



Train for Life. Train with Love.

Different Kinds of Dog Training



About This Presentation

Hi, I'm Bo McGuffee, owner of Puppy Tutor Dog Training in Beloit, WI. I do what is called modern, science-based Dog training. And I want to take some time to talk about what that means. In this particular presentation, I'm going to help you understand some different types of dog training, and the basic methods they employ.

It's important to note that not all dog trainers do the same thing. It's not like a dog trainer is a dog trainer is a dog trainer. We are very different in our understanding and approaches to what we do.

This is not an unbiased presentation. It's very biased, because I believe it is important for people to not only understand how their training options are different, but how many options are actually harmful for your dog.

This is important information for any dog owner, and you shouldn't be left in the dark. After all, our dogs are not "just dogs". They

are family members and we are their guardians. It is our responsibility to make sure that any trainer who works with our dog is not only going to be effective with regards to behavior, but also safe for our canine companion's health and well being. You might be surprised to discover that some dog trainers can be downright dangerous to your dog's health.

*I want to help you identify that danger **before** you walk into it.*

For simplicity's sake, I have boiled down all the different kinds of training into four categories. Think of this as a spectrum, and the differences between the categories aren't always so clear cut. But for the sake of understanding, I think it helps to have identifiable categories.

Traditional Dog Training

The first category I want to talk about is more of the traditional dog training approach. This approach is very correction based. That

means when your dog does something wrong you want to correct it in some fashion. For example If you are trying to teach your dog to walk in heel, which is to say beside you, when your dog walks away from you, you yank the leash or pop it in order to punish the dog.

If you ever hear someone use the phrase “yank and crank trainer”, this is the approach they’re talking about.

The reason they do what they do is because they believe that dogs naturally try to assert themselves as your master. They believe dogs want to be the “alpha” of the pack. They want to be “dominant” over you. This is a really, really old understanding that is complete rubbish from a scientific standpoint. There are so many ways in which this is just flat out wrong.

Imagine that you are considering taking a cruise to visit all seven continents, and you’re looking for someone to pilot your ship. What if I applied for the position and said that the

Earth is actually flat. Would you hire me?
Probably not.

At one time in history, sure, we thought the earth was flat. But today, there's no excuse for believing that. Same with dominance theory. At one point we didn't know, but now we do, that dogs are not trying to take over your human family and become the Alpha. It's just flat-Earth silly in this day and age.

Nonetheless, traditional trainers rely on the belief to guide them, and that belief justifies using coercion and violence to make dogs comply. Fear is their tool of choice. "Oh, you didn't like what happened when you jumped on me? Then don't do it again, or else you're going to get it again."

Their overall goal is to have a relationship with your dog in which the dog is submissive and obedient, hence the term obedience training. And by submissive, that's a nice way to say fearful-of-you, So, ultimately the overall goal is a fearful dog, a dog who is afraid to step out of line.

Balanced Dog Training

The next type of trainer I want to talk about is the balanced trainer. Balanced trainers are not afraid to use corrections, like a traditional trainer would. However, they tend to prefer to reward dogs for doing the things that they want them to do.

The reason is that they've come to realize the power of motivating a dog through positive reinforcement. When dogs get reinforced for performing desired behaviors, they enjoy the learning process. As a result, they engaged to learning process more, and they perform better.

Despite positive reinforcement being their preferred way to train, it's always qualified with a "but". So they may sound something like this.

"We focus on rewarding your dog for doing things right. When dogs are happy and engaged they train better. But, sometimes

that isn't enough, so we remain open to other methods as well. After all, not all dogs learn the same, so you need different training methods for different dogs.”

Basically everything after the “but” means I will hurt your dog if I believe it's necessary to achieve compliance.

Balanced trainers tend to be very proud of the fact that they are open to using any and every method out there. You will often hear them talk about being open-minded when it comes to training methods.

I personally believe there's a difference between being open-minded and discerning.

Imagine going to a medical doctor and asking, what methods do you use to treat illnesses? How would you feel if the doctor said the following? I primarily focus on modern medicine, but I am open to other options as well. For the most part, you want to work with medicines such as antibiotics,

anti-inflammatories, or decongestants. But if I think it's necessary, I will also use leeches.

At one point in time, leeches were considered a valid medical treatment. Of course, we have come to realize that leeches really are not appropriate to treat illnesses. Should such outdated methods of treating patients be considered on the table as an option?

Wouldn't a *discerning* doctor exclude leeches as an outdated option that has proven to ultimately not helpful?

As I use doctors and leeches as a metaphor to address trainers who want to keep all options on the table, I do want to emphasize that there is a big difference. If a doctor were to use leeches on a patient, it's not going to hurt the patient. While it's not helpful, it's also not hurtful. Outdated training methods, on the other hand, used on a dog are a different story. They can be harmful, and indeed they can be harmful enough to put a dog's life at risk. So I would be less concerned about a doctor who offers to use

leeches than a trainer who claims to keep all options on the table.

I'm not going to get into dangers of outdated training methods now, but I will address that in a later presentation.

“So-Called” Positive Trainer

A third type of trainer is the positive trainer, which is shorthand for positive reinforcement training. I actually like the term “positive” trainer over “positive reinforcement” trainer, since it speaks more to method. Positive trainers don't just use positive reinforcement. Their toolbox is wider than that. But the methods they choose are overall a positive experience for the dog.

Or, are they?

That's where this one gets a bit tricky. I would say there are actually two kinds of positive trainers out there.

