

## What My Mother Taught Me About Training

By Fran Peck

Training and handling dogs is not rocket science, it doesn't require a PhD in dog psychology.

Some of us believe that there really isn't any such thing as "dog psychology." Dogs, even though they are domesticated, are animals and have very basic needs. They do and repeat what is successful. If a behavior doesn't work for them, they generally will not repeat it or won't repeat it very often if it continues to be unsuccessful.

In many cases of raising a pup or young dog, it is simply a matter of preventing the dog from performing or channeling unwanted behaviors so they do not become ingrained as the pup matures, like chewing. Much of the handling is just like an infant or toddler. Lock 'em up when you can't supervise them. Keep them on a 'short' leash when out in public because they can't survive on their own.

Then there are the 'normal' dog behaviors we try to squelch, e.g., countersurfing or digging. We try to do this because 'civilized' dogs aren't supposed to do these things. Says who? Countersurfing is 'hunting'/food finding behavior. This is a good thing in the wild. Digging is useful for finding varmints, also for finding food, building a den (security), and keeping cool.

Then there are the social behaviors we try to stop, such as, mouthing and 'jumping up.' Watch dogs in a 'pack' situation and you will see dogs mouthing and jumping on each other as part of their social interaction. But our 'civilized' dogs aren't supposed to do these things.

The purpose of dog training is twofold. It is first and foremost to help handlers establish acceptable rules of decorum for their four-legged buddy. But it is also to understand the motivations behind the behaviors we see in our dogs and to use those motivations to establish those rules. One cannot establish these rules if the dog is successful at inappropriate behaviors. So this is where common sense comes in. If I allow my dog to get away with a certain behavior that is unacceptable to me, then the dog is successful and will continue to perform that behavior despite my attempts to change it. The shy or fearful dog that isn't 'motivated' to go up to people and isn't firmly but gently moved in that direction will continue to be shy and fearful.

I grew up with dogs. I can't imagine not having a dog. My Mom, who is no longer on this Earth, was my first dog training *mentor* even though she was not a *dog trainer*. Our dogs didn't have *behavior* problems.

My Mom was very practical about raising and maintaining dogs. They were treated like us kids - or maybe we were treated like the dogs, I don't know. There were rules within certain limits, but she wasn't heavy handed about it. Everybody only got one command. If she told you to sit, you didn't question why only where. Puppies and kids got into things.

That was the nature of puppies and kids until they were older, so they were allowed to do only certain things and given only some freedoms until they were old enough to demonstrate that they could successfully do the others.

A dog that was shy or fearful wasn't allowed to stay that way for very long. My Mom would firmly but gently work the dog out of it. She equated this to one of us children not wanting to go to school. Tough. You are going.

Aggression, like fighting, wasn't allowed and was quickly and soundly corrected. And if the aggression was directed AT Mom, there would be a tough penalty (my mom was big enough to go bear hunting with a switch and catch the bear!). Once the aggression was over and my Mom prevailed, it was all ok and the dog (or in the case of my brother who made that mistake only once) was accepted without a second thought. Life wasn't always fair.

Sometimes you had to do things you were afraid of doing, go places you were afraid of going, and meet people you didn't like. Later in her life, she babysat and was especially good with children with special needs. Watching her work with kids that were fearful or aggressive taught me more about 'training' than any 'trainer' I have worked with since.

Mom's dog training 'equipment' was simple. No prongs or e-collars or clickers. She didn't even use chain collars. The dogs had a simple inexpensive buckle collar and a leather or nylon leash for when they went *out* to the park, vet, or groomer. When I started 'training' competitively, she thought the use of all that equipment was unnecessary and couldn't imagine having to have a separate collar for this or leash for that.

So, reward the behavior you want and correct the inappropriate behavior. Don't allow the dog to be successful in a behavior you don't want to perpetuate. Be firm, but be gentle. And it doesn't matter what equipment you use as long as you are consistent.

It worked for Mom!