

Inside This Issue:

- *Particular Person*
Teaching the dog trainer
- *Interview With Terry Ryan*
Life as a trainer

AN OBEDIENCE INSTRUCTOR'S FORUM FORWARD

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Part Three: Working With Aggressive Dogs - Ethics And The Law

By Jan Gribble

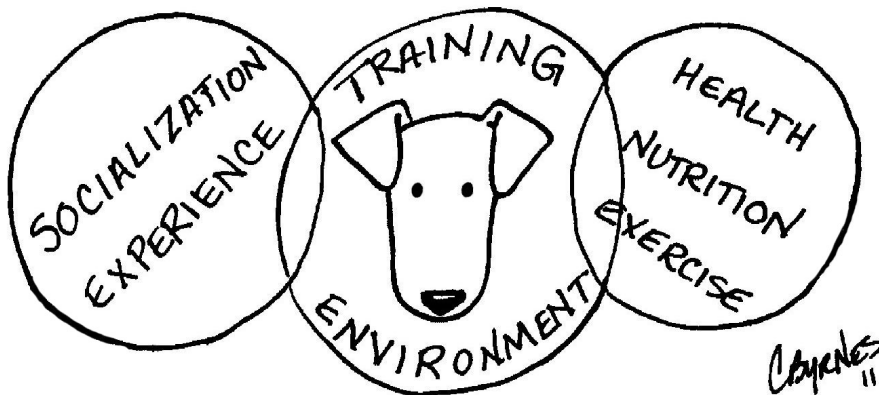
Disclaimer: This article is not intended to dispense legal advice. The author takes no responsibility for use of information contained herein and advises that an attorney be consulted to evaluate a specific situation and provide legal advice on how to proceed.

This is the third article in a multi-part series on aspects of dealing with dogs exhibiting aggressive behaviors which are often overlooked or not understood by instructors and trainers. After reading the first two articles it is hoped that the trainer/instructor is better prepared to deal with the complexity involved in dealing with aggressive behaviors and understands that knowledge of aggressive behaviors is only one part of being competent to address these types of cases.

It is imperative that anyone conducting business, regardless of the type of business, know what laws, local, state and federal, affect their business. All too often, dog trainers and instructors fail to recognize that there are laws, other than local animal ordinances, that are directly relevant to what they do. This is especially true when it comes to dealing with behavioral issues such as aggression.

Behavior does not happen in a vacuum but rather is part of a larger picture which includes the health (physical and mental) of the dog. Tied into this larger picture is nutrition. Many trainers and instructors have educated themselves to varying degrees on how certain health issues or nutritional deficiencies impact behavior, but

See Aggressive Dogs page 2



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Aggressive Dogs: *from page 1*

while they may understand the correlation, legally this does not mean they are competent and qualified to give advice to dog owners. In many areas giving advice, and especially advocating the use of herbal or homeopathic remedies, or giving therapeutic massages crosses the line into practicing veterinary medicine. Professionals should be aware of the Veterinary Practice Act in their state and be careful not to do anything that is in violation of this act (always assuming that the professional does not also hold a license to practice veterinary medicine in that state.)

Working with licensed veterinarians is important, especially if the trainer/instructor deals with significant behavioral issues that may be rooted in health issues. However, keeping the veterinarian in the loop regarding any training program the professional advises requires the consent of the owner. Either a separate form signed by the owners or a contained in an executed Release of Liability is required to enable communication between the veterinarian and the trainer/instructor.

This also allows the professional to copy the veterinarian on any correspondence sent to the client regarding a failure to follow advice or recommendations and when a client is “fired.” This ensures that the veterinarian is aware that the client was noncompliant and preserves the good working relationship that hopefully exists between the veterinarian and dog trainer/instructor. As an aside, any communication sent to the client severing a business relationship should clearly set out the reasons for termination, the fact that the dog owner was counseled regarding the potential for liability should the dog continue to aggress and should be sent certified mail, return receipt so that, in the event a later problem arises, the professional has proof that the dog owner was so informed.

