

TOP 5 Dog and Cat Training Myths

By Joan Orr



Daisy. Photo courtesy of Joan Orr.

Top trainers and behaviour experts weighed in with their top picks for dog and cat training myths. Here are the top five, in no particular order.

MYTH #1: The cat/dog pees in my bed, chews my shoes or engages in other unacceptable behaviors when I am out because he is spiteful or is mad at me. Conversely, my dog should do what I want because he wants to please me.

FACT: Dogs and cats are not moral beings and do not have a concept of “right and wrong”. They are capable of neither spite nor the advance planning required to get back at you. Animals do these “bad” things because they are anxious. The most likely causes of severe anxiety are being left alone, or fear of punishment upon your return. They feel better when they relieve themselves or chew some-

thing. They are attracted to items that carry your scent, because they associate you with food and companionship, and so they are more likely to damage items that you use frequently. Dogs do what pleases the dog (as do cats). Don’t expect your dog to behave just to please you anymore than you would expect to go to work just to please your boss. Be prepared to make it worth the animal’s while using treats or play, and your dog or cat really will do what you want.

MYTH #2: The dog barges through the door, takes the leash in his mouth, jumps on you or pulls on the leash because he is being dominant and is trying to raise his status in ‘the pack’. You must act like a pack leader to stop the dog from taking control.

FACT: The dog engages in these behaviours because they have been rein-

forced. That is, some favourable consequence (to the dog) has occurred as a result of doing these things. Any behaviour that is reinforced will be repeated. The dog pulls on the leash and gets to move forward, so he will pull on the leash again. The dog jumps on someone and they pet him or even yell and push him off (exciting for the dog) and so he will jump again. Scientific research into the natural history and behaviour of dogs and wolves has debunked the dominance myth, without question. Find a dog trainer that no longer believes in dominance hierarchy or the need to show the dog who’s boss.

MYTH #3: I don’t have to teach my dog or cat to be good with my kids. They should know that the kids are part of the family.

FACT: Dogs and cats do not come knowing how to interact appropriately with humans. Kittens and puppies are generally friendly, but don’t assume that this will last into adulthood without specific training. Many dogs and cats are surrendered to shelters because of this very assumption. For the best chance of success, dogs and cats must be taught using positive reinforcement (play and treats) how to behave around people, especially children.

MYTH #4: Animals have to make mistakes and be corrected or punished in order to learn. The only way to get truly reliable behaviour is to punish the animal when he is bad or makes a mistake.

FACT: Animals (people too!) do not have to make mistakes to learn. Learning occurs best when the animal is feeling happy and confident. Fear of

punishment impedes learning. Punishment may suppress behaviour in the short term, but is needed time and time again as the animal does not really learn from it. The most reliable behaviours are those taught by setting the stage for the animal to succeed and then rewarding success. The world's top trainers of assistance animals, performance animals and working animals train by teaching the animal what *to* do (as opposed to what *not* to do) and then giving food or another reward when the animal does the right thing. There are a million ways to do something wrong, but only one way to do it right, so it makes a lot more sense to teach the right way to do something than to punish or correct if the animal does it the wrong way.

MYTH #5: You can't teach an old dog new tricks, and you can't train cats, period.

FACT: Of course you can teach an old dog new tricks, and you can certainly train cats (and any other animal for that matter). The laws of learning apply to all species, young and old. Behaviour that is reinforced is repeated. Behaviour that is not reinforced fades away. Find a way to get the animal do to the behaviour you want, limit the opportunity for behaviour you don't want and give the animal something it likes as a consequence of appropriate behaviour. The animal will be more likely to repeat that behaviour in the future, giving you yet another chance to reinforce it. 🐾

Joan Orr is the producer of the award-winning Clicker Puppy DVD, co-creator of the award-winning Doggone Crazy! board game (www.doggonecrazy.ca), co-author of the book Getting Started, Clicking with Your Rabbit (www.clickerbunny.com) a member of the Karen Pryor Clickertraining Clicker Expo faculty and a member of the Advisory Board to the Karen Pryor Academy for Dog Training and Behavior. She is also the co-founder of TAGteach International, a company dedicated to the application of marker-based positive reinforcement teaching with humans. Joan is the president and co-founder of Doggone Safe www.doggonesafe.com.

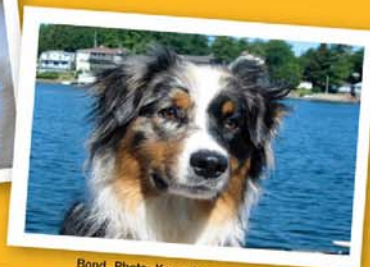
PETS MAGAZINE PHOTO CONTEST 2009

**NEW ENTRIES MUST BE SUBMITTED NO LATER THAN
SEPTEMBER 30/09.**

**CONTEST WINNERS WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN THE
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2009 ISSUE**



Shalley. Photo: Holly Abidi



Bond. Photo: Karen Larocque



Tsunami. Photo: Howe Sim



Mouse. Photo: Mila Bridger

All entries will be eligible for a draw for a free subscription.

Good quality photos will be published and credited to the sender.

Best photos may win one year supply of pet food or a high quality photo printer.

Cover-quality shots will be credited with a cover photo and will receive a framed cover

of the **PETS Magazine** cover on which your pet appears.

The print process requires that all photos are high quality and resolution (minimum of 300 DPI).

Please make sure to send only high resolution files.

Submitting a photo to this contest will constitute your consent and agreement to have the image and your name published in PETS Magazine.

**Send picture of your pet to
photocontest@petsmagazine.ca.**

Please include the name of your pet and your contact information in your email.