

Lessons Learned in Prison: Collaborative Training in Pet/Prison Programs

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Learning Outcomes

- Share details about how pet/prison programs can challenge and enhance your skills as a trainer and instructor.
- Discuss how program provides an experimental training ground for testing ideas (yours or others) and honing skills.
- Share details about a few specific protocols utilized effectively with our program dogs.

Prison set-up:

- There are multiple handlers and dogs. Numbers vary by facility.
- Ideally, 2 handlers are assigned to every dog.
- This is typically their f/t job, often a paid position.
- Not optional to do the weekly training homework, if they want to maintain position in program.
- Some join to actually learn job skills to use upon release. (Quite different from paying clients!)
- Numerous dogs in program at same time.
- All housed in same building.

Benefits of having multiple dogs at each facility

- Built-in, daily distractions.
- CGC prep.
- Confident dog as 'support' for fearful dog.
- Social/play outlet.
- Opportunities to work on refinement of social skills, play skills, or at least neutral/polite behavior on leash.
- We don't always have this luxury with our paying clients unless we have excellent decoy dogs of our own.

Benefits of multiple handlers

- Feedback system – to me and to each other.
- More input means I'm more likely to get a straight picture.
- Coaching – experienced handlers assist newer ones.
- Collaboration may yield new ideas.
- Extra eyes help, especially with fearful or reactive dogs. Increases safety and reduces # of incidences that may draw negative staff attention.

- For one handler only, it's hard to be vigilant, sweeping the environment for triggers, while also working with dog.
- Working on dog/dog skills requires multiple handlers.

Types of dogs selected for program include the "Tarzan" types!

- Adolescent, full of energy, confident
- Easily frustrated by delay in gratification
 - See it – want it – NOW!
- Quickly, excessively activated by ordinary stimuli
- Rough w/people, dogs, environment ~ jump, mouth, pummel, grab, lunge, shove through obstacles
- Resist restraint, vocalize when frustrated
- Appear unaware of other dogs' cut-off signals

[These dogs are in much need to learn impulse control, and working with so many inspired production of "Fido Refined" dvd]

Program as experimental training ground

Hone presentation skills ~

- Handlers & their learning styles are diverse. Create a safe environment where feedback is welcomed, and you can get input on clarity of your instruction.
- Describe / demo / flush out 'holes' in instruction.
- Test understanding as they implement instructions.
- Have handlers present parts of the lesson themselves so you can assess understanding. (Also good prep for future trainers.)

Test new training ideas – whether they're yours, or other trainers' ideas you've heard about – and get weekly feedback on them.

- Test effectiveness of behavior modification strategies in this challenging setting.
- Assess weekly to see if there are any 'holes' in these strategies and tweak as needed.
- Try out new equipment, supplements and get feedback.
- This information can be helpful for our work with clients.

Exploring treat delivery

Using treat delivery to reduce reactivity and manage dog through 'tight' situations.

- Dropping treat to ground –

- For excitable dogs that tend to go vertical, this promotes exact opposite movement, plus they expend energy hunting for treat.
- For reactive dogs, gives something else to focus on.
- Dropping treats in steady, rhythmic fashion, say in a left/right pattern, can have a calming effect.
- This year, discovered Leslie McDevitt's dvd, Pattern Games. Her games mirror this and go much further. We use her exercises regularly now.

When 'scary' person is armed with the treats:

- Never lure dog to come closer. Many food-motivated dogs will go over their own threshold to obtain. Then they're in hot seat.
- Deliver treat by lobbing behind dog, so he knows & practices retreat option.
- Let him make own choice about comfortable approach distance.
- For dogs that tend to choose forward motion/threat in presence of 'scary' person, counter-conditioning includes much treat delivery in retreat. So, "X" proximity is paired repeatedly with both food AND retreat.

ARTICLE: [Fearful Dog Tip](#) (by FCCW handler)

When you have a fearful dog, it is very tempting to lure him. For example, if your dog is quite afraid of strangers and is meeting a friendly stranger for the first time, it is common to give the person food to lure the dog closer for petting. Or, if there is a benign object that the dog finds very scary, you might want to plant treats around the object to coax the dog closer. The human thinking is that the dog will discover there is nothing to be afraid of. Unfortunately, this can back-fire. The desire for the food may 'force' the dog past his comfort zone. So, he may slink up to the stranger to access that treat but still feel incredibly uneasy about the stranger's proximity. Should the stranger then make an innocent movement, the dog's fear may increase, and perhaps even cause him to behave defensively. In either case, the dog has learned nothing about being less fearful in future encounters.

The most effective, long-term solution is to reward the dog just after he has made a courageous move *of his own accord*. When this move is made, you can reinforce it by tossing the treat AWAY from the scary object or person. Being able to move away from the 'scary thing' is also reinforcing to the dog.

