I

Putting it in Perspective: Past and Present

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

—George Santayana

Overview

When I see a new training book by the latest "designer trainer," or a TV program with the telegenic "trainer to the stars" du jour, I think we are condemned to repeat the past. Dog training and our knowledge of dog behavior has come a long way over the past 100 years, but little (if anything) is "new." As you'll see in Part I, virtually every method falls into one of three discernable categories.

To put dog training in perspective, in this section I review and evaluate training methods using our knowledge of the past—where modern dog training started; what has happened over the past hundred plus years; and where we are now. As dog trainers have become better informed about how dogs learn, there has been greater evaluation of training methods from the dog's perspective, using our improved recognition of dog body language and communication for insights into what our dogs are thinking and feeling. With this as a sound foundation, we are not condemned to repeat the past. Dogs are certainly the better for that!

Chapter 1
Crossing Over

My Crossover Journal

I was frustrated, disappointed, and, truth be told, embarrassed when I first tried clicker training with my four-year-old Bearded Collie, Mayday. Enrolled in a clicker training seminar with Karen Pryor and Gary Wilkes, I was not just a participant, I was the host—and an experienced, successful dog trainer. Given instructions to shape a behavior, we participants spread out to train our dogs. All around me I heard click, click, click as others successfully shaped behaviors. I stood silent. Well-trained and extremely "obedient," Mayday looked at me, patiently waiting to be told what to do, offering nothing to click. Why wouldn't my dog cooperate?! Move! Offer me something! But Mayday's extensive training history said not to, and I couldn't make him. I had to allow him. A new approach to me and foreign to my dog, it would be two months before Mayday stopped waiting for a directive. We were, the two of us, quintessential "crossovers."

As you embark on this training adventure, you may not experience the same level of frustration as I did when Mayday and I first tried clicker training. You may not even consider yourself a crossover trainer, but the chances are good that you are.

The term "crossover" was coined by Corally Burmaster, founding editor of *The Clicker Journal*, to refer to those of us who have some training experience and have decided to "crossover" to clicker training. Whether or not you have a great deal of previous experience, it is rare for someone to know absolutely nothing about training a dog and have no preconceptions.

Almost everyone's a "crossover" trainer

Dog owners get information and impressions from many sources that may include training on your own, taking a training class, reading a book, or training instinctively—doing what "feels right." We get ideas from watching dog trainers on TV, and even from friends and co-workers with (or even without) dogs.

Sit in a restaurant and tune in to snippets of conversation from a nearby table. Chances are you'll hear the word "dog." Often the topic is a behavior issue, complete with a layperson's advice and counsel. Anecdotal information and opinions about dealing

with dogs are easy to come by and they influence dog owners both subtly and explicitly. Even people who have never actually trained a dog have preconceptions and ideas about training, making everyone a potential "crossover" trainer.

Backgrounds vary, but as their dogs' trainers, all owners, fall into one of the following. You may be:

- A trainer with knowledge (from a little to a lot) of clicker training.
- A crossover trainer with a crossover dog (one that has had some prior training by another method).
- A crossover trainer starting fresh with an untrained dog.
- Or one of the fortunate few—a dog owner with no prior training experience—nothing to unlearn—starting fresh with an untrained dog who also has nothing to unlearn.

Regardless of your background or experience, before learning about clicker training, it is helpful to understand what has gone before as training methods have developed over time.

A brief history

Dog training has been around as long as we've had relationships with dogs, but "modern" dog training is only about 100 years old. Over the past century, many dog training techniques and methods have developed, evolved, come, and gone.

How it started

Col. Konrad Most, arguably the father of modern dog training, trained military and service dogs in Germany at the turn of the 20th century. Most wrote the first comprehensive "how-to" book, *Training Dogs, a Manual*, published in Germany in 1910, and then translated into English in 1954, the year of his death.

Training resilient dogs with strong temperaments, Most's techniques relied on collar corrections and punishment, an approach viewed as heavy-handed by the majority of pet dog trainers today. While now considered harsh, Most's training followed the principles of **operant learning** (which is how dogs learn to offer voluntary behaviors), effectively using consequences (corrections and praise) to reward or punish a dog's behavior. By and large, his techniques were successful, especially with the working dogs Most and his disciples trained.

