

## Picture the Behavior and Make It Happen

By Joyce Miller

Depending on which study you read, dogs and humans have worked together collaboratively and cooperatively for at least 15,000 years (150 centuries) and maybe as long as 100,000 years (a thousand centuries). That means that dogs and people may have been cooperating with each other since *before* humans had any spoken language. If that is the case, the working relationship between dogs and people originates in a mind-to-mind connection with both the dog and the person knowing what the other needs.

While recovering from breast cancer, I did a lot of spiritual and intuitive work. In the course of several mind-body workshops, I learned how to use visualizations to change outcomes. This work not only changed my own life; it had a dramatic impact on my work with dogs.

### **Changing an undesired behavior with visualization**

For example, in one mind-body workshop, we did an exercise using visualization to change a behavior we did not like into a good behavior.

First, we were asked to think of a behavior that bothered us. That was easy for me: it was bathing my dogs. Nothing could reduce me to shouting and yelling faster. It bothered me that I got so angry with these animals that I love so much.

The leader told me to see the whole event: I visualized my clumsy efforts at catching the dog, getting her into the tub. I “saw” her fighting me every step of the way, turning away from the water and the soap, and refusing to turn when I needed her to turn. I saw myself getting angrier and angrier. Finally, I visualized rinsing her off and getting covered with water as she shook herself when I finished.

Then, the trainer told me to imagine what I would like to happen: I imagined a picture of one of my dogs happily getting into the tub, standing quietly while I calmly wet her whole body and soaped it up. I saw her turning when I asked her to turn and standing quietly to be rinsed off.

The next morning, when I was ready to leave the house, our five month old puppy came up to me, wiggling with happiness, soaking wet. I asked my husband what had happened. He said she had peed in her crate. “Oh, and you washed her?” “No,” he replied, “That is pee.” I only had about 30 minutes to get to the seminar, but I picked the puppy up, put her in the tub, bathed her, and towed her off. My husband came into the dog room and asked, “Are you going to bathe her before you leave?” When I told him that I had already bathed her, he said that he hadn’t heard me yelling. I realized that the puppy had behaved exactly the way I imagined in the exercise. I was calm, and my clothes were dry: I didn’t have a drop of water on me.

### **Thinking in pictures**

When you call your dog to come to you and work, she comes to you with a clear focused mind. Yes, she can be distracted by just about anything: the sight of something moving within her range of vision, a scent of another animal, or a far-off sound. Those things happen in the moment and are as fleeting as the moment. If you can quickly regain her focus on you, she is all yours.

Holding the dog's attention depends on how well you can visualize what you want her to do and how well you can hold that visualization in your mind.

### ***Clutter Chatter* diffuses the picture in your mind.**

Unfortunately, the modern dog owner comes to her dog with a lot of *clutter chatter* on her mind. Whether she sees it in words or pictures, her mind is full of many things competing for her attention and diluting her focus: an important report is due tomorrow, the meeting today went badly, her performance review is next week, someone is blocking her work, it's almost time to start supper, she needs to stop at the drug store and pick up a prescription, what's going on with the kids, and her personal concerns are mixed with the innumerable threats in the world that are in television and radio news, Internet reports, newspapers along with advertisements for thousands of products. Anyone who works in marketing can tell you how hard it is to break through the clutter and get the attention of one person for 15 seconds a day.

So, if we are designed to connect with our dogs mind to mind, and our mind is cluttered with so many other things, how can our dog clearly see what we want the dog to do? To complicate the situation even more, we tend to remember the last time we worked with our dog and the dog did it wrong. In fact, we tend to think of all the times that the dog did it wrong, and that picture is in our mind when we pick up the lead and start a training session.

As the dog's mind ferrets around in our cluttered mind for a picture of what to do, she sees a picture of herself misbehaving, and that is what she thinks we want her to do! I ask my students, what do you see in your mind's eye just before your dog acts out inappropriately? Always, the answer comes back that they saw the dog doing what it did. Congratulations, I tell them: your dog is doing exactly what she thinks you want her to do!

### **How can we connect mind to mind?**

1. **Relax and clear our minds.** The dogs come to us in the present moment; we must do the same. We must put aside worries about the past and the future, and we must concentrate on the moment and what we are doing with the dog. We can clear our minds using the techniques of prayer, meditation or animal communication. (see sidebar *Relax and Clear Your Mind*).

Prayer, meditation, and animal communication techniques open us up to a universe in which we are all one in spirit, enabling us to communicate mind-to-mind with others, both humans and animals. You know this is possible: Just think of how many times you have thought of a friend that you have not talked to in a long time, and within 24 hours, you hear from that friend.

**2. Form a clear picture of the desired behavior:** If we erase all the clutter chatter from our minds and come to our dog's training or working session with one single clear picture in our mind, a picture of what we want our dog to do, the dog will have no confusion. She will receive a clear intention of what we want her to do.

