

WHY IS IT CALLED BEHAVIOR CONSULTING?

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THE TRAINER

Can a Dog Trainer do Behavior Modification Successfully?

Pet owners rarely understand the concepts behind behavior modification. Here is a short Q/A to help answer some of the questions I've been asked about why it works, and whose fault is it when it fails.

The answer is no. I have to admit that I was once a dog trainer who thought I could do behavior modification. After all, it is just changing the dog's reaction to a fear stimulus. But dogs are emotional. They fear. Unlike us, when a dog fears, it fears dying. So many dogs who are reactive are 'reacting' to what they perceive as a loaded gun.

"But that is irrational, it is only _____" It doesn't matter what you put in the box. A man with a hat on. A little fuzzy dog. A child. To the dog, it is a loaded gun pointed right at their head. You cannot train a protocol and magically have a dog stop fearing.

"Look at me" is a common one taught by trainers. That is the equivalent to saying to your dog 'don't look at the thing that is going to kill/hurt you.' Of course, as humans know, you just have to look. How many of us would hear someone outside our house at 2am and go take a look?

To make a real change you need to study the fear of dogs. You need to know what dogs put their trust in, and you need to understand the owner's behavior – because in my experience the owner's behavior is 80% of the cure.

So, to answer this question you need to look at the owner. If the dog trust their owner to save their life then yes, any trainer can help you. But, if your dog engages on its own, lunges, barks, air snaps, then you need

someone who can help you learn how to help your dog.

CHANGE THE EMOTION
CHANGE THE REACTION
UNKNOWN

Who can all themselves a Canine Behavior Modification Specialist?

I have met several people who have 'read' books, and they have even changed the lives of some dogs. But if anyone asks me who I would recommend to do behavior modification I tell them there are only three true behavior modification experts in Ontario.

There is a difference between changing a pet's reaction to something scary, changing a dog's fear especially when they have been attacked. A canine behaviorist will listen. They want to *know* why, so they can *recognize* the reaction, and *understand* the emotions.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Before looking for a trainer to help you manage your dog's reactive problem, take a look at yourself.

- Are you doing anything to make your dog anxious? Are you afraid?
- Are you making your dog mistrust you?
- Do you suffer from anxiety?
- Do you generally ignore your dog?
- Does your dog run wild around your house and yard most of the time?
- Do you play with your dog every day?
- Are you willing to commit 1 – 2 minutes, 10x a day to help your pet overcome their fears?
- Are you willing to learn, and to adjust, or are you looking for a quick fix?
- Are you hoping someone else will fix the problem?
- Are you willing to continue the protocols 2-3x a week your dog's whole life?
- Are you willing to listen? You may have caused the problem? If so, are you willing to change for the good of your dog?
- Are you looking to ease your guilt?
- Are you willing to learn?

REACTION VS AGGRESSION

Anxiety can steal your dog's joy in life. It can make leaving the house a daily struggle.

Anxiety can make any change, even someone walking down the street an emotionally stressful situation for your dog.

A 'reaction' is typically anything the dog does to try and keep something away. It may bark, snarl, lunge on the leash, dart back and forth, and nip.

Aggression includes the intent to cause harm. The level of damage can vary, but the dog has given up trying to tell people/dog to stop, or go away, or back up, and are upping their game.

Many dogs who 'suddenly bite' (especially children) have been telling them to stop for a long time, and feel helpless.

In my experience, aggression is a last resort for most dogs.

Fear and anxiety can be a 'learned' reaction. Dogs fear what their owners fear.

Aggression can be learned. Laughing when a puppy barks at the door. If a puppy growls, and you pet its head and say in a soft voice 'its okay', you may be teaching it that growling is okay.

Once a dog bites you cannot go back. You can only prevent and control.

Very few dogs are domain. Doing alpha rolls can create mistrust and fear/aggression.

Many dogs bite in response to pain. Contact your vet after a bite.

THE OWNER

My Impact on My Dog's Level of Success

In the initial consult, I have run into all sorts of excuses and explanations as to why a person cannot do what is necessary to help their dog.

- I don't have time.
- It is my dog, it will behave the way I want it to.
- I wanted this dog because it looks beautiful, I don't care what the breed temperament is. I want it to lay down and stop being hyper.
- This is too hard.
- I will not act happy and get excited.
- My dog should trust me because I love it.
- Why is my dog acting like this? I am good to it. Why is it trying to hurt me?
- I don't care if my dog doesn't want to go on walks. I do.
- My friend said _____
- That is not how my other dogs were.
- My method has always worked before.
- I am not an emotional person, my dog will just need to be quiet and lay still because I don't feel like being emotional.
- I just need to make my dog lay down and be still. It should obey me because I am the owner.
- I just want a way to punish my dog so that it understands I want it to stop. It doesn't matter that my dog is afraid. It needs to learn that I want it to stop reacting.

I could continue the list, but humans have a very warped idea about what a dog can, and cannot do.

Dogs are not programable. They can feel emotions. They can be emotionally harmed.

