play with their humans. Many of you may argue, and rightfully so, that the dog enjoys play but is so fearful it cannot play. However, we can have the same argument about food. If a dog will not play and will not eat in the presence of the fear-provoking stimulus, we have no starting point. This is the time when I recommend seeking the help of a veterinary behaviorist since it is obvious that the fear is extreme, if not bordering on phobic.

Beliefs vs. Logic

There is reluctance in using classical counterconditioning when dealing with emotional behaviors since many feel that the undesirable behavior will be reinforced and that soothing the dog will reward timid or fearful behavior. However, studies reveal that it is difficult to operantly condition anxiety-related behaviors (Aloff, 2001, Miller, 2001, Price 2001).

Logic also tells us that it is difficult to punish or reinforce involuntary or reflexive behaviors. Let us look at a few other examples:

If your dog is afraid of loud noises, such as thunder, and you decided to give him a scratch behind the ear and a little hug should he run to you in a panic, you are *not* rewarding his fear. If *your* behavior calms the dog down, then the dog obviously did not become more fearful. You helped change his emotional state. If the dog is phobic

and an ear scratch or hug does not help, then what you did really does not make a difference. The dog remains the same emotionally—not worse, not better.

If your dog is fearful in a particular situation and suddenly freezes, and you give the dog a massage or attempt to sooth him by using a calm tone of voice, perhaps by saying “it’s okay,” and the dog begins to relax, you will *not* increase his level of fear nor will the dog become more stiff or frozen the next time he is in the same situation. It will not increase the frequency of freezing. This is what reinforcement does, correct? Reinforcement increases behaviors. Instead, the dog may be put in the same situation again and look to you for guidance. Your calm tone relaxes the dog. This is more powerful than any reinforcement given since you are changing the emotional state. Classical will win over operant.

My Golden Retriever, Chester, was extremely thunder phobic. He paced, drooled, panted, hid, quivered and trembled, sweat from his footpads and, at times, expressed his anal sacs when we heard very loud cracks of lightening (all reflexive behaviors). He would jump up on my bed. I told him to get off; he would snuggle up to me. I told him to go lay down; he hid in the closet. I let him be. I didn’t want to “reinforce” his fear by interacting with him.

During one storm, he was absolutely beside himself and started to chew on his paws. Enough was enough. As tears rolled down my cheek, I felt that I did my poor dog a disservice by making him suffer as long as he did. I went with my gut and invited him up onto the bed, gave him a deep muscle massage and as the pounding of his heart slowed down, the drooling stopped and his eyes closed, I gave him a hug, kiss, and told him how sorry I was. I bought him a new bed, put it in the closet and filled it up with his toys. As the years went on his fears subsided. He would lie next to my bed and actually sleep during a storm.

Respecting Animal Emotions

In conclusion, it is time we start to look at our pets as living beings with emotions. They need empathy, care and touch, especially when fearful. I do not believe the earth is flat because this is what the experts have proven through various studies. There might be some

of you that still debate that, which is fine. Studies have been done on this topic as well, with good evidence that you cannot “reinforce fear.” But, if you feel the earth is flat or want to believe you can make a dog more fearful by petting it, I suggest you give it a try before you stomp your feet and tell me I’m nuts. A little bit of love and affection should make *you* feel better!

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APDT NZ Vision statement:

All dogs are effectively trained through dog-friendly techniques and therefore are lifelong companions in a relationship based on mutual respect and trust.

Building Bridges

Peta Clarke

Being a professional animal trainer is somewhat of an odd profession and never ceases to raise an eyebrow when mentioned at social gatherings. Starting with a boxer over 10 years ago I have now had the opportunity to work with many different animals from chickens to seals. The world of exotic animal training can be both vastly different and very similar to training a pet dog. Some things never change. Whether you have a dog, seal or bird in front of you, training is all about identifying the reinforcer – what the animal will work to gain - and using it to strengthen desired behaviour. Training is training. However, unlike our beautiful dogs, the animals I work with don't particularly like humans - at least at first.

The best part about dogs, I'm sure you will agree, is their ability to ignore all of our less than perfect parts and want to hang around with us any way. All those years of domestication give us an animal that has a longer socialisation period than its forbearers and who will form bonds with humans with very little exposure. Many people (I am not one of them) would even go so far as to say they have an innate desire to please humans. I myself live with boxers, so have never seen this.

When you work with an eagle or a seal or any other species that doesn't have a long history with humans, you don't have this luxury. Thankfully, learning is a powerful thing and if you play your cards right you can at least become as important to the animal as a dead rat or a big mullet.

