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7 Vital Facts You Should Know About Dog Training But Probably Don't...

1. Inappropriate punishment can have a negative impact on your dog for the rest of its life.

With a plethora of individual case studies that I could share with you on this topic it could easily be a subject of a book.

The most recent case study I will share is that of a 3 year old sterilized female Daschund named Missy.

The presenting problem was Missy's constant and aggressive barking when visitors came. She also displayed strong attention seeking behaviours mainly toward Mary.

I was met with Mary and Missy on lead at the front of the house. I noticed a small 'throw' bag and immediately knew that her previous 'punishment based' trainer would have encouraged using this device to suppress Missy's inappropriate and 'fearful' behaviour by throwing it toward her.

Since the previous methods had proved ineffective and my services were now called upon I confidently told Mary that she could throw that in the bin. Her reply was that of elation – she said, "Thank goodness - I am so glad you said that".

This poor lady had endured subjecting her dog with this form of punishment to 'address' Missy's fearful and anxious behaviours. Not surprisingly since she has been using these techniques, Missy's inappropriate behaviour toward visitors and general anxiety has increased.

Every time Missy showed fearful/defensive behaviours toward visitors, Mary was told to throw this chain and promptly shout out "BAH!". How in the world was this going to help Missy associate good things with visitors? It wasn't, it didn't, and it wasn't going to.

Because dogs learn by association all Missy was effectively learning was that her owner 'reluctantly' turns on her when she's in a fearful/threatening situation and coincidentally it always happens to be when there's a visitor present. This is the perfect breeding ground for more fearful/defensive behaviour.

Missy had this training well over a year ago and had been subjected to 'negative associations' in the presence of visitors each and every time. Without any productive behaviour modification happening, **Missy had learned by association that other people were the reason she was punished.**

Missy and Mary are now happy to leave the days behind of setting Missy up for failure and are now enjoying a much more humane way to train – without the fear of punishment.

They have some work ahead of them, as there's a lot of baggage for both Mary and Missy to get through and to re-establish the trust and bond that was missing from their relationship for some time.

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2. Impatient dog owners run the risk of harming their relationship with their dog.

Impatience and lack of understanding in dog training indicates a frustrated owner and a confused and stressed dog.

Teaching your dog new and reliable behaviours isn't something that happens immediately. Unfortunately, in a society of 'instant results' a quick fix approach is what we often expect.

The expectation is that your requests should be met by prompt, anticipated and even instant responses. Anything short of this suggests that you should repeat the command again within a second from the last one; say it louder because the dog didn't hear; say it more sternly because the dog is being stubborn, etc etc.

Don't we all know someone who has impatiently said "sit, sit, sit" to their dog?

Training your dog is a process that requires a great deal of patience from you.

It can be frustrating when your dog doesn't appear to be 'getting it' or worse, you're convinced that your dog 'knows' what you're asking but is refusing to oblige.

Here's a hot tip: Have you ever thought that when dogs haven't been 'properly' taught, are fearful, stressed, or aroused, that they aren't actually able to offer behaviours readily?

Some people even perceive that the dog is a slow learner, stubborn or wilful. They couldn't be more further from the truth.

Take your time and do things at a pace your dog can cope with instead of overwhelming, stressing and frustrating both you and your dog.

Picture the impatient teacher badgering and pressuring you in front of the other students. Not only are you stressed (and stress suppresses learning) but also unclear about what it is that they're asking of you.

Wouldn't you agree that it's better grounds for learning with patience and understanding?

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3. Lack of good leadership skills is the downfall for many dog owners across the world.

There is a sole owner, female in her forties who owns adolescent female sterilised Kelpie cross named Fruity.

Presenting problems are a serious lack of leadership skills by the owner and solid and well established attention seeking and various inappropriate behaviours by the dog.

Fruity is definitely an 'over the top' individual with a high level of unruly and bad behaviour.

The number of problems is clearly due to a distinct lack of leadership, exacerbated by a dog with a very 'out there' personality and an 'I dare you' attitude.

Problems include inappropriate elimination, car chasing and other undesirable behaviours on walks. Fruity is out of control on lead, screams and bites if you attempt to restrain her. She bounces up trying to get at your face with often harmful results. If given the opportunity she runs over furniture and onto bench tops!!! The extent of her training is practically nominal.