WHY DO YOU WANT CHANGE?

In my experience, the lowest success rate is by people who want their dog to change because it annoys them.

The people whose emotions are hurt by their dogs behavior come next. Some would rather confine their dog to the house, and co-exist as base as possible.

But those who do want what is best for their dog see the fastest level of change.

The highest level of success is in people who realize their dog is suffering and they want something better for their dog – at all costs.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

If we could cure the foundation of reactive and aggressive behavior in dogs, then we could cure it in people. There would be no addicts, no depressed people, no anxiety. No one would sabotage their success. We could have better relationships.

If we, adults, cannot control our own emotions, then it is unrealistic to expect a dog who is cognitively 2 – 2.5 years old to control theirs.

Plan for the best, be prepared for the worst. The best is a dog that can live a full life. The worst is a life where you adjust your lifestyle to suit the dog.

Dogs with a job are happier than dogs with an idle mind.

John Fisher (Canine Behavior Researcher)

THE DOG

What You Don't Know Can Hurt

Dogs do not express emotions like we do. When a dog grins it is not being silly. It is warning you. When a dog looks guilty it is really begging you to stop bullying it. When a dog licks its lips, it is nervous. When they lunge at another dog and try to get on top of it they are 'not' being friendly.

Learning to read your dog's body language is easy. It can improve your relationship.

Dogs Think But They Are Not Smart

Dogs can think. They can solve problems. They are not a toy. But they are only cognitively 2 – 2.5 years old, depending on the research you read.

But we often forget that dogs do not have our cognitive skills. They misinterpret our intentions.

If your dog is looking at another dog saying 'stay away' and you are yelling at your dog, and yanking on the leash, the dog assumes you are upset at the other dog. Because you were not yelling until the other dog appeared.

Dogs Are Not Children

Treating a dog like a child can damage their 'balance' of right and wrong. Many of these dogs start to bully their owners. Their social manners and body language change. This makes it difficult to socialize with other dogs.


Asking a dog to fulfill our emotional needs is unfair. It causes social and emotional problems in dogs. This becomes a vicious cycle leading many dogs to be rehomed when they can no longer fulfill our needs. A better scenario is to 'give' to your dog what it needs, to build a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment within yourself.

Your Puppy Only had 13 Weeks

A puppy's confidence, ability to solve problems and stay calm, may have been determined before you got your puppy at 8 weeks old.

If the breeder didn't understand neonatal stimulation and desensitization (no excuse in today's DVD world) then your puppy is doomed to a life of anxiety. You can build coping skills, but you can never turn back the clock and rebuild the brain (thicken cerebral cortex and increase receptors.)

Most people don't understand the importance of 'real' puppy socialization until it is too late.



I COULD SPEAK TO YOU AND SAY 'LAYTAY-CHAI, PAISEY, PAISEY.' ... WHY AREN'T YOU RESPONDING? OH, YOU DON'T SPEAK SWAHILLI. WELL, I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU. YOUR DOG DOESN'T SPEAK ENGLISH.

Dr Ian Dunbar –
Veterinarian - Canine Behavior Researcher

Medical Issues Cause Behavior Problems

Your rescue may have PTSD, or OCD. They may have chronic pain. Lack of puppy socialization creates anxiety issues. Your only option may be vet pharma intervention.

My first 'go to' for dogs who bite suddenly is to send them to a chiropractor. Then, the vet. It is irresponsible to attempt behavior modification in a dog that is in pain.

You Cannot Trump Mother Nature

My students are familiar with the phrase "Mother Nature is Tenacious." She gave your dog survival instincts. Breeding gave it 'working' instincts.

If you bought a working bloodline dog, or a hyper herding dog, then you must live with that. If you bought a Cain Corso then you need to live with the Cain Corso's temperament. Can you learn to cohabitate? Yes. You and your dog can negotiate. You can have a calm dog, after 2 hours of vigorous exercise, as in the case of a Dutch Shepherd. I've met friendly Cain Corsos, with constant (forever) socializing and desensitizing.

There is no bad dog. Dogs are just doing what they were bred to do. They cannot change their temperament. If we want them to fit into today's Urban environment, then we need to adjust.

Behaviors Fade

Dogs behaviors are either becoming more Urban, or more 'survival.' There is no stopping. The day you stop reinforcing social behavior your dog's behavior will fade. It will return to its previous behaviors.

It is your responsibility to make sure your dog avoids stressful situations. You need to practice protocols to protect, so they are perfected when you need them.

WHEN DOES BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION WORK?

In the right situation behavior modification works well. There are many trainers who specialize in behavior with decades of experience helping dogs. I've listed a basic strategy that you can use to give you, and your dog, the best opportunity to succeed.

THE TRAINER

Finding one will take some time, and you will probably need to travel. It is much easier to become a dog trainer. Less cost. Less reading. Less investment. In the end, all the extra cost and study doesn't equal more pay.

There are a few things to ask.

Who Did You Study Under?