So, for trainers of exotic animals one of the most commonly thrown around phrases is 'rapport building'. Before we do anything in the name of training behaviours, we have to establish a relationship of trust. What zoo folk call 'rapport building', scientists call 'habituation' and 'desensitisation'. What we call 'trust' they call a 'conditioned emotional response'. But whatever you call it, it is vital that the animal have a positive association to you. It is also important that you feel comfortable enough around whatever animal you are training. At the beginning of the year I started working with a 120kg Californian Sea Lion named Michi. Now I had never even worked with a 20kg seal before this, so you can imagine what my learning curve looked like – actually there was nothing curvy about it – it was a straight vertical line. After ten years of training lots of different animals everything I knew and all the skills I had developed were lost when I had Michi by my side because I was way outside my comfort level. Nowadays things are cool, we have grown to know each other's ways and for the most part work really well together, but the experience is fresh in my mind and a great reminder to the importance of the role classical conditioning plays in good training. How your seal, your chicken or your dog feels about you is important.

Changing an animal's association about you is a very interesting process to go through as a trainer. Often times - in the very initial stages at least, you have to let go of all you know and love about operant conditioning and focus your mind on classical conditioning. While trainers need to have a good understanding of how to change behaviour by controlling consequences we also need to understand that how an animal behaves on an innate level is driven largely by its emotional associations about that situation. Unlike our domestic species that need minimal exposure to humans to feel a high level of comfort in our presence, exotic animals need a huge amount of systematic desensitisation to just begin to cope with being around us. Without this the animal would be so fearful that no matter how good

you are at delivering reinforcers, operant learning would be impossible.

With exotics we build the relationship over time by associating ourselves with what the animals like most in the world – which seems to be more often than not something that we find disgusting like cut up rat or raw squid. Depending on the animal's history it may already be pretty used to being around people, but we go through rapport building with every trainer that works with the animals to ensure the relationship is good. There are a number of ways we will go about getting the animal to accept us. Food is our number one tool. An important factor at this stage is making the availability of the food dependant on you. This way we can speed up the association because the animal learns that the only time it will have access to food is in the presence of a human. Approximations are also used, meeting the animal with what it feels comfortable with. We may for instance start by throw half a mouse under the door of a new bird of prey and standing back to the side so that the animal can sense that we are there. Gradually we will work up to being n with the bird and asking the bird to move towards us for the food. At every step there is a clear window of opportunity – ten seconds say – after which the food will be removed if it has not been consumed.

Often at this stage trainers will be offering food in this way several times a day. This ensures the animal has many chances to eat during the day and builds on the association of human equals food. At every step, the trainer will be watching the animal closely for signs of confidence or fear. This process cannot be sped up by using force and the speed and success of the conditioning program will ultimately depend on the patience and sensitivity of the trainer. Sometimes the trainer will use also negative reinforcement to initially condition an operant behaviour during this time. Being aware that all the animal wants in the world is for you to nick off is a great bit of information because it means that we can initially reinforce behaviour by leaving the animal's environment. In this way, an animal that is still not confident enough to eat in our presence can be reinforced for sitting still as opposed to moving away from us when we enter an aviary or an enclosure. Thus reinforcing sitting calmly in our presence. This really helps build the animals confidence in themselves and the trainer.

One of the most common questions we get asked is how long it takes to train our animals. More often than not the training of a behaviour for a show or for husbandry purposes is completed in a very short period of time – I have trained behaviours on parrots and seals in a single session, but without the often lengthy process of desensitisation, training anything would be impossible.

So what has all this have to do with dogs? While we spend a lot of time thinking about operant learning, underlying every behaviour is an emotion. Whether dog, chicken, seal or mouse, how our animals feel about their training is going to play a big part in how their learning proceeds and ultimately the behaviour we end up with. While it may not be as obvious as it is when working with exotics, the process is also a very present and real part of training dogs. Unfortunately for our dogs, sometimes their innate need to belong allows us to ignore this aspect of training. And don't fool yourself that just because you use positive reinforcement to train your animal it's all rosy. Positive reinforcement has to be used well to get the good emotions flowing. Aspects like success rate (the higher the better), motivation level (not too low not too high) and length of session (keep it short) are all important to be aware of as a trainer.

The domestic dog is a very forgiving animal when it comes to training. They forgive us poor timing, low rates of reinforcement, murky criteria, poor concentration (how often have you started a conversation with another person in the middle of a training session while your dog – your training partner – waited patiently?) and at times terribly unclear communication. Most other animals are not as forgiving. Treat a chicken like this and it will go and dig up worms. Working hard for the trust and cooperation of animals like Michi has reminded me not to take this for granted with my dogs, but to continue to work on it every day as hard as I work on it with him. Next time you train spend some time really focusing your attention on your dog's attitude while you are training that all important retrieve, agility obstacle or scent item. They will love you for it.

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