



## *Awareness Centered Training – ACT*

By Maureen Ross, MA, NCC, CPDT-KA, RYT  
Balboa Press, a division of Hay House, 2012, 370 pages.

If you have been looking for an uncomplicated way to train with your dog and enjoy the whole process, this might be your book. *Awareness Centered Training (ACT)* is about fostering and practicing awareness and mindfulness as we live and train with dogs.

Maureen Ross has written a thorough book reviewing a myriad of training, physiological, and psychological concepts as they relate to dog training, the dog, and the trainer. She explains complicated concepts in terms that are easy to understand for the novice and, still provides lots of great insight for the seasoned trainer.

From a simple discussion about dog park downsides - my take away: meeting people is fun for you but would you enjoy a biker bar? - To step-by-step instructions for a wide variety of training situations, Ross covers all the basics and a lot more.

Her background combining dog training and behavior with wellness and a focus on the canine-human relationship in all of its facets prepares her well to explain and advocate bringing this relationship to a higher level.

No matter what the concept or issue, the author finds an easy-to-understand and motivating way to introduce the reader to the concept. Dogs tend to live much more in the here and now than humans. The author demonstrates in an array of case examples how humans often live in an immediate, results-oriented, time-driven, hectic environment that is more focused on the past and the future than the present moment. They tend to transfer this approach to dog training with less than stellar results for both sides. Letting go of stress, hectic, and at times meaningless and repetitive demands on the dogs will lead to much better results.

The author provides many suggestions and opportunities for the trainer and owner to empower themselves and the dog, thereby opening up a world of letting go of what doesn't matter which allows positive and healing energy to flow freely. Sharing a meaningful journey with our canine companions being fully present in the moment opens the doors to a relationship that many dog owners never fully develop.

While dog trainers would likely be familiar with the review of technical terms and methods that provide a good overview for dog owners, every dog trainer can learn to be more aware of the moment, emotions, physical being, and mental framework. To build a healthy relationship between the dog and the human, both partners need to be present and fully aware of the other in the moment.

*ACT* offers interesting insights into the team relationship, and the author asks the reader to be open to infinite possibilities learning from each other as long as we can be aware of the very moment we are sharing with our canine partners. The reader is encouraged to learn more about themselves and the canine partner they are working with.

My main critique of the book is that at times the author gets away from the basic idea and delves into technical terms that the dog trainer should know anyhow, and the dog owner probably doesn't need to know. A few book chapters contained some "minor" spelling and grammar errors, which will hopefully be corrected in the second edition. The book has great concepts for everyone from the novice pet dog owner to the seasoned trainer. The author covers every aspect of a dog's life from its beginning to finally the loss of the canine companion.

This book can serve as a reference guide along the way and as an important reminder to live, learn, and teach fully present in the here and now. Take a deep breath, and human as well as canine will enjoy a deeper connection.

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