Laws defining “aggressive” dogs were covered in Part One of this series. However, it is also important to know what the legal definition of a “bite” is and the reporting requirements for the same. In addressing this specific issue, it is essential to keep in mind that most legislation regarding the reporting of bites was first created as a way to address the very real public health issue of rabies. However, this particular issue also has serious ethical considerations which may be in conflict with the law and every professional should consider how he or she is going to deal with this potential conflict before it occurs.

For example, the Albuquerque, New Mexico ordinance defines a bite as “A puncture or tear of the skin inflicted by the teeth of a Companion Animal.” New Mexico state law requires all animal bites to be reported to the local animal control officer along with a description of the animal and the circumstances of the bite. Given the fact that every puppy is going to inflict a bite, and probably several bites, before the pup learns bite inhibition, if every owner complied with the law with respect to reporting bites, the system would very quickly be overwhelmed. Such reports would also not be in keeping with the spirit of the law with regards to why bites should be reported. While the example given is for a specific location, there is going to be both a definition of a bite and reporting requirements for every locale.



Where does this leave the professional though? This is from the Code of Ethics of a professional organization: 1.2 Animal behavior consultants comply with applicable laws regarding the reporting of animal bites and possible neglect/abuse; 3.3 Animal behavior consultants maintain adequate knowledge of and adhere to applicable laws, ethics, and professional standards. For someone who belongs to this particular organization, there is the implicit statement that ethics are linked to compliance with the law. For others though, the ethical decision is to not report bites made by puppies or instances where the professional feels that while a bite, by legal definition, has occurred it creates no public health risk or hazard.

It is only common sense to expect that anyone working with a dog that has been stated to be aggressive is more at risk for sustaining a bite. While a competent trainer/instructor should be able to work with an aggressive dog without triggering a bite, the simple fact remains that even the best trainers and instructors are not exempt from being bitten. Being tired, preoccupied and not paying sufficient attention, and carelessness are just a few ways a trainer/instructor can find themselves on the receiving end of a bite. Quite frankly, even if the professional doesn't make a mistake, if he or she makes a practice of working with aggressive dogs, at some point in time he or she will be bitten. However, if a professional chooses to deal with a dog that has been identified as aggressive, he or she assumes the risk. If the worse happens and a bite occurs, is it ethical for the instructor/trainer to subject a client to the legal repercussions which may result in the death of the dog? Is it ethical to expect the client to pay for medical costs associated with the bite? While the professional may be legally required to perform an action, it also needs to be considered whether that performance is ethical. Each professional will have to make a decision on whether or not a particular course of action is ethical and if ethics collide with legalities, how he or she is going to proceed.

Another serious ethical consideration will be the focus of the next, and last, article in this series.

All professionals need to know and understand the laws that affect their business, but it is also important for the professional to make decisions on actions based upon ethical considerations as well.

That One Particular Person

by Charlotte Schwartz

A Particular Idea

From time to time, I meet people who come to me asking if I'd help them become dog trainers. Most of them have trained at least one dog prior to asking and they all realize they will need some personal experience teaching dog owners before they can consider themselves trainers.

I usually smile as I listen to their request and realize how I must have sounded to my own teachers those many years ago. Now it's time to chuckle to myself when I think about how a good teacher never stops learning. I've always said one won't live long enough to learn all there is to know about dogs and teaching them and their owners.

All we can do is share what we do know and realize that life experiences in working with people and dogs has much to teach us. All we have to do is listen, learn and let each lesson lead us to the next level of understanding.

Think about it. Handling a dog, reading all the dog behavior books you can find, watching and observing the upper echelon of noted trainers at seminars and classes, is like looking at an ice berg. What lies beneath the surface is the real meat of the matter and that will be yours if and when you have the wisdom, the fortitude, and the perseverance to take in about ninety percent of what constitutes the combination of homo sapiens and canines.

All that and a few minor details such as physical stamina, patience, your command of the English language and your ability to articulate. Add to those items sooner or later you'll discover that you need to excel in sympathy and empathy, a gift of psychology and a talent to be a comedienne. Never mind a few dozen other characteristics that you'll find out about as you begin teaching!

I've been teaching for over fifty years and yet I can be sure that during every class I teach, there will be either a dog or a handler who has something new to teach me. As a matter of fact, that's probably the number one reason why I keep teaching. I love learning!