Any specialist I have found has had several mentors. Ask what courses they have taken. What behaviors they specialize in. Ask them what books they have read.

A dedicated specialist will be able to list about 20 books off the top of their head. These books will have titles like 'handbook of applied behavior.' They will use veterinary terms, and can go into great detail explaining.

Someone low on the learning curve will list books that are written for pet owners, not university level. They rarely read research papers. They almost always have one 'guru' they follow.

Avoid anyone who brags about specific dogs they have trained, or their experience.

What Are You Studying Now?

True professionals have learned that '*the more I learn, the less I know*'. They may list 2 or 3 books they are reading, or courses they are enrolled in. At the least, they will be happy to share information. Walk away if they focus on how great a trainer they are.

THE ORGANIZATION

If you search you will find several behavior organizations. But there are only three peer organizations to focus on.

Some believe, only people trained in university level applied behavior are 'authentic.' If you feel there is an element of danger, then this should be your first avenue.

No matter who you hire, a behavior trainer, or obedience trainer, they should belong to some organization.

There are 1000 ways to become a behavior specialist. All include two things a lot of money and time. I sometimes think a university education is easier.

That said, these are the organizations that are 'peer' recognized, and/or organized. That said, certification is only gaining authority. It can take years of study, so do not dismiss someone who is well educated, but not yet certified.

Association of Professional Dog Trainers.
Karen Pryor Academy

CERTIFICATION ORGANIZATIONS

International Association of Behavior Consultants
Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers
American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior

EDUCATION

University level - Applied Behavior
Association of Professional Dog Trainers.
International Association of Behavior Consultants
Animal Behaviour College

THE EXPECTATIONS

Understanding the process can help you choose the right trainer.

AVOID TRAINERS WHO:

- Fear/pain based methods
- Quick results
- Effortless results
- Boot camps/Board and train
- Not making you part of the solution.
- Teach methods without helping you understand both the problem and solution.
- In home training. It makes them look great, but doesn't help out where the 'scary things' live.
- Franchises which make big promises for a single fee.
- Franchises who do not hire professionals.
- Training centers that do not focus on education.

LOOK FOR TRAINERS WHO:

- Explain the Good and Bad
- Are more focused on teaching you 'how' instead of fixing your dog.
- Have a lot of handouts.
- Tell you it could take you a long time, but don't charge big fees up front.
- Spend time listening to you instead of talking.
- Can talk about your breed, and its drawbacks, with ease.
- Are willing to tell the limitations up front.
- Can help you 'long term'. Are not locked into classes. Have a program for long term support.

WHY IS IT CALLED BEHAVIOR CONSULTING?

RELATIONSHIP

Behavior modification works by building a relationship of trust between you and your dog. In this paradigm, there is no room for a trainer who tries to force you to use their methods. This isn't about working with the best trainer, or someone who is famous. It is about changing your dog's life. ***In the end, the decisions are 100% yours.***

You need to trust your trainer. You need the freedom to tell them what your dog needs. You need to feel safe enough to tell them the good and the bad. Was there another incident? Do you need to fear feeling that you are letting your dog down because you cannot make their method work? If so, then this is not the person to work with.

Someone once asked me why I was worth my pay. I answered that it was not that I had helped dogs, or how many I had helped. It wasn't even that I had educated myself. My value was in the fact that I could listen and figure out the solution that was right for his dog. My value was in the fact that I had many techniques to draw on, and we could work out a program for his dog.

A Canine Behavior Consultant needs to be bluntly honest, even if they hurt your feelings. But they need to respect you enough to take their time and explain things, repeatedly, until you can see results.

It doesn't matter how great a trainer/behavior consultant is. If you cannot successfully execute their strategy, then they have let you down.

The sooner your dog gets help the better.

The older your dog is, the more work you will need to do.

Take these two things into consideration. If your dog is over 2 years old, then take your time and find the right person. If your dog is under 15 months old then find a positive trainer who works with reactive dogs and get started. As long as you are making some progress you are moving towards a 'better life' for your dog and a more relaxed, and rewarding relationship between you and your dog.

RELATIONSHIP = SUCCESS

What makes a dog reactive?

- Lack of socialization
- Genetic
- Neonatal negligence
- Being in danger
- Lack of trust
- No relationship
- Miscommunication
- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of understanding
- Lack of play/exercises
- Long periods of isolation

I have never seen a dog that didn't try to get better. I have seen dogs fail their owners. I have seen owners fail their dogs.

I have seen a bond and relationship where both the dog and owner 'worked it out' and learned to compromise.

I have seen owners, and dogs, give it 110% and make it work. I have seen more successes than failures.

I have had a few dog's I honestly admitted were beyond my abilities and referred them to a veterinary applied behavior specialist.

I guess if I had to give one piece of advice to people looking for a behavior consultant it would be 'look at the consultant's dogs.'

Do you want that relationship with your dog? Are their dogs happy? Do they obey? Are they robots, or do they share a relationship.

If you can trust the people you are working with then it will be easier for your dog to trust you.