

New Addition



The Beatles famously declared, “All you need is love,” and the idea that a puppy should only be trained with treats and love had been Sarah Robinson’s only guidance for her family’s first dog, Cali. Robinson had seen a wide variety of behaviors in friends’ dogs and felt a little nervous about training her brand new puppy. She paid extra money for Cali to stay 4 weeks with a puppy trainer after leaving the breeder, and had information from the breeder on what Cali needed to feel at home. There was a kennel for Cali to sleep in, toys to play with, food for

her to eat, and an excited family that was ready to give the new dog all kinds of love. On the day Cali came home from the airport after finishing her four weeks of training, she got her first dose of love and couldn’t contain her excitement. It was outside the house when she let her bladder flow, so it was understandable because she had been on an airplane for many hours. Cali was finally brought inside the house, and there she received a second dose of love from new faces. Once again she couldn’t contain herself and eliminated all over the floor. Frantic squeals of

Soren Robinson

confusion ensued as one person tried to pick her up and bring her outside again, while another two backed away disgusted. It just so happened that that night Robinson had previously arranged to have guests over and of course everyone wanted to meet the new puppy. Both Robinson and Cali eventually became so overwhelmed that Cali had to be put in her kennel under watchful eye until all the guests had left. Crisis averted. Right? Well, not exactly.

Many dog owners might just say this was normal puppy behavior that Cali would eventually grow



out of, and in many cases, that is correct. This is what most dog owners hope for, so that they don't have to put the time, training, and effort into establishing behaviors that allow the dog to be incorporated into family life. In the case of Cali, a mix of Border Collie and Poodle, she was genetically intelligent and started learning how to take advantage of her owners and get what she wanted, leaving behind a path of torn baskets, scratched walls, chewed furniture, and scratched children. Robinson started Cali's training off by doing what her friends had told her to do. That is, to only use pos-

itive reinforcement as the way to train her dog, but soon she realized, "I had not been able to figure out how to cure certain problems with that." Luckily for Cali, Robinson wanted to learn how to train her correctly and became more desperate to learn as problems amplified. Robinson reflects, "So then I started reading more books. And then I talked to a trainer that we're going to do some training with, and they suggested that some negative information or consequences have to be given in addition to the positive." Cali, like so many other unruly dogs could have been sent to a shelter

in the ensuing months or years because of a gradual build up of unaddressed problems. Problems like jumping on people, nipping at people's hands, or chewing on furniture may seem relatively normal for a puppy, but as a twenty pound dog eventually grows into a 60 pound dog (in Cali's case), these problems are magnified. Those same behaviors that were cute when they were a puppy suddenly become scary when an adult dog jumps up on a little child who doesn't know how to treat them. Approximately 47% of the 3.3 million dogs put into shelters each year are there because of problematic

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behaviors, including aggressive behaviors in the US. There are about 670 thousand dogs that are euthanized each year in the US. Many of the owners felt it was their dog's fault for the behavior, however perhaps some behavioral issues occur because owners don't put in enough effort to help their dog understand boundaries and behavior expectations.

One difficulty in figuring out dog training is that every dog is different. Some dogs want to please their owners in every way. Other dogs are more self interested and want to do what is most pleasing to them. What works for one

dog in bribing with treats may not work for another dog who gets into trouble regardless of the treat. In some cases, dogs learn better behavior from other dogs. Kay Parker, who has had a dog her entire life, says that her latest dog, Zeke, is a very good example of that. Earlier in Zeke's life, when he was just a little puppy, he was very mouthy and highly energetic. There were times when guests would come over to see Parker's puppy, and they could not stay in the same room with him for longer than two minutes. Even hardened dog veterans could not get the ball of energy under control. And

as she took Zeke to dog parks none of the dogs really liked him very much because he would nip at their ears and generally be annoying. Everytime he would do this though, the other dogs would turn and give him a sharp growl. At first, Parker thought that the dogs were being mean to Zeke, but as she took Zeke to more dog parks and introduced him to other dogs, both she and Zeke started to figure it out. The other dogs were training Zeke to know what was socially acceptable and what wasn't. But it doesn't stop there. Now, Parker says, "If a dog gets on his back, now, he will do that same little

growl...He learned respect from other dogs.” The idea that dogs learn from each other is true – they absolutely do. And not only that, but they can teach other dogs the manners that they learn so that the younger dogs learn manners too. Virginia Dickson, a dog trainer for Cali and many other dogs, cautions that, “Yes, dogs learn from each other, both good habits and bad habits. It’s important to know the dogs your dog is interacting with, especially if your dog is still maturing. It’s also important to intervene when dogs are practicing poor