Most's compulsion-praise training techniques spread throughout the world as his students and disciples emigrated to other countries. His structured approach to training was adopted as the model for military training throughout Europe and North America, and his methods are still used today in many military, police, and service dog training programs.

Three trainers helped spread Most's training philosophy to America. They were Carl Spitz (*Training Your Dog*, 1938), Josef Weber (*The Dog in Training*, 1939), and Hans Tosutti (*Companion Dog Training*, 1942).

Spitz lived in California where he trained dogs for the movies (Toto in the *Wizard of Oz* and Buck in *Call of the Wild* among others). He is credited with devising a system

of silent hand signals by which to control his dogs at a distance. Significantly, it was Carl Spitz who developed the American war dog training program in World War II, training Doberman Pinschers for the Marines at Camp Pendleton.

Hans Tosutti immigrated to Boston, where, in 1936, he founded the New England Dog Training Club, the oldest existing AKC member obedience training club in the country. Josef Weber lived in Philadelphia, and it is through his students that this method of training was spread even further.

One of Weber's students was Blanche Saunders (*The Complete Book of Dog Obedience*, 1954 and *The Story of Dog Obedience*, 1974) who, with Helene Whitehouse Walker, originated AKC Obedience trials, traveling around the country spreading the concept of companion dog training to the general public. Among Saunders' students and followers were many of the well-known trainers of the 1950's and 60's, including Winifred Strickland (*Expert Obedience Training for Dogs*, 1965) whose book, *Obedience Class Instruction for Dogs*, published in 1971, was the first publication targeting group class instructors—those who taught others how to train, rather than trainers who worked one-on-one with a dog.

The "Koehler" era

It was the advent of World War II that solidified the military training approach as the model for pet dog training. At the end of the war, many soldiers came home with a skill: training dogs using the methods developed by Konrad Most fifty years earlier. In the U.S., the most famous of these dog-training veterans was William Koehler, whose book *The Koehler Method of Dog Training* (1962) was, and may still be, the all-time best-selling dog training manual.

With relatively few training books to compete with it, and unabashedly self-promoting, Koehler's manual became a reference for virtually every dog owner and dog trainer for the next two decades. While it requires a trainer to have good timing and coordination, the "Koehler Method" can result in successfully trained dogs. It offers clear instructions and effective techniques for trainers able to employ them, at least with dogs that are able to handle "corrections." Using the consequences of punishment and praise as Konrad Most before him, Koehler's book profoundly influenced dog training throughout the U.S.

Adding to the popularization of dog training were the movie (and later TV) dogs, Rin Tin Tin (trained by Corp. Lee Duncan, who learned from a Most-trained German Kennel Master who was held in an American prison camp in World War I), and Lassie (trained by Rudd Weatherwax, whose brother Jack worked for Carl Spitz). So it was that the two world wars laid the foundation for the German military dog training method that spanned the next 80 plus years.

This history puts in perspective the global nature of "traditional," compulsion-praise training, based on the teachings of Konrad Most, down to William Koehler who made an indelible mark on dog training in America, and whose method is still followed by many today.

The dawn of "dog-friendly" training

Other training methods also began to evolve during this same time. *Patient Like the Chipmunks*, a video by Bob and Marion Bailey, presented an overview of operant

conditioning as a method of training animals. Marian Breland Bailey and her late husband, Keller Breland, were graduate students of behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner, who wrote about operant learning in his book *Behavior of Organisms* (1938). Leaving graduate school in the early 1940's, the Brelands founded a business devoted to training and providing many different animal species for commercial and government enterprises. Unlike Most and Koehler, their training focused primarily on positive reinforcement rather than relying on "corrections" or punishment.

Keller Breland was the first to use a clicker in training a dog—a tin cricket he used to train field dogs and herding dogs to work away from the handler. Calling the sound a "bridging stimulus," Breland marked the behavior with a clicker, as Marian told it to me, "to **bridge** the time between the behavior and the delivery of the reinforcer."

Breland's training with a marker might have spread beyond his own business were it not for the returning soldiers infused with compulsion training ideas and the fact that the Brelands' focus was not on pet dog training. Keller Breland used his techniques with other species, notably in the 1950's developing the training program for marine mammals that is still in use today. The Brelands worked with trainers and associates in many locations, including Sea Life Park, then owned by Karen Pryor and her husband.

