

Getting Started

1

Introduction

I'm sitting here on a sunny California morning watching our dogs – Hally, our little Pug, is sitting in the sun, tummy exposed to the warmth, eyes half-closed with a dazed look of half-sleep on her face. Pugs love to warm themselves in the sun. My heart feels warm just watching her.

Across the yard, Cambria, our Chinese Crested Powderpuff, is romping and jumping like a deer. She's still a pup – well, an adolescent now, about 7 months old. She's busying herself, as usual, and vacillates between running and jumping, exploring gopher holes, and seeing if she can entice Sahara or Chili to play with her. Just watching her makes me laugh. A Chinese Crested is not quite all dog – they are part creature.

Sahara, our adult Anatolian Shepherd, is laying quietly on the highest point in the yard. From her favorite vantage point, she can see over our wooden fence and to the street in front of our property, all the while keeping a careful eye on the llamas and goats that she likes to watch over. She is calm and intent, yet at any moment she could jump to her feet, move at a speed unimagineable in a large, 135-pound dog, with her hackles up and tail raised to confront any incoming intruder or predator. When I look at her, I just marvel at what a wonderful creature she is.

In the corner of the yard is Chili. He's like a piece of my heart. Some of us “dog people” talk about our “heart” dog. He is definitely one of mine. He was rescued from the streets of Mexico at about 8 months old by my friends Robin and Ben. Robin, a veterinarian, brought him to her clinic and doctored him up for about 2 months. He had lost all his hair and was malnourished. I volunteered to simply help her train him and fell in love at first sight. He is about 6 years old and is a Corgi, Aussie and who-knows-what-else cross. As an adolescent, I found him easy to train and work with. As he approached adulthood, he developed a number of serious aggression issues. He has been both a challenge and one of the best dogs I've ever lived with. He has been a great teacher, and he has helped me to be compassionate and understanding with my clients that live with “difficult” dogs. He reminds me of the duality of life – like having a child whom you hope will be a doctor and instead that child decides to be an artist. Not a bad thing all-in-all, just different than what you had imagined. That's how Chili has been for me, and, yet, I love him all the same.

Kiko is in the corner of the yard and has found a small hole though which he can catch a glimpse of the new neighbor's dogs. He is entranced. Suddenly he

breaks into barking and jumping around. He stops and sniffs the air. He's a Kees-hund/Collie cross that we adopted from the local Humane Society about 8 years ago. He's now approximately 10 years old. He's had both knees operated on and can run like the wind again. I like to watch him. Even though he came to us with major behavioral issues, including aggression towards strangers, children, and serious resource guarding, he is a total love bug. He will melt into your arms and cuddle the way herding dogs often do.

Lying close to me is Crystal Moon. My little Princess. She's a Lhasa Apso and for so many years ruled the pack as dominant female. Now at 16-¹/₂ years old, she has begrudgingly surrendered that job to Sahara. She has only 25 % of her sight left, and her hearing is not good. Some days she's stiff from arthritis, and some days she acts like a puppy again. She still eats well and appears to enjoy life. I tear-up at times knowing that her time with me on earth is nearing an end. I comfort myself knowing that she'll join her partner, Wags, who was my male Lhasa Apso and her playmate for 12 years. Wags passed four years ago. I still miss him.

The journey through life with each of our dogs, especially for those of us who consider ourselves "dog people," is amazing and wonderful. The connection we establish with our dogs through positive training is the icing on the cake. More than just having a dog that will come when called, stay when asked, or spin or weave through my legs in a musical freestyle routine, I have developed a deep connection with each dog. That is the beauty of training your dog. The benefits far outweigh the time invested. This book is about how to get started training your dog with an amazing and effective method of training called "Clicker Training." More than that, this book is about a journey you will take that can teach you how to connect with your dog and establish a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. When training is successful, it's a wonderful feeling, but it is life-journey you must travel together, and all traveling companions must learn and do their part. As with all adventures, there are things to learn, tasks to perform, and obstacles along the way; however, as you go remember that you don't want to miss the fun.

Mapping the Course

Before you step foot on this new trail, it's important that you consider what is unique about this journey. Knowing what to expect and developing an appropriate set of expectations is key to managing your end of the dialogue. In the *Handbook to Higher Consciousness*, written by Ken Keyes, Jr., in 1975, Keyes outlines 12 pathways that will help one to cope with and improve their lives. Having studied and used his 12 pathways for many years, I've come up with my own 12 path-

ways in regard to dog training. Described below are several essential concepts to keep in mind as you begin:

Pathways for Training Pups

- Give up the need to “control” your pet. Clicker training is based on giving your dog a choice. You will not need to force your dog to respond with the correct behavior because the dog will choose the behavior you want because that’s the behavior that’s been reinforced.
- Be aware that your perception of how your pet should behave often conflicts with a dog’s natural instinctive behavior. Remember, these are dogs. Not humans. Be patient and train your dog by utilizing that instinct, and then make a place in your thoughts for your dog to act the way you would like them to. “My dog is calm and sits to greet strangers.”
- Every training challenge provides you with an opportunity to appraise whether or not you are calm, focused, and capitalizing on your training techniques. If you get frustrated, breathe and take a break. You will learn a lot about yourself from your dog!
- Stay in the moment with your pet – focus on how your pet is doing today, and don’t be preoccupied with past problems or future expectations. Rather than saying “my dog never comes when called,” do the training, and then say, “it’s typical for my dog to come when called.”
- Take full responsibility for how you are training and be aware that your attitude can influence your pet’s reactions.
- Accept your pet completely at all times. Remember, these are dogs, not humans, and it’s up to us to train them so that they can be successful in a human environment. Be aware of your reactions to your dog’s behavior. Be aware of your consistency and commitment to train your dog.
- Maintain a positive communication with your pet. If challenges arise in the training process, examine your attitude and your expectations. Then examine your training methods.
- Be compassionate with your pet and be aware that your dog may not always understand what you want.
- Keep a positive state of mind when training your dog. If you are angry, work on your attitude first, before continuing your training session.
- Strive to feel as one with your pet and all living things.
- Continuously monitor your emotions – your dog does. Create a place in your thinking for your dog to do well in training or competitive situations – visualize!
- Perceive your pet as a unique entity deserving of the best you have to offer.