social interaction.” The role of being the owner is a very important one as poor interaction can result in dogs becoming anxious and reactive with other dogs. Cesar Millan, a world renowned dog trainer, tells us in his book *How to Raise the Perfect Dog*, “If your puppy doesn’t have a role model like Daddy (his dog) to look up to, it falls to you as her owner”. If an owner does not know how to lead and teach right from the beginning, it may lead to problems later in their life. Diana Foster, a German Shepherd breeder, put it this

way: “When some people aren’t prepared, it’s a recipe for disaster. And it’s totally unnecessary. It’s as if a woman were pregnant for nine months; she goes to the hospital to have the baby; she comes home, but there’s nothing ready. There’s no crib. There’s no playpen. There’s no booster seat or diapers. So she just leaves the infant on the floor. That may sound extreme, but there really are people who buy a puppy on a whim and that’s the kind of thing they do. Then they wonder why their house is a wreck and they have all these behavior problems. They blame the dog



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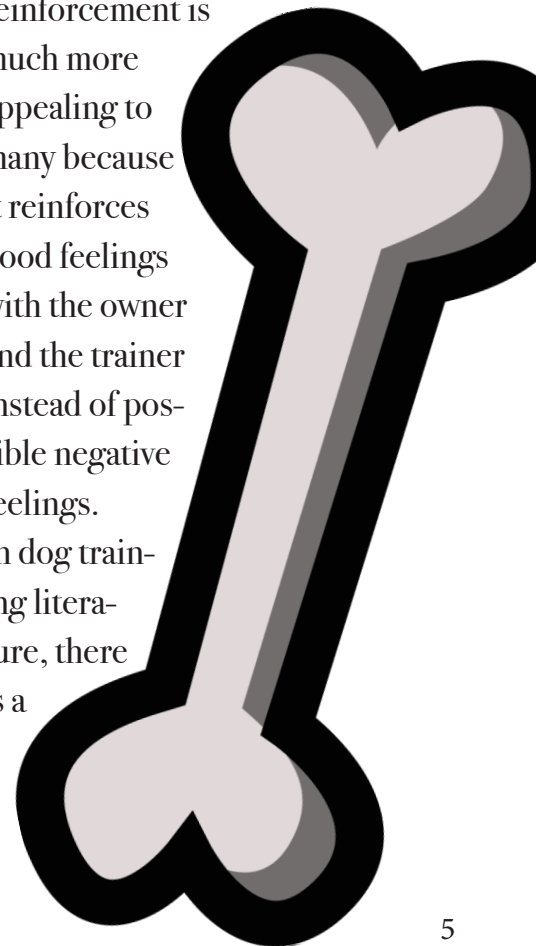


for being out of control.” Without the proper planning and action ahead of getting a puppy, a dog owner puts themselves at a severe disadvantage in their training. The dog will be confused about what is allowed and what isn’t. It is up to the owner to know what is acceptable and what is not, and to enforce those rules to a tee.

In dog training, there are two schools of thought: positive reinforcement only or a combination of positive and negative reinforcement. Negative reinforcement tools include prong collars, e-collars, and electric fences. Dickson put it this way by saying, “Positive reinforcement helps teach what you want

and negative reinforcement stops behavior that you don’t want... Positive reinforcement can range from a soft pat on the head to high pitched praise and treats. Choosing within that range greatly impacts any specific dog’s ability to learn. Negative reinforcement can range from applying steady pressure [with a prong collar] to a high intensity correction; knowing what to do within that range impacts the effectiveness.” Negative reinforcement is usually not used to by novice trainers, because they don’t want to hurt the dog for fear of making it unhappy. The thought of putting their dog through pain or discomfort to remove a bad behavior doesn’t

seem right to a lot of people. Leaning heavily on positive reinforcement is much more appealing to many because it reinforces good feelings with the owner and the trainer instead of possible negative feelings. In dog training literature, there is a





heated debate whether negative consequences are a kind of dog abuse, raising the idea that the kind of training you use is a moral issue. The US National Institutes of Health did a study asking what the welfare consequences and efficiency of electronic collars are compared to treat-based training. Their findings concluded that “the immediate effects of training with an e-collar give rise to behavioural signs of distress in pet dogs, particularly when used at high settings.” Someone can easily read that quote and get the wrong idea for how a trainer uses an e-collar. In