In the 1970's and 1980's the dog training world saw a growing movement away from correction-based training. Milo and Margaret Pearsall (*The Pearsall Guide to Successful Dog Training—Obedience From the Dog's Point of View*, 1973) introduced the concept of Puppy Kindergarten classes for puppies as young as eight weeks. A radical departure from the "rule" of waiting until a dog was six months old, Pearsall used gentle placement rather than the collar corrections and force that precluded obedience training for such young puppies.

Jack Volhard and I took it a step further (*Training Your Dog—The Step-by-Step Manual*, 1983), introducing a food lure with the "Motivational Method." Around the same time, Ian Dunbar introduced lure-reward training to the general public with his ground-breaking dog training video, *Sirius Puppy Training*.

Enough training books!

In the early 1980's, when Jack Volhard and I first approached publisher Howell Book House, known for their quality dog publications, they were reluctant to publish "yet another" dog training book. Having previously rejected many manuscripts, they believed there were already enough training books on the shelves. We convinced them to take a chance on *Training Your Dog*. When the critical acclaim and popularity of our book clearly demonstrated that the dog-owning public likes training books, Howell pulled out the stops. *Training Your Dog* opened the door to the new generation of dog training books that pack the shelves you find in bookstores today.

Karen Pryor's impact

At about the same time, a book that had nothing to do with dog training would nonetheless profoundly impact it, changing its face forever. In 1984 Simon and Schuster

published Karen Pryor's guide to *human* interpersonal relations, which they titled *Don't Shoot the Dog!* The serendipitous selection of this title brought Pryor to the attention of dog trainers, setting in motion a convergence between Keller Breland's approach to animal training and the dog training community.

In the early 1990's, Pryor teamed up with Gary Wilkes, a professional dog trainer and the first since Keller Breland to use clicker training with dogs. Through their articles and seminars, the collaboration of Pryor and Wilkes cast the die to spread the word of clicker training.

To meet the needs of a growing community of clicker trainers, Corally Burmaster founded and published the quarterly *The Clicker Journal*. Coining the word "crossover," Burmaster gave a name to the hundreds, soon thousands of dog owners and trainers from a variety of backgrounds, who were discovering, learning about, and embracing clicker training.

Through the wonders of the Internet, clicker training for dogs has spread across the world in a few short years. But as this brief history demonstrates, the principles of clicker training have been around for over 70 years. It is not a New Age, touchy-feely gimmick, as those who try to marginalize it may claim. It has just taken this long for the dog training community to catch up, with crossover trainers leading the parade.

"Natural" or "Pack Mentality" methods

Recently there has been a surge of interest in training methods claiming to be based on "pack mentality." Rooted in common (and often mistaken) beliefs about how dogs (and wolves) interact with each other and maintain pack order, the focus is on the trainer replicating the way a "dominant" dog supposedly disciplines lower ranking members of the pack. This approach is personified by Cesar Millan, a charismatic TV personality who, in an online interview for National Geographic News, erroneously claims: "If you study a pack of dogs, the first authority figure is the mom, and the mom does pin the puppies down. It's an instinctual relationship that I have to establish with them...Domination, dominating, and the alpha roll exist, and will exist, until we get rid of the species of dog."

While the concept of training dogs the "natural way" has some intellectual appeal, unfortunately much of what Millan and others claim is based on faulty research. For example, the "alpha roll" does not exist, and the mom does not pin puppies down. (For the real skinny on what mom does and what her lesson is, see "Life Lessons" in Chapter 10.) The dominant dog does not roll the subordinate; the subordinate dog falls over onto his back, "rolling" himself. When a more assertive being (dog or person) rolls a dog, it is an *attack*!

The second fallacy is the idea that dogs view us through the same lens as they view each other. While hierarchies may exist within an intra-dog pack, that differs from our inter-species relationship. People are not dogs, and dogs aren't fooled when a human attempts to "act like a dog." To try

to act like a dog demeans a dog's intelligence, awareness, insight, and perceptions. Just as we must not be anthropomorphic—viewing dogs as "furry people with four legs"—we must not presume that dogs suffer from "caninepomorphism," viewing humans as "two-legged, sparsely-haired dogs with inferior biting ability."

