

“POSITIVELY” BETTER TRAINING

Once upon a time ago, it was believed that the best way to train a dog was to tell him over and over, and often harshly, all the things he was doing wrong. If the dog pulled on the leash, a sharp painful jerk was the way to correct this. If the dog jumped on a person, his back paws were stepped on. The belief was that if you showed a dog all the bad things that could happen as a result of an undesirable behavior, that behavior would disappear. Not only did this create unimaginable stress on the dog, most loving owners found these training techniques very stressful. Stories of dogs being injured, and even worse – dying – as a result of these training techniques scared owners away from obedience.

In the early 1980s, Ian Dunbar developed reward-based training. Considered by many to be the ‘Father of Positive Reinforcement Training’, Dunbar showed the training industry how incredibly effective reward-based training could be. Instead of correcting the wrong behavior, now training involved rewarding the right behaviors. Think how frustrating it can be to be told everything you are doing is wrong (everybody has had a boss like this in their life), yet you are never told ‘good job’. How would you ever know what behaviors to repeat? Instead, if you were told you that you did a great job on project X, you could repeat that same process over and over. Both you and your boss would be much happier.

The most compelling reason to use positive reinforcement training is that it is *HUMANE*. Positive Reinforcement Training (PRT) focuses on telling the dog when they are doing something right and shaping (not forcing) correct behaviors. For example, to teach Sit an owner doesn’t force the dog’s hind to the ground, but rather uses a treat to lure him into a sit. The luring method works better than force because the dog is learning how to shape his own behavior. Pretty soon, a sit means a reward and thus a frequent, positive behavior is formed. Because the behavior has always been associated with good things, the behavior will often appear on its own with little, if any, prompting from the owner. The only thing the owner has to know for positive reinforcement training to work is what behavior they want. When they see that desired behavior, they reward it!

The second most compelling reason to use PRT is that punishment based training can cause very serious, unintended consequences. The most common consequence to punishment training is aggression. How can this happen? When a dog sees another dog in the park, he pulls on his leash because he wants to play with the dog. The pulling dog gets choked, pinched and/or corrected for the pulling. The dog knows he saw another dog and felt pain. This happens over and over until the dog decides he gets hurt every time he sees another dog; therefore, the other dog must be causing his pain. Hence a dog-aggressive dog has been shaped by his owners. I am sure this was not their intention.

Another reason PRT is more effective than punishment based systems is that it creates an environment where dogs want to learn. PRT focuses on building a mutually respectful relationship between you and your dog. Your dog wants to do the right thing to earn his rewards. In punishment systems, dogs would often shut down from training. I can only imagine after the first ten corrections what a dog must have been thinking "I can't do anything right so I just won't do anything at all!"

KHS wants to promote a happy, healthy relationship between you and your pet. We strongly believe that through positive reinforcement training methods, you can achieve a wonderful relationship built on mutual respect and trust.

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