a book called, *The Art of Raising a Puppy*, written by the Monks of New Skete, they call to attention the effectiveness of using e-collar technology. They too were originally skeptical of the tool, but they wrote that, “After attending several seminars and speaking at length with bona fide masters of this tool, we found the evidence compelling, and it’s worth describing in some detail. Gone indeed were the days when the e-collar was a one-dimensional “shock” collar; instead, we saw how it had transformed into a multidimensional training tool, providing precision, reli-

ability, and versatility to trainers, owners, and dogs alike.” While watching Dickson train Cali with the e-collar, I got a better sense of what this meant. Dickson is one of the masters of this tool, and when it was introduced to Cali after two weeks of training with the prong collar, Robinson was able to get Cali to obey. The e-collar is first used at a very low setting that is just above the threshold the dog perceives the electricity. If a dog feels the collar at a setting of 4/100, the trainer might use a level six. This is only used to remind the dog to stop a certain behavior. It is not



a way of terrorizing the dog into submission out of fear, but merely a tool in communication. The e-collar intensity is increased only in situations only where the dog is disobeying despite getting a correction. But usually the intensity is increased by very little before the dog understands what they are expected to be doing. As Robinson reflects back on Cali's first day home, she now recognizes that it was doomed from the beginning. Cali had

been in her kennel for far too long and had not been able to relieve herself during the flight from the trainer. This solitude in the airplane compared to the attention she was bombarded with as soon as she was able to get out of the car was too much. Any kind of logic for calmly integrating her into the house was not understood. Although the Robinson family initially thought that they could handle the work that it took to make sure Cali was trained, slowly over the next cou-

ple of weeks, there was enough destruction that Robinson appealed to outside help from other people and dog trainer Virginia Dickson. Dickson says that most dog owners don't realize that "they might have adopted a dog who needs leadership in order to be balanced and live a life that allows his/her dog to enjoy a life of inclusion." There is also a catch to this however because you might get lucky with the type of dog you end up getting. She says, "The tricky part is that not every dog needs leadership; a lot of dogs live without any boundaries yet don't develop behavioral issues. If every dog needed leadership, then it would be easier for every owner to see that as a necessary aspect of being a dog owner." To simplify this a bit, most dog owners have their expectations too low for the amount of training and leadership that their dog will need to be happy. Training dogs takes a lot of work and many people would prefer not to do that work. So when faced with a decision to either keep the dog and vigorously train it for months or just return it to a shelter, many owners take the latter option. Dog information in the media portrays quick and easy solutions to problems that often take longer to solve. Slogans like "Houstrain your

puppy in just a week!” and “Simple trick to get your dog to learn faster!” run rampant and can easily confuse new dog owners into getting the wrong idea about training. But to Dickson, the process of training a dog should not be rushed, and most importantly does not stop even after the dog has learned their commands. Just like humans who have good habits and lose them over time, so too can dogs, if they are not held responsible for what they’re supposed to be doing.

Cali is now in her fifth week of training. She gets an hour with Dickson, and for the rest of the week the concepts from the training session are practiced with Robinson at home. There has been some monumental progress in that span of time. Cali is a much calmer dog and can stay placed on mat with the family, even with tons of distractions all around her. She can sit or lie down when Robinson talks to other people. Cali can come when called. She does not pull on the leash very often and is not as distracted or scared by noises or other unexpected things she encounters. This progress has occurred very gradually, and has required some strict rules like not giving treats, petting, or talking in baby voices to Cali. While it is exciting to see the



progress, there is still quite a ways to go. In the words of the Monks of New Skete, “Training is a humane form of dominance. In following your directives, your pup implicitly recognizes and submits to your leadership.” Dog training should be done with care, leadership, and focus. If it is possible to get a dog to behave well using only positive

reinforcements, then do that. If not, then it might be a good idea to consider using negative reinforcements in addition to the positive ones. Negative reinforcement can be harmful when done incorrectly, but so can positive reinforcement, so maintaining the proper balance is critical. Training a dog correctly takes a little bit more than love alone.

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About the Author



My name is Soren Robinson, and I am a Junior attending Mountain View High School and Freestyle Academy. Some of my hobbies include playing basketball, running, hanging out with friends, playing board games with my family, and watching movies. I have many interests, so it is hard for me to choose what I will do next in life. However, I am sure that whatever it is, I will work hard on it and push myself to be the best.