Happily, this dominance model appeared to be dying out with a number of leading trainers like Pat Miller and Jean Donaldson pointing out the many fallacies of this approach. Sadly, it makes for exciting television, leading to a popular revival of this erroneous "natural" approach, that undermines our bond of trust, is unkind to dogs, and damages our relationship with them, often irreparably.

Why I crossed over to clicker training

Throughout my career as a dog trainer, I've been open to finding something better than what I already know. As I learned different ways to get a dog to "obey," it became clear that virtually every approach I tried, read about, heard about, or observed "worked"—that is, they all achieve some level of dog compliance (potential downsides or side effects notwithstanding). Since so many training methods "work," at least with some dogs some of the time, how does one discover or choose which method is "best?"

As I've studied dog training and instructing (teaching others to train their own dogs) and learned about learning theory and dog behavior, I've solidified my principles into a philosophy that seeks and uses training techniques that meet the following criteria:

1. A technique must "work"—the dog can learn how to perform the desired behavior.
2. It must be fair to the dog and do no harm to either the dog or the relationship between the dog and owner.
3. The average dog owner, including children, must be able to do it. That is, it cannot rely on exceptional talent, innate dog-handling skills, or dominating the dog.
4. The average owner must be willing to perform the training technique. That is, a method must not require owners to do something to their dogs that they find too challenging or objectionable.

My "old" approach to training, based on the method in my two books with Jack Volhard, met these criteria. But in terms of #1—that it works—clicker training blows everything else out of the water, while being in harmony with the rest of my philosophy. I simply could not ignore this "new" training.

As I've learned clicker training, using it to train dogs and teaching it to others, I have become more and more convinced that clicker training communicates information to and with dogs as it should be. But it was a tenacious little dog that changed my training approach forever.

Maggie the Pug

My staff and I first saw clicker training in action when we hosted a seminar with Karen Pryor and Gary Wilkes. The effect was monumental, with every one of our trainers agreeing that we wanted to learn more. I was not about to blithely toss out the method that had served us well for over 20 years of training people and their dogs, but we all wanted to experiment and learn more about clicker training. It wasn't long however, before clicker training was put to the test.

About a week after the seminar, Laura, our head trainer, came to me with a problem. She had been training Maggie, a five-year old rescue Pug who had recently been adopted by two of our doggy daycare "parents." Maggie had been coming to daycare-training for three weeks and was doing well in everything except lying down. Clearly having had some prior training with a method that had created an aversion, this otherwise sweet, loving Pug became a Tasmanian devil, viciously biting at any attempt to get her to lie down.

Laura had tried everything she could think of—luring with food didn't work, and gently placing her in a down was out of the question. Even after three weeks of desensitization, Laura could not touch her if Maggie thought lying down was in the offing. And the pressure was on: We had just learned that Maggie's family was moving to California. Training Maggie to lie down before she left had become a mission…and we had just three days to do it.

With other options exhausted, we had nothing to lose: Let's try clicker training—our first "professional" foray. Armed with a clicker and a bowl of cut-up hot dogs, Laura, Maggie, and I got started. I began by clicking and giving her a treat. Maggie got right into this neat, new game: "You make a funny noise and throw me a hot dog? Awright!!!"

Next, I started clicking for different behaviors—whatever she did. She sat—I clicked and tossed her a treat. Stand up—click and treat. Walk toward me—click and treat. Eye contact—click and treat. I didn't say anything; no commands, no cues, just a click followed by a hot dog.

A Pug's face, with its wide, alert eyes, smiling mouth, and open, honest expression is really easy to read. We could tell that Maggie was having a good time, when suddenly her expression changed from enjoyment to pensive. In a moment of clarity Maggie realized that I was clicking *her*—that I clicked when *she* did something. She paused. Her eyes got even wider, and in a moment of pure communication, she tested me. Looking directly into my eyes, she sat—click and treat. It was instantly clear to us that Maggie got what the click meant: *She* could make me click.

With Maggie now playing the game, I began to use **selective clicking** to shape the behavior we wanted. I clicked anything that led toward lying down. If she lowered her head, dipped her body, sat and put a foot forward, anything that approximated starting to lie down, I clicked and treated. This meant that she was no longer clicked for everything she did. Maggie didn't like this rule change. She got mad. Looking right at me, she started swearing—barking, spitting, sputtering, growling—language that would embarrass a longshoreman. Suddenly, in a fit of temper, Maggie threw herself down! Click.