This allows your fearful dog to be in control of the situation and work through it for himself, and he'll grow a tiny bit more confident with each repetition. Better yet, the dog starts to learn how to investigate the world for himself.

Body handling

- Important to empower dog with some sense of control when working on handling issues. Their option to engage in the 'game.' Go at their pace. Take time to do counter-conditioning thoroughly.
- Ex: nail trims.

- Head targeting to counter hand-to-head shyness.

ARTICLE: [Toenail Clipping, by FCCW handler](#)

Working with dogs from the shelter, we deal with many behavioral problems that were caused by well-intentioned humans. For example, toenail clipping does not have to be a traumatic event, but it can become so if the dog is held down, forced and frightened during the process. It is so much easier to teach a dog to accept handling than to fix a dog who has been mishandled. Either way, the process is the same, but it can take much longer and must be broken into smaller steps with a dog that has been traumatized.

This process requires patience because it is about building a trusting relationship with the dog. It should not be rushed, and the human should be in a calm state of mind. Keep the sessions short and easy. This process never lures, forces or tricks the dog. The dog chooses and allows each step. The dog does not need to be restrained in any way.

If the dog is so averse to having its toenails clipped that it may bite you, the first couple of weeks may involve *no* touching of the paws at all. Your first step is to discover the point where the dog just starts to become uneasy or uncomfortable, and then begin your actual work several steps back from this point. For instance, if the dog does not want any part of the paw to be touched, you may start stroking a shoulder with the clippers. Reward the dog with fabulous treats after each stroke that is accepted without moving away. Be certain to squeeze the clippers frequently so that the noise of the clipper predicts treat delivery. As you begin the process of moving down the leg, make it a sort of game, keeping things light and fun.

Smart dogs will quickly figure out that you are aiming for their paws or toenails, so progress in a non-linear way. Don't do 5 reps of touch to elbow, then 5 reps of touch to ankle, and then 5 reps of touch to top of paw. While making sure you never progress further than is comfortable for the dog, you should actually 'ping-pong' back and forth with touch to these different locations. You can reserve the best of the treats for the most difficult area.

It is also helpful to create fun, paw-related games. Teach the dog to put his paw on your knee, on a stool, on a toy you're holding, or into your hand. The more confidence you can build in your dog about his paws, the better. We also make sure to sprinkle paw touches, strokes and light squeezes into every game of fetch, tug or gentle wrestling match.

We recommend at least one daily session of gradually working the clippers towards the nails. We do not attempt to clip a nail until we can hold the clipper around the nail for a count of 3 while the dog remains relaxed. Yes, this takes time, but it is so worth it. An accident is bound to happen one day -- a paw may be hurt, or the quick of the toenail be cut -- and it will require handling. If you put in the time

to build the dog's tolerance of this handling, he'll be so much easier to handle and will be quick to recover from the event.

Because we've spent the time to build so many positive associations between paws and the clippers, we've actually had dogs "ask" for their nails to be clipped! When this happens, we know all the work we put in was clearly worth the effort.

One final point -- it's always best to work in small steps that the dog can easily tolerate. If you try to rush the process by taking steps that are too big for the dog to handle, you re-ignite his fear and end up making more work for yourself. Be conservative. Try to think of it as a meditation. And reward yourself for every toe you clip peacefully and successfully!

Gathering written data so there's no guessing or forgetting when handlers see me the next week & give feedback.

- List triggers.
- Tally # of reactions.
- Describe reactions.
- Time for recovery after stressful events.
- Length and number of exercise sessions.
- Physical issues – important info for vet.

Important to ask our clients to do this, too!

LIMITS OF DOG ASSESSMENTS AT SHELTER:

Reliability, validity and feasibility of existing tests of canine behaviour:

http://www.academia.edu/1121691/Reliability_validity_and_feasibility_of_existing_tests_of_canine_behaviour

Assumptions about future behavior of shelter dogs seen as food aggressive are unfounded:

<http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/blog/assumptions-about-future-behavior-of-shelter-dogs-seen-as-food-aggressive-are-unfounded/>

Pogo – history

- Didn't show typical signs of global stress in prison. Loved training, learned quickly, enjoyed attention from many people, played with toys & some dogs daily, looked happy & relaxed at weekly lessons.
- Yet, prison setting *was* difficult for her and problems cropped up:
- Developed lunging/air snapping at strangers, in tight spaces like sallyports.

- Also developed polydipsia and polyuria. Vets, including specialist, could not find a medical explanation. Issue disappeared post-adoption.
- Had some issues with other dogs, esp. females. One damaging fight. Initial greeting skills with any dog were a little tense.