For that reason, I usually agree to take on a new apprentice in the hopes that the wisdom I've gained and the experiences I've had will serve the novice well in years to come. In addition, I'll help them develop a method of teaching that will help dogs, owners and their families to learn without force or any form of violence.



The schedule below is titled "Ten Steps to Teaching An Exercise". For those who are just beginning to teach others how to train their dogs, my Ten Steps will help get you started on your own successful journey to mentoring. As time goes on, you'll likely rearrange the steps, delete some, or reword others. So go ahead, use it to help you launch a theory and method of your own. My steps are used solely to keep me organized when I'm teaching any behavior. It's sort of a personal reminder to help me keep my students interested and successful.

1. *Name of exercise*
2. *Purpose of exercise*
3. *Goal of lesson*
4. *Method and theory - Teaching owners how to praise their dogs*
5. *Actual steps - Praise owners*
6. *Repeat three times - Tell them what you're going to tell them*
Tell them
Tell them what you told them
7. *Practice rules for home*
8. *Progression to goal - Praise and Encourage*
9. *Alternative methods when dog doesn't respond to first presentation*
10. *Alternative methods when owner and/or dog can't execute steps*

This particular idea is one I've wanted to share with NADOI members for a long time. I created this schedule more than twenty years ago and it often serves to remind me to keep focused on the subject at hand when I'm teaching. Thus I decided the first issue of 2011 would be a perfect time to do that rather than focusing on a person. However, I promise that the next issue of Particular Person will return with a story about some very particular individual. Until then, happy training everyone!



Charlotte Schwartz <cdogteacher@aol.com>

An Interview With Terry Ryan

by Marti Kincaid

Terry Ryan is one of the most well-known figures in the world of positive dog training. She has been a mentor to a generation of trainers world-wide. *In The Toolbox for Building a Great Family Dog*, Terry presents a complete guide to help families raise a happy and well-mannered dog using techniques and games that are both fun and effective. The focus of this book is the family dog and all that phrase implies including the interactions between kids and dogs, household management strategies, common behavioral problems and training games the whole family (and dog!) can enjoy.

Terry's fans will remember her 1998 book *The Toolbox for Remodeling Your Problem Dog*. This was one the first books to translate the science of dog behavior and training into practical and easily understood skills for both pet owner and trainer. The focus was on how to solve behavior problems. Now, as Terry puts it, her emphasis is on circumventing problems by rewarding good behavior and teaching alternative behaviors to replace those that are less desirable.

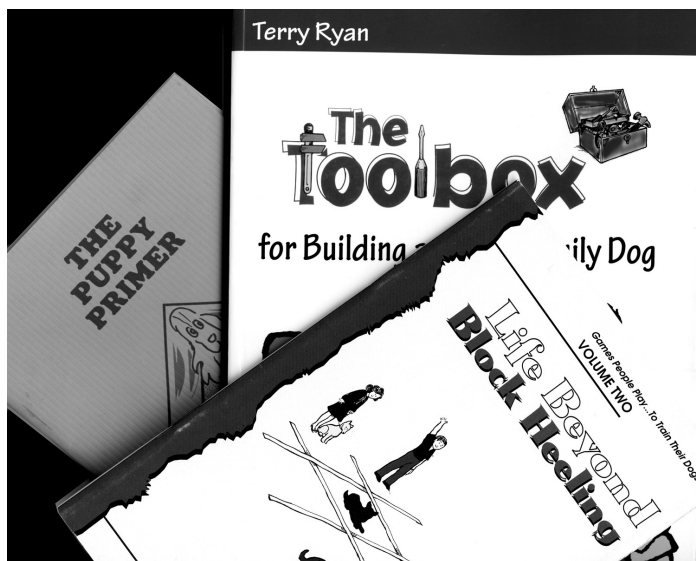
Terry, you've been instructing and presenting for years, traveling and observing the entire time.

How have you managed to do it?

Endurance, as in the "going slow and steady" mode. Keep trying new things and keep learning, so it is always interesting for me, too! Always wanting to instruct. I have a lot of good people working with me, so my school can keep going during my many absences

What is the reinforcement for you?

Getting paid for doing what I'd do anyway.



What are some events or moments that have directly affected or changed your instructing?