In short, this dog is a nightmare and her bad behaviour means that she has been confined to the backyard.

Unwisely, just over 12 months ago, the owner bought a Jack Russell puppy into the household and not surprisingly, both dogs now have some fairly significant behavioural issues.

Even though he is quite socially interactive, the Jack Russell urinates whenever spoken to,

or picked up for that matter. Like Fruity, he is also poorly trained and is influenced by her bad behaviour.

He refuses to walk on a lead outside the front yard leaving both dogs without walks and lacking socialisation, physical and mental stimulation. A recipe for further behaviour problems... But wait, there's more...

Recently the two dogs have begun to fight over food and compete over their owner's attention. A veterinarian saw the Jack Russell as it had a gashed ear after a fight over their owner's lap.

This is clearly a scenario that if the owner showed consistent leadership skills she wouldn't be facing these serious issues.

If having one dog out of control isn't enough of a challenge, now there are two dogs with their own collection of bad behaviours.

The owner can't enjoy either dog to the full extent as their problems are not being addressed. With a distinct lack leadership it should be no surprise that the fights were imminent.

These scenarios were easily avoidable by setting clear and consistent boundaries from the beginning. **As there was no control of the first dog, the owner should never have taken on board a second dog.**

Unless some productive steps are taken the dogs lives won't be as fulfilled as they could be.

Never underestimate the power of good leadership skills.

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4. Dogs behaving badly often don't get better entirely on their own.

It's surprising how many people that have a dog with a behaviour problem 'ride it out' in the hope that their dog will get better with age.

This fallacy only aims to prolong the problem and largely deliver a more ingrained, inappropriate behaviour with age.

Without training and behaviour modification many common behaviour problems strengthen in time and as you've perhaps heard before, prevention is better than cure.

For instance, the three month old Labrador puppy that is allowed and even encouraged to jump up on their owners and visitors will more than likely continue to offer this behaviour when they've reached six months.

During this time it has had plenty of opportunity to practice behaving badly and also had many practice sessions on various people.

In addition this dog has also been reinforced for its jumping in one way or another, good and bad. **Whether that it got pushed off, shouted at or even patted – some dogs don't care. Either way it gets a reaction.**

Interestingly enough these same people are then annoyed that their dog is still jumping up as an adolescent and are surprised by their dog's 'bad behaviour'.

There's nothing surprising here, the writing was on the wall that this dog would continue with a behaviour that gets them results. It would be fair to say that this is a scenario where the dog is smarter than their owner.

After all the dog is just doing what it has been allowed to do since it was a puppy.

They don't come pre-programmed to change their behaviour when they are 30kg!

Instead of preventing this inappropriate behaviour when he was a puppy they are now

pressed to address it because other family members don't want to come over because of the dog's bad behaviour.

When do you think this dog will stop jumping without any productive input from his family? My bet is that he won't, but with your intervention the dog has at least got a chance.

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5. The main difference between everyday dog owners and the most successful dog trainers in the world is that they've learned to master the dog's language.

In my opinion, learning to speak dog is without a doubt the single most important aspect to learn about dogs.

Without understanding their language you're left with guessing why your dog is doing what they're doing. There is too much room for error using this 'hit and miss' method.

You shouldn't assume you have any clue what a dog is thinking. But by taking the time to learn what the best trainers in the industry have discovered, you will be making a remarkable difference in you and your dog's life.

Not a week goes past when a dog owner tells me why they believe their dog behaves the way they do.

I wait to see their dog in action so I can observe the 'signs'. This is what makes the difference when correctly interpreting your dog's motivation to behave the way it does.

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6. The 'Dominance Theory' is flawed and outdated and is the main excuse dog owners are told to control their dogs with physical force.

I saw an eighteen month female sterilized Alaskan Malamute named Perch owned by a young lady called Tania who was currently renting house with her boyfriend.

She actually saw my Siberian Huskies in my vehicle sitting patiently at the local shopping centre and approached me. Tania said how well behaved my dogs were and that her own dog would never behave like mine.

Tania lives across the road from the local shopping centre and I could hear a dog howling. She explained that was her dog and that someone was coming the next day to help with her Malamute's separation anxiety issues.

I asked who it was as I have a number of colleagues, and she mentioned someone who uses punitive methods to 'train' dogs. I offered her my card and emphasized my methods without criticizing the individual she was getting.