Pogo – managing reactivity

- Build +CER, and pay attention to small details.
- Counters human's signal that tight leash = trouble ahead.
- Careful management strategies reduce aggressive displays, increase safety and protect dog from stress.
- Counter-condition hand sliding down leash to GL.
- Had to break down to partial slides at first, due to minor stress response.
- Lots of reps in peaceful settings first, no triggers in sight.
- Then reps done at distance from triggers, gradually reducing distance.
- Also practiced moving dog through space with food lure.
- Was helpful that Pogo was very food motivated.

Strategy was successful ~ lunging/snapping at strangers ended, and bought us time to find adopter.

Pogo – lesson learned

- Who is the 'real' dog when you only get to assess closely in prison setting?
- This can be a similar issue with shelter dogs.
- How do we market the dog fairly, balancing full disclosure vs. scaring all potential adopters away?
- By pulling dog out of prison and putting in foster home we might discover dog's typical MO in a 'typical' setting. Just not practical for us.
- Pogo is better meeting and playing with dogs now that she's in a 'typical' home.
- She no longer drinks/pees excessively.

Niyak – differing fear displays

- Arrived: 9/21/12. Presented at shelter as very energetic, nice/friendly with me and others on staff, great with other dogs.
- In prison – great with other dogs, friendly with handlers, quick to learn. Quite stressed by volumes of strangers. Actively avoided strangers; almost never vocalized.
- Used l-theanine – may have helped a little with anxiety.
- *His reactivity (bark, lunge, growl) to strangers was globally suppressed at prison.*

1st adoption 1/23/13. Returned to my house 2/1/13 due to reactive barking & growling & threatening approach to every stranger he saw at house and during leash walks.

- At my house for 2 weeks: initially would bark in yard any time he heard/saw a stranger.
- Wanted to bark through windows at passersby.
- Spooky, fearful, barking, growling and APPROACHING any stranger in house. Worse with men and child, a little better with women.
- Quickest resolve: 20 min to warm up to woman trainer displaying perfect/neutral behavior.
- Other strangers required longer period of time, sometimes multiple visits.
- Start of bark caused brief upward pressure on head halter, or I'd use HH to turn him away from stranger.
- Manners Minder to reinforce settling on mat behind x-pen (at a distance from visitor). Pre-trained.
- Counter-conditioning, with gradual reduction of distance.
- Treat lobbing by stranger, delivered behind dog.
- Test cue response, when calmer.
- When he decided a female was ok, he'd suddenly be all over them with enthusiastic greeting. With men, he needed counter-conditioning from person sitting to standing to movement around room.

Niyak's take-away messages

- Ability of environment to globally suppress reactivity.
- GROUP exposure may yield one type of behavior, but one-on-one exposures can be very different.
- Shelter vs. prison vs. in-home behavior don't necessarily correlate well.
- Importance of response prevention.

Working on dog/dog skills

- Experienced handlers allow you to experiment more with refining of social & play skills.
- Dogs coming out of weeks/months of confinement at a stressful city shelter (barrier frustration and little exercise) have often deteriorated behaviorally.
- Frequent presenting issues:
- Reactive on leash.
- Rude greeters, no impulse control, irritating during play.
- Some are so aroused, they're likely to start a fight if let off leash to interact. (It would take a very skilled dog to 'handle' them.)

Rocco – history

- Owner turn-in: 7/7/12. 8 mo. old, already neutered. Shelter's assessment upon intake: **very** good with other dogs. But they could not take him out regularly for dog play, so his behavior deteriorated rapidly (lots of barrier frustration).
- Joined program 8/2/12 at about 9 mo. old.
- If adopted straight out of shelter, his poor behavior around dogs could easily have been misinterpreted and may have gotten worse over time without intervention.

Rocco / Presenting interaction style with dogs:

- Jump on top of or bulldoze into them; sometimes mount & growl.
- Completely ignore other dog's cut-off signals.
- Was very hard to control on leash when in presence of any other dogs.

Rocco – dog/dog rehab

In 7 weeks he was back to exceptional dog/dog skills. Steps, beginning week #2:

1. Rocco always had to start in DOWN position and *other* dog was the one to initiate play.
2. Any infractions = "too bad," followed by 1 min. time-out, then back to step 1. (Several handlers ready to take him out of play.)
3. GL worn during play for first 6 weeks, then no longer needed.
4. Luckily, we had a calm, mature female that schooled him daily and set firm boundaries. (sessions = 10 min/day for 3 weeks)
5. Play sessions where two other dogs could 'gang up' a little on him had a positively calming effect.

By week 7, he could enter play sessions flawlessly, without any special steps needed. His play style was excellent.

Adopted by one of his handlers, who was released from prison. Received continued positive feedback about his exceptional play skills, even with a fearful 5 lb. dog that came to trust him.