The first one, and the one I'm going to focus on here, is what I call a "*so-called*" positive trainer. This is a person who generally relies on positive training methods. In fact, I suspect that most of the dogs they work with will only experience positive methods. However, you may hear them say something like this: "I am a positive trainer, but I will use aversives if I think they are necessary."

Note the echo here of balanced training. The whole idea of "I will use pain *IF* I think it's necessary" seems a little odd to me. Why would anyone do otherwise? The reason the yank and crank trainers use pain is because they think it's necessary. So, what a so-called positive trainer should say is "I will use positive training methods, and I will use pain, albeit rarely."

A while back I was talking with someone who was struggling with puppy biting. That person was talking with a self-identifying positive trainer. The trainer said to hold the puppy's mouth shut to stop the biting. That's actually the polar opposite of what any actual positive

trainer should ever recommend. Why would a positive trainer ever say something like that?

There are a couple of reasons. First, that trainer may simply be ignorant. Maybe they don't know that positive training means something specific and that they are well outside the box. If that's the case, then they don't know what they don't know. You can't fault them for that.

Second, and this is much worse, they could be using it as a marketing ploy to get into your wallet. Imagine that you're looking for a dog trainer. Consider how you feel about seeing that a prospect is a "positive dog trainer". That's a good thing, right? Who wouldn't want their dog to be trained by a positive dog trainer?

Let's face it, most clients aren't going to know the difference. If a person is told by a so-called positive dog trainer that they should hold their dog's mouth shut to stop it from puppy biting, most people will assume that it's a positive dog training method, because,

well, the person says they are a positive dog trainer.

There are actually so-called positive dog trainers out there who will use shock collars on dog. To my knowledge, this is about the worst possible pain inducing tool out there. Talk about an integrity issue. If a positive trainer is willing to use one of those, they they're just lying to get your business.

Again, for the most part, so-called positive trainers use straight up positive methods. But, sometimes they will leverage pain.

Force-Free Trainer

Finally, we come to the second kind of positive trainer: the force-free trainer. In a nutshell, force-free trainers do not use intimidation, fear, pain, or violence to motivate a dog in their chosen training methods. Whereas so-called positive trainers will add on that they will use aversives if they think they are necessary, "positive, force-

free" trainers say that they are never necessary, and indeed are counterproductive.

So, why do force-free trainers say that aversives are not only unnecessary, but also counterproductive?

Because that's what the science behind modern dog training says. And this is important.

I suspect you would easily find balanced trainers who claim to be "science-based" trainers. Basically, they are saying they understand how reinforcers and punishers work and can be used to modify canine behavior. And I'm sure they can explain all of that.

But the problem with that claim is this: The science is showing us that dealing with a dog aggressively in training, while it may help with the current behavior problem, tends to have negative side effects.

These negative side effects may be physical, emotional, or social. So, while dealing with one issue, you are creating others.

If someone wants to say "I'm a science-based trainer" this is really, really important. And if you take this seriously, they you're going to be a force-free trainers. That's why I say that the only real science-based trainers out there are necessarily force free. There's a difference between having your methods be "informed by science" (much like balanced trainers are) and "science based".

Another issue is that, force-free methods are scientifically proven to be effective. The use of intimidation, fear, pain, or violence simply isn't necessary.

*If you don't have to use pain to motivate,
why would you?*

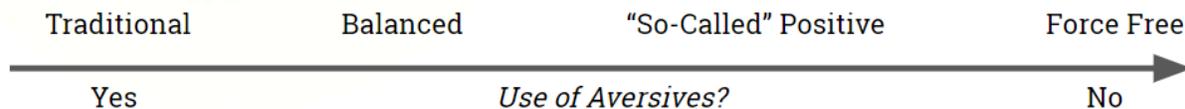
If you **choose** to hurt a living creature when you don't have to, when you **choose** methods that are harmful when you have options at your disposal that are not, *how is that not*

inhumane? Sometimes, you may hear force-free training identified as “humane” dog training. That’s why.

So, the bottom line is this: force-free trainers are the most fully science-based and humane trainers out there. It’s pretty hard to legitimately claim otherwise.

The Evolution of Dog Training

As we’ve gone through all of the different approaches to dog training, what we’re really looking at is the evolution of dog training.



If we were to line them up, we see both a timeline and a progression. On the far left, we have the oldest approach. On the far right, the newest. On the far left, we see a stronger willingness to use “aversives” (which is short for intimidation, fear, pain, and violence). As we move from left to right, the willingness to

use aversives declines, until you see them disappear completely with force-free training.

Again, I want to emphasize that these categories aren't as clear cut as they may seem. There are grey areas. But I think the categories help us to understand the landscape of the training world.

It will be interesting to see how the field progresses from here. In the science-based, force-free community, there are always questions about how we can do things even better. For example, some trainers may ask that you don't feed your dog before coming to class, because they want that extra motivation while you're using treats.

I don't do that. I don't want a dog stuffed before class, but I don't want people to hold off on dinner completely to keep them hungry for class. I don't want dogs in my class working for treats because they want to alleviate hunger pangs. Rather I want them motivated because they are enjoying the games. To me, that's a very different thing.

Now, If another trainer says “don’t feed your dog before class”, I’m not going to say that trainer’s not a force-free trainer. If you look at everything we covered today with all the different training methods, that’s a really minor issue in the grand scheme of things.

Thank You for Reading!

That wraps up this presentation. I hope you have found it enlightening.

Again, I’m Bo McGuffee of Puppy Tutor Dog Training. If you are in need of help with your canine companion, I would love to hear from you. Just contact me through my website at www.puppytutor.me.

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