It's been more or less continual through taking or teaching various workshops or courses. Then there is the direct learning from the people and dogs that I'm in contact with.

If an obedience instructor only taught one thing to a pet owner, what would you choose? Why?

It would have to be relationship. It's the very foundation for communication between the owner and the dog

Would this be the same in other countries? Why or why not?

Yes, it is fundamental no matter the culture.

What do you see as the most common mistake made by a dog owner? Has this changed over the years?

What I've seen is a lack of understanding their dog's body language. Also, the dog owner seems to lack experience in how to enrich the dog's life and provide guidance for good manners.

What do you see as a common mistake made by instructors? And has this changed over the years?

Instructors could concentrate more on what is going WELL in the class and emphasize that for the students. Both ends of the leash need to feel success.

What are dog owners doing better now than before?

They are welcoming dogs into their homes rather than yards only.

What are instructors doing better now than before?

Networking! Thanks to several good organizations, internet, magazines and lots of books.

You're a skilled observer and able to distill information into small parts. How did you develop this skill?

I'm still working on that. The credit for the skill level I've achieved would go to the animals. The animals are teaching me to be better and better.

You've built Legacy into a well-known business. What advice would you give to those trying to establish their own business?

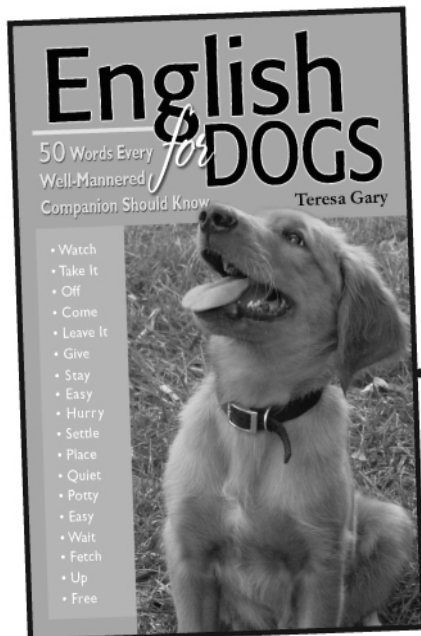
Walk your talk. Hands-on experience is essential. Keep improving and learning. Keep connecting the dots and searching for the answers.

Continued on page 6

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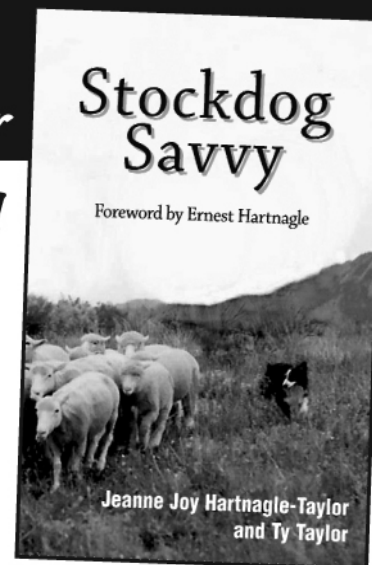
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Interview: from page 4

Where did your idea for having a camp come from?

Where did the chicken training idea come from?

The first camps that involved dogs that I knew about were the Volhard camps on the east coast and Roy Hunters camps in England. At the time I couldn't afford either, so I just started my own in Washington!

The idea of using chickens at the early camps evolved from using rats and Skinner boxes. After a few years of rats I wanted to try something else. Ingrid Kang Shallenberg was helping me with camps and she suggested chickens since she had a backyard full of them. She helped me get started in chicken training. Ingrid formerly worked with Karen Pryor at Sea Life Park. Later, I was able to convince, beg, bribe Marian Breland Bailey and Bob Bailey to come and teach the chicken part of my dog camps for me. Now the chicken training is of great interest to me. We've been doing corporate chicken training for team building, started an east coast camp. We have a specialized chicken training course for working dog handlers, and we've attracted a number of researchers and zoo staff - always something new to keep it interesting. I never thought I'd be published in a chicken magazine!

Are there any other comments that you want to make?

Thanks NADOI, for your early guidance. I was your first member west of the Rockies back in the day. NADOI helped me connect and not feel quite as isolated here in the wild west.



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FORWARD

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