Sassy is a miniature American Eskimo Dog. The first night she came to class, we heard her before we saw her. A natural show dog, Sassy did not need to be taught how to show, but she and her owner needed to learn how to work cooperatively if they were going to succeed in the ring.

At one class, when Sassy was refusing to stand for exam on the table, I stepped back and asked the owner what she saw in her mind's eye when Sassy acted out. She said she saw Sassy squirming and moving around, refusing to stand still. I knew that the owner would never be successful with Sassy if she continued to think of her misbehaving.

I asked the owner if she meditated. No, she replied, but she prayed. Both meditation and prayer quiet the mind and eliminate the distractions of *clutter chatter* in your mind. I suggested that the owner work Sassy just five minutes a day. I also suggested that just before starting each training session, she relax and say a prayer to quiet her mind and in the prayer, I asked her to imagine a picture of Sassy doing exactly what she wanted her to do. I told her to keep that picture in her mind all the time that she worked with Sassy, praising Sassy when she complied with the picture, ignoring her misbehavior or removing her from a distraction that she wanted, and keeping any pictures of bad behavior out of her mind.

The owner agreed to give this approach a try. Within four days, she called to tell me how much better her work with Sassy was going. At classes, Sassy behaved like a little show dog, doing what she was supposed to do, with none of the sassing and disruptive behavior we had come to expect of her.



*Pretty as a picture, Sassy, a small fluffy white American Eskimo Dog, turns in outstanding performances as long as her owner and she are connected mind-to-mind.*

Within four weeks, the owner called in tears to tell me that she had shown Sassy to a Best In Show at a United Kennel Club (UKC) dog show.

### **3. Keep that picture foremost in your mind while you are working.**

Vanity is a young white German Shepherd. She is a beautiful dog who moves effortlessly around the ring. But she would not let anyone touch her. As a judge approached, Vanity could disappear, slipping back, down to the floor, or to the side. At one time, I would have told her handler what I had been told: that if she physically kept control of the dog's head, the dog would not be able to move. But having had to work with a dog that could slip away from a judge no matter how much physical control I had of her head, I knew that we needed more in order to get Vanity under control.

I asked the owner what she saw in her mind's eye just before the judge came to her dog. The owner replied by describing Vanity's behavior. "Is that what you see in your mind?" "No, that is what she is doing."

We did the exercise in the sidebar, *See It In Your Mind's Eye*, to demonstrate what visualization is, and the owner immediately understood. Then I showed her a way to hold Vanity while she visualized Vanity standing steadily for exam.

The owner stacked Vanity. I stepped back and looked at the dog. Then, acting as the judge, I walked toward her and reached out for her. She stood rock solid. I went over her and she did not flinch. Four other class members went over her, and she stood quietly for

all of them. That weekend, Vanity showed very well, and two weeks later, she went Best of Breed over eight other German Shepherds and won a Group placement at a UKC show.



*Vanity's owner was worried that Vanity was too shy to stand for exam. Using visualizations, Diane has Vanity self-stacking and standing rock solid for the judge to go over her.*

#### **4. Generalize the use of pictures to other aspects of your work with your dog.**

This is the hard part. It is very easy to slip back into the *clutter chatter*, and the dog slips back with us. Or we fail to generalize the use of visualizations to other exercises, and we send confusing messages to our dogs.

Five weeks after Vanity's success, we were in class and there were thunderstorms somewhere in North Texas. Wherever they were, we could not hear them, but Vanity heard them. She stood in place, trembling so badly that everyone in the class saw her trembling like a leaf. I walked over to go over her. She stood for exam, but the trembling intensified. Her owner said, "If there is a storm, I cannot show her." I asked her why, and she said because Vanity is afraid of storms and trembles continuously. We talked about dogs with thunder and noise phobias. Then, I realized, as the owner came back repeatedly to the statement that Vanity could not show when there were such noises, that she was visualizing Vanity doing that. I asked her to change the picture in her mind.

The owner re-stacked her dog as I walked back to the middle of the ring. I turned and looked. Vanity wasn't trembling. I walked up to her and went over her and there was no trembling. I asked others to go over her. Vanity continued to stand steadily without trembling. We were all amazed. I asked the owner what had changed. She said, "I see her

standing calmly and looking beautiful.” Her smile widened as she realized what she had done.

**Conclusion:** Visualization is very powerful in getting behaviors. If we can focus on a picture of what we want, we will get the behavior. If we become complacent, we can easily slip out of the moment. As we get more and more experience, we will make pictures without thinking. These pictures enable us to stay in the moment and keep our focus on exactly what we want the dog to do.

The idea of a mind-to-mind connection with animals is not new. Neither is the idea of seeing mental pictures of what we want the animal to do. Penelope Smith, a pioneer in animal communication, says that the thought or image that we project is more important than the words we use. She says that dogs “get confused when people say something that is not what they are thinking.”

