

Who Wants to be Obedient Anyway?

By Maureen Ross, M.A., NCC, CPDT-KA, LTE



Not me! I took the “obey” part out of our vows / second marriage. Too much work particularly for someone recovering from caretaking and perfectionism.

Besides, some of us take this word too seriously because we have been conditioned too.

One of the few things I fortunately never heard from my mother growing up was “you better obey me”. She never liked the word or meaning but did not like the lack of it either. What she did was give me two choices. I needed to pick one or suffer the consequence

The Webster Dictionary defines obedience as the state or quality of being

obedient, a sphere of ecclesiastical or secular authority or jurisdiction. Obedient is defined as compliant with or submissive to authority.

Historically, the connotation and meaning of obedience training comes from World Wars. It is a military style of training that may still exists in some training classes.

Not ours! At Dog Talk LLC and New England Pet Partners Inc. we integrate awareness centered, positive training. We follow the Association of Professional Dog Trainers LIMA (least invasive, minimally aversive.

The different people, who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world are the ones who usually do...

I cannot think of a more submissive & compliant creature than a puppy! It is a clean canvas for teaching and developing a lifetime relationship with another species.

In most cases, puppies & adult dogs who had a decent beginning, just like children, are willing to learn when they understand what we want

I simple will not call teaching our dogs commands and obedience. Not many positive based reinforcement trainers do.

We shape behaviors in a puppy with teaching in a way they understand. During my assessments with potential clients, and in group class, I refer to it as teaching and some respond, “but I want an obedient dog and I don’t want to use food!”

I ask, usually with a strange expression on my face, “Okay, tell me how you would like to achieve that”. That usually is enough to open minds to a new, more effective, joyful, easy way to train.

What most dog parents are seeking is a happy, healthy,

confident dog they can enjoy a relationship that is balanced, educational and that family and pet is well.

Reflecting on training many years ago today, new dog parents can easily become overwhelmed. We have choices in the hundreds (food, toys, where to buy).

Grateful, the dog training has become pleasant and it should be not just for the humans but the dogs.

Okay, I agree that there are times we need to be obedient and respectful. I like the sound of respectful better. And, add in empathetic. It enhances learning and engaging with others who are different than we are.

Here is a good analogy. Think about the difference between aggressive and assertive. Aggressive people will walk up one side of you and down the other to accomplish what they need to achieve! Assertive people will present their case with a win/win attitude and still achieve what they want, but make you feel good about yourself (even if they are duping you in the process).

For example: I respect most police officers in most circumstances. However, I wouldn't if they pulled me

over for no particular reason other than to flash a badge in my face, tell me to get out of my car, but not how come, then took out a stun gun and zapped me because I wouldn't comply!

Dogs do not appreciate this kind of learning experience either. Imagine you are dropped in a foreign country without anything? Pups/ dogs are generally taken from Mom, shelters, fostering (familiarity) and transition into a new environment that can be nothing like they are use too. What would you do? I would look around and try to find someone who speaks English.

Thus, we need to plan for long-term to bring a new pup/dog into our family. This requires awareness, observation, patience, teaching and setting the pup/dog ups for success.

Infants need parents and puppies need the same, and this does not mean they need an "alpha" which is a myth. Search dog hierarchies/body language /behavior in the last even five years. You may be pleasantly surprised that we can teach w/o force and feel good about it too.

Dogs need guidance, management, prevention, supervision with children

and other pets, and gentle desensitization / introduction to the environment (sights, sounds, smells).

It is an elephantine task to change the way we have been conditioned to think from parents, society, TV, school, friends, and social media.

There is a veritable plethora of videos and training books and online. Explore and be skeptical. If any training material or trainer brings up something that does not feel right, or how you would like to be taught, list to your gut!

Being a Board-Certified Counselor and Dog Trainer, I am keenly aware of patterns and conflicts, not only in humans but in dogs.

What I have found in the last twenty years of training is that the barriers are becoming more permeable.

Organizations like the Association of Professional Dog Trainers (APDT) and their founder Dr. Ian

***Take a Deep Nose to
Navel Breathe, Relax,
Let Go and Grow ...***

Dunbar created learning pathways that have connected like wildfire making teaching our dogs a

joy. Science is important, but so is the fact that living beings can be taught with adversity or positive reinforcement.

People are awakening to approaches that feel good for us, are effective, and can easily be integrated into daily living and learning with our dogs.

In Awareness Centered Training – ACT, I share easy, joyful training techniques from puppy hood, through adolescence, adulthood, and geriatric.

Big changes, for the good are happening in the world of training our dogs. I encourage you to explore new ways of engaging with trainers, searing the internet, and knowing that we can get our dogs to pretty much do anything if we reinforcement what we want in an effective way.

Does the pup/dog understand what we want?

Is it really obedience you are looking for or a dog willing to do what you want because it is a good idea and good things happen?

I prefer good things to happen, even if I must work hard first to get it. We work, we get paid. The mantra is “do something for me and I’ll do something for you”.

Example: If we feed out pup/dog 2X a day, we have 14 training opportunities every week to teach watch-me, sit, down, wait, stay, gently all while channeling the dog’s energy into something rewarding.

Life rewards are all things good (food, toys, walks, touch, play).

Take a deep nose-to-navel breath and ask yourself, “Do you want to be obedient all the time?”

They key to any good relationship, including the one with our dogs, is to build trust through understanding.

If I only speak English and someone sits me in a room and speaks only French, I am going to have a difficult time trying to communicate. I may need to employ sign language, watch body language carefully, make changes in my approach or risk not getting what I want accomplished.

If you ask, most trainers will say, “Dogs are easy, people are difficult”. Change this! Learn with your dog, with an open-mind and I guarantee that training dogs can change your life too.

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