Two weeks later I had a call from Tania who was in tears. She'd had the trainer out a couple of times who advocated the use of dominant type methods.

She was told that Perch was dominant and had endured not only having a chain thrown toward her whilst shouting 'BAH!', (whilst she was in a state of anxiety) but in addition because her dog was a more 'serious' case that she had to throw the chain 'AT' her dog. Yes, that's right, she was told to hit the dog with the chain.

During this 'training' period the trauma Perch endured in her backyard had exacerbated her anxiety level so much that she escaped from the backyard and received some very nasty injuries from being 'run over by a car' in her state of panic. It was very sad to hear what had

been a preventable situation.

Her problem wasn't even diagnosed as serious separation anxiety but the stock standard solution for most behaviour problems of incorrectly diagnosing the dog as 'dominant'.

This dog's separation anxiety was so severe by the time I came out that it wasn't even able to stay in the backyard alone for one moment without getting into a panic attack.

I noticed many scratches on the outside of the back door and I had a sneaking suspicion what the owner was told to do. She looked at me, perplexed, and said, "You're going to tell me that I shouldn't have insisted on my dog being outside alone, aren't you?"

I explained that because of the serious level of Perch's anxiety that she needed relaxation training before any desensitisation could occur. Having left her outside alone was not the first step in the behaviour modification plan.

Tania felt terrible. She also felt betrayed that she had been poorly instructed by someone she thought she could trust to help her dog.

The good news is that Perch is currently on a 'pro-active' behaviour modification plan. This begins with relaxation first and then slowly desensitizes her to being left alone for 'short periods'.

The negative training episode had definitely set training back for both Tania and Perch, and to some degree - myself, as Perch was in a worse state than before this other person came on the scene.

Last feedback report was that both Perch and Tania are coping well and are much happier with the humane methods of overcoming this delicate issue.

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7. Removing stress in your dog's life significantly increases their ability to learn and improves their well being.

How much force is too much and where is a dog owner to turn these days for behaviour and training advice?

Outdated punishment methods such as choke chains, pinch collars and alpha rolls have been around for many years and as a consequence are still widely used.

However, informed dog owners do not need to rely on outdated techniques and damaging dominance theories any longer. **There have been major advances over the past decade in dog training with much better techniques and better equipment available.**

Positive reinforcement methods are successfully being used in zoos and marine parks all across the world. If trainers of exotic animals (including lions, killer whales, bears, seals, dolphins) don't have to use harsh methods why should we have to resort to that with our domesticated dog?

There are numerous problems with correction training. Firstly, it's difficult to do correctly, and too easy to punish a dog in ways it doesn't understand. This can only worsen or create new behaviour problems and escalate aggression.

Because so many behaviour problems are anxiety based, it's actually inappropriate to use punishment techniques to treat them.

Imagine you have a fear of heights. You're anxious, up on the 50th floor of a building, tapping your fingers, hands sweating, heart racing, sighing, saying a few choice words one only says when they're stressed (you get the idea) and the person standing next to you promptly grabs you by the collar and shakes you, shouting 'STOP IT!'.

That doesn't make you any less afraid of heights - now you're also scared of this

person. In fact, perhaps your level of anxiety is now higher than ever as not only are you worried about your original fear but also about the actions of others around you when you're in this frightening environment.

This is ground for learned helplessness, otherwise known as going into shutdown. This is not a good place for anyone to be - person or dog.

No productive learning has taken place in this example. Instead what has been learned is that not only is it stressful being up in tall buildings, you are punished for your fearful behaviour as well.

There is simply too much science that explains why positive methods are far more desirable than punishment.

The first thing that will help us all is letting go of the old 'wolf' model (dominance training) that has long been dispelled.

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About Kathy

Kathy Kopellis McLeod is a Certified Dog Consultant and Professional Trainer with over fifteen years experience successfully working with dogs. She created the popular **Reactive Rover®** classes specifically designed for dogs that have issues with other dogs and/or people.

Kathy encourages positive reinforcement methods with not only her own dogs but also those of her clients.

If you're looking for tips and techniques to get the very best out of your dog, visit www.kathysdogtraining.com.au

Or if you'd just like to chat about that four-legged friend of your family, simply give Kathy a call on 08 9345 5277

She'd be delighted to hear from you.



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