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**Books that can help develop greater understanding of the mind-to-mind connection:**

- J. Allen Boone, *Kinship With All Life*, 1944.  
J. Allen Boone, *Letters To Strongheart*, 1954.  
Barbara Cecil & Gerianne Darnell, *Fear No More: Competing With Confidence*, 2002.  
Stanley Coren, *How Dogs Think*, 2004.  
April Frost, *Beyond Obedience: Training With Awareness for You & Your Dog*  
Temple Grandin, *Thinking In Pictures*, 1995.  
Temple Grandin, *Animals In Translation*, 2005.  
Linda Kohanov, *The Tao of Equus: A Woman’s Journey of Healing & Transformation through the Way of the Horse*, 2001.  
Candace Pert, *Molecules of Emotion*, 1999.  
Candace Pert, *Your Body Is Your Subconscious Mind (audio)*, 2000.  
Jane Savoie: *That Winning Feeling: Program Your Mind for Peak Performance*, 1992.  
Jane Savoie, *It’s Not About the Ribbons*, 2004.  
Jose Silva and Philip Miele, *The Silva Mind Control Method*, 1977.  
Penelope Smith, *Animal Talk: Interspecies Telepathic Communication*, 1989.

**Biography:**

Joyce Miller is a retired teacher and marketing writer. She is a member of the American Dog Writers Association, the International Association of Canine Professionals, the Association of Pet Dog Trainers, and the Airedale Terrier Club of America. She teaches a six-weeks handling techniques class, and she also does in-home training for people with new puppies or older dogs that need re-training. She lives in Dallas Texas, where she and her husband breed and show Airedale Terriers.

**Sidebars:**

*Relax and Clear Your Mind*

Relaxing and clearing your mind, whether you use prayer, meditation, or animal communication, takes you to a state of mind called the alpha state. According to Jose

Silva in his book *The Silva Mind Control Method*, our mind cycles through four frequencies: Beta, the conscious level in which we take care of business and daily chores; Alpha, a relaxed state in which we can consciously form intentions and solve problems; Theta, a deeper state in which most hypnotism is done; and Delta, a state of very deep sleep. Our minds slip in and out of the Alpha state throughout the day, often when we are not focused on anything. At night, we go through a series of 90-minute cycles from alpha to theta to delta back to theta and then alpha.

Whether you call it prayer, meditation or communicating with the animals, the steps for relaxing and clearing our minds are simple and similar.

In the beginning, you will find it easier to find a quiet place and sit or lie down, whichever you find more comfortable. If this is new to you, you will probably find it easier to do with some form of entry ritual. Eventually, you will be able to click into a relaxed state without any preliminaries.

Entry rituals may include:

- bowing your head and making a petition to a supreme being;
- taking a series of deep breaths;
- breathing positive energy in and exhaling negative energy;
- counting backwards mentally saying and seeing the numeral for each number;
- scanning your body while focusing on what you feel in each part of your body and relaxing each part as you proceed;
- listening sounds that are near, then further and further away, then your own heartbeat and other sounds within yourself,
- and more.

All of the methods depend on being patient and letting go of distractions, thoughts, and pictures of other things. Penelope Smith says that if you are going to communicate with an animal, you also need to feel that the animal is listening to you in the same way that you sense other people are with you in a conversation.

During such relaxation, it is normal for your mind to wander. When this happens, just bring your attention back to where you left off. Occasionally, you will fall asleep. This is also normal. As you gain more experience, you will fall asleep less often. No matter how much you increase your concentration and focus, you will always find your mind wandering to some extent. Just accept it and know that this is normal.

While you are in a deep state of relaxation, you can set goals and solve problems. This is done by visualizing the problem or the goal in a picture and by imagining the desired solution or outcome in a picture. When you imagine the solution or outcome, be sure to use all of your senses. The more detail you can put into the picture of your imagined outcome, the more success you will have.

Finally, trust that you can do this, and enjoy yourself and your relationship with your dog.

## **See It In Your Mind's Eye and Then Do It**

(Exercise)

1. Stand up with your feet shoulder distance apart. Lift either arm and point straight ahead.
2. Without moving your feet, turn your upper body, arm and your head in the direction of that arm as far as you can go. Note what you see on the wall at that point.
3. Let your eyes go further and see a different point on the wall. Note that point.
4. Come back to your starting point.
5. Close your eyes and visualize what you just did, going to the point where you stopped.
6. Then imagine your body, arm and head turning so you stop at the further point on the wall, the one that you noted but did not reach when you actually did the exercise.
7. Open your eyes, and physically repeat the exercise, going in the same direction that you did the first time.

How far did you go the second time? On the second try, most people go effortlessly to the point further away. When asked what the exercise means, they usually say if you can picture it in your mind, you can do it.