Silence. No one moved. Maggie stopped dead. Clearly, her brain was working overtime as she pondered this new development. Then she erupted in furious barking…and threw herself down again. Click and treat. She ate and immediately began barking again as she quickly lay down once more. Click.

Maggie threw herself into a down, hollering and swearing at the top of her lungs.

At that point, I began to wait for her to lie down without barking or we would have achieved our mission of getting Maggie to lie down, but only accompanied by furious noise! Waiting for quiet took a while as Maggie continued loudly barking, repeatedly throwing herself to the ground. And then she took a breath as she lay down. An accidental moment of quiet—I'll take it! Click and treat. She went through another spate of barking, then quiet with another down. I waited until I had marked and rewarded two more quiet ones, then we took a break.

I looked at the clock. From start to finish, from the first click to the third quiet down in a row, had taken …What?!...Could it be? No…This isn't possible!

Just *eight* minutes?! I was flabbergasted. There was something really powerful here. In eight minutes we had accomplished more than we had been able to in literally weeks of training and desensitization.

Over the next two days, Maggie continued to improve. On her last day with us, after just three days of clicker training, we were able to show her Mom that Maggie would lie down on cue. She performed beautifully. And we were hooked!

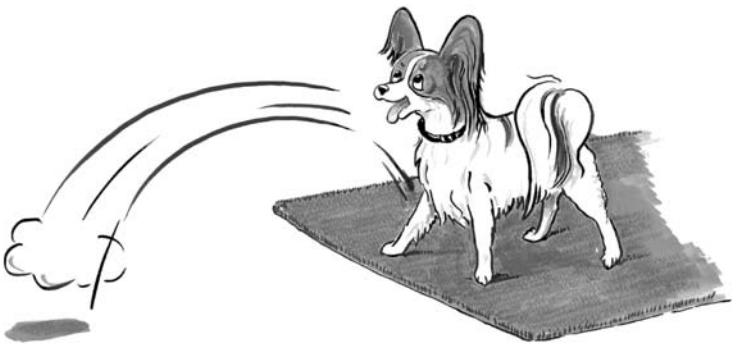
The "Aha!" Moment

Actually, I was hooked before Maggie's final "go home" performance. Unquestionably the most exciting moment for the clicker trainer is when your dog "gets it"—that "Aha! moment" when it "clicks" for your dog…when you can see your dog's mental wheels start to turn. I was hooked the moment Maggie figured out that it was her behavior that got me to click and toss her a treat. I didn't know it at the time, but in retrospect, this was a momentous event. By giving Maggie—and every dog I train—volitional control of her own behavior, I was for the first time, working in partnership with a "Thinking Dog."

I get an adrenaline rush whenever I work a new dog through a behavior, especially the moment the dog unhesitatingly and proudly performs the behavior I'm looking for. I particularly love that moment at a training seminar when participants can see the dog thinking it through, testing the behavior, working out what he needs to do to get me to make that noise and reward him—and then finally, he's got it!

My Crossover Journal

At a seminar in California, I was demonstrating shaping a Papillon to "settle" (go to the blanket, lie down, and stay there). Because I was looking for feet on the mat, not how the dog got onto it, I happened to click him several times when he moved onto it backwards. After just two or three repetitions, this wonderfully bright boy was literally leaping backwards onto the mat. After the click, I'd toss the treat away from the mat. He'd eat, and then cavort over to the mat, turn his back, pop up into the air, and land backwards, much to everyone's delight.



Delighting the audience with his antics, it didn't matter how the Papillon got there. It is being on the mat that gets a click.

An "Aha! moment" doesn't happen just once. Thrillingly for the trainer, it happens over and over. Seeing a dog start to think, offering you behaviors as your true partner-in-training: "Watch this! Did you like that? How about *this*?!" Having your dog become an active participant—helping drive the bus, not just along for the ride—makes for the most exciting human/dog partnership, the most wonderful human/dog relationship imaginable. This is what training a thinking dog is all about!

Clicker training is fun; it's exhilarating; it's rewarding, joyous, and exciting. I can't promise that you won't have moments of frustration. In fact, I guarantee you will! The information in this book is for you, the crossover trainer, to prepare you for some of what you'll likely encounter so you and your dog can experience that thrilling "Aha! Moment" many times over the years to come.