Lessons highlighted

- Dog/dog skills can devolve rapidly in shelter. Adolescents seems especially vulnerable.
- Some dogs may need a couple weeks (post shelter life) just to settle down in home. Rushing to meet other dogs too soon could be counterproductive.
- Avoid dog practicing the undesired interaction style.
- Some social dogs, after a stressful shelter stay, may need multiple weeks of rehab, even in experienced hands.
- Teacher dogs are priceless!
- So many of our dogs show (favorably) toned down play when wearing a HH. Great transitional tool.

Carlo – history

- **At shelter** ~ friendly, but easily over-stimulated, compulsive leg-lifter. Brought into prison w/diaper!
- Joined program 10/17/12. Left 2/12/13.
- **At prison** ~ friendly with people, appeared confident in setting. Restless pacer in afternoon. No leg-lifting inside. Excitable/poor impulse control in presence of dogs. Over-the-top, rude play style.
- Niyak intimidated during play with Carlo until week 6-7.
- Early on, if handler interrupted rough play (and at other times, too), he sometimes redirected on her – jumping/pinging off her, mouthing, dilated pupils. She'd gently restrain 'til he calmed.

Carlo – improving play skills

- Play shaped in baby steps inside, 1:1, on leash. Calm behavior / settling near other (calm) dog, then brief sniffs, gradually permitting longer, calm interactions. Eventually could transfer to outdoors, off leash. HH used.
- HH on, short play sessions, c/t for free check-ins, c/t for good choices during play (very treat motivated so he'd come out of play to collect treat), lots of breaks during play to practice calmer skills, massage before play and in between.
- Multiple handlers available to assist with play interrupts.
- Carlo's signals of escalation were closely monitored – going vertical, neck biting & pulling indicated need for play interruption.

Carlo – other details

- Nose work games were a stress-reducing outlet for him.
- Compulsive interest in specific ball plus excellent nose led to DOC choosing him for detection program.
- While in prison, L-theanine @ 200mg 2xday, had positive impact on play behavior, reduced indoor pacing, increased calmness, literally allowed him to stay in program.
- Carlo did not present as globally stressed – he loved training, loved people, appeared confident in setting, ate well, played every day. (Self-control requirements probably put him on edge.)
- Post-adoption feedback reveals 'real' Carlo – much calmer, appropriate play with other dogs *and* a cat, good around horses, no over-arousal issues.

Carlo – lessons learned

- You can't necessarily know the 'real' dog when assessing in shelter or prison.
- Self-control 'rations' per day are finite. (Please see article written by Dr. Patricia McConnell: <http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/self-control-depletion-dogs>)
- Hard for some dogs - prison is stimulus-rich environment. (Pia)
- Manage carefully and know when to call it a day.
- Nose work is now used more regularly with some dogs.

- L-theanine was very helpful with him, as well as for numerous other program dogs. (No effect with some.)

Typical steps we take to build dog/dog skills

- Meet exercise needs. More isn't always better. (Sage)
- Desensitization to HH, when needed.
- Variety of impulse control training exercises.
- Install various skills incompatible with dog reactivity.
- Especially touch, leave it, come, settle.
- Manage distance between dogs to reduce incidences of arousal. Visual blocking; calming cap.
- Desensitization and counter-conditioning to presence of other dogs, when needed.
- Leslie McDevitt's pattern games for calming effect. (www.tawzerdog.com)
- Pre-train touch-to-flank for reorientation.
- Mental stimulation/activities, especially nose work.
- Handlers try to become central to fun & games with dog.
- Massage.
- Occasionally find L-theanine to be useful if there's anxiety or fear.

Careful selection of 'decoy' dog(s).

- Back-end sniffs, very brief. (Sniffee heavily reinforced.)
- Lateral walking.
- Controlled, curved approaches, very brief face-to-face opportunity.
- Frontal visit with brief sniffs.
- Controlled, on-leash interactions, building in very small doses.
- Retreats are heavily reinforced.

If/when more freedom can be granted, leashes drag and multiple handlers are ready to assist/interrupt.

- Brief bouts of play with lots of training breaks.
- Time-outs for play infractions.

Time, good management, and decoy dogs with good social skills can really help with dog/dog rehab.

Resource guarding

- Typical protocol -- working an object/food hierarchy; sharing object & trading for treats; approach/treat, reach/treat, touch/treat, take/treat, etc.
- Handlers use Jean Donaldson's book, MINE.
- Training to generalization w/multiple handlers.

- Cold trials.

Additional technique: Classically conditioned response to 'drop' cue (Chirag Patel) prior to dog even having an item. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndTiVOCNY4M>

Thank you for coming!

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