

## Connection consequences

**Craig Murray**

### INTRODUCTION

How can we plan successful connection consequence outcomes by better understanding and identifying what is the wrong dog or wrong owner, or wrong environment?

Dog                      Owner                      Environment

If we consider a basic principal of temperament + environment = behaviour, we can simplify a very complex issue.

A basic overview of dog character categories that generally coincide with a given dog's stress threshold and pain tolerances which closely relate to the dog's dominance levels unless environmentally enhanced by a softer or anthropomorphic owner or diminished by too harsh handling. These factors greatly enhance the general identification of the given dog's level of bite or inhibition of bite.

Today's presentation is modelled on my formal education and my observations with hands on experience.

### BREEDS AND INHERITED PREDISPOSITIONS

#### Guarding Breeds

As bred to gain protective instincts that humans can utilise to warn us of intruders or to offer area protection for guarding properties or personal protection, such as a police dog would offer it's handler. These breeds if correctly driven for this purpose should possess a harder character to ensure they can stand the mental and physical strains this job could produce. The dog's natural drives and instincts should be pronounced and their upbringing should be modified to best suit their particular job performance skills needed for area guarding or personal protection.

#### Herding breeds

These breeds were designed to again possess certain traits which humans could best exploit to help with a very person power consuming task of herding livestock. There are two distinct functions widely used to herd smaller stock or larger stock. The first generally requires a dog that possesses a higher level of prey drive with a lower level of actual predatory instinct so that they will be ensured not to damage smaller weaker stock. The second function is that of larger more hardened stock that requires a dog that possesses the high level of prey drive but with higher level of predatory instincts so the nip or bite is more suited to larger stronger more hardier stock.

#### Retrieving breeds

Generally are designed to help humans in the task of flushing out smaller prey animals and then locating them via the use of their pronounced olfactory abilities after they have been downed. Finally the dog is able to return the downed prey animal to the human companion without mouthing or damaging it further. To best achieve this task a retriever would need a high level of play which is a displaced prey drive, but would possess a greatly diminished predatory instinct and almost no guarding instinct over small prey objects. The dog's character would need to be strong enough to withstand harsher conditions, but soft enough to ensure a manageable dominance level.

## **TEMPERAMENT**

Temperament is the hereditary make-up of the given individual that was passed on by the mating of the father to the mother. Temperament is often misinterpreted as character, which really is an environmental component of temperament.

The correct description of temperament is so subjective and complex that it is a full course alone so simplistic classification is desired for today's presentation. If we look at temperament as either sound or unsound as in the 1990 book by Wayne Davis USA, we can model an explanation of 6 unsound categories.

1. Sharp
2. Sharp Shy
3. Submissive
4. Temperamental
5. Hyperactive
6. Over Aggressive

## **SPLITTING PUPS FROM THE LITTER**

Clarence Pfaffenberger identifies in his book 'The New Knowledge of Dogs', that he did studies that confirmed there are critical times to split puppies from their litters which can maximise benefits to modern society and the responsible pet dog owner. The use of knowing how to best utilise the window of opportunity can greatly help by ensuring a given sound animal will have a greater chance of not displaying unwanted aggressive behaviour and will not suffer any of the unwanted psychological effects of being incorrectly split from its litter too early or too late. In its basic form, this is a way to start to customise the building of a dog for a particular task and with sound practices in social exposure regimes can be extremely beneficial.

## **SOCIAL EXPOSURE**

Social exposure is where the newly acquired puppy is shown as many differing environments and situations or objects as possible in a positive setting. This is done so the puppy gets to associate every thing in a positive light before its social exposure window is closed off as then you are no longer socialising but merely desensitising things that the dog is either fearful or unsure of. Correct social exposure is a way of ensuring the adolescent or adult dog will have a better aptitude for learning due to possessing less true fears or phobias that have an ability to bind the dog's learning capacity due to stress. Correct social exposure also will ensure a greatly diminished suspicion level hence helping lower the probability of developing fear based or aggressive behaviours.

## **NATURAL DRIVES AND INSTINCTS**

These drives and instincts are passed over from wild canines to the domestic dog. They are the very basic hunting skills that have ensured the canine family have been so able to survive as well as they have. Every dog will possess differing levels of these drives and instincts and some will have them greatly suppressed or displaced. These drives and instincts can be harnessed and productively used by well versed trainers but can be extremely dangerous when not productively shaped or controlled by the lay man or general pet owner.

## **PRODUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT**

A productive environment is one where the owner is constantly monitoring the dog's daily behaviours so that they can target and develop a balance of stimulation and control that ensures the dog has a rewarding life and a purpose and set pack positioning. Having the dog do rudimentary exercises to learn to earn some form of reward is also suggested as well as ensuring the dog has enough time being a dog.

The dog's ability to gain attention for unwanted behaviours should also be limited and setting out time out places such as a kennel or a denning area are all good for most dogs. Ongoing exposure is a high priority and setting out fun games for the dog to play with people and children is an advantage so long as they are not going to heighten the dogs level of natural drives or instincts such as some forms of tug of war games.

## **DISCIPLINE PLAN**

The plan of discipline is set so that an owner can portray themselves as the pack leader and this is best done in two separate phases. The first is to have the dog under control, which is done by formal obedience training to at least basic pet dog standard of heel, sit, sit stay, down, down stay and come. The second method involves controlling feeding times and food, controlling play by starting and finishing and controlling entry and exits from gates, doorways, and cars. Controlling beds and key positions in the dog's environment and places of comfort and elevation such as family member's beds and comfortable seats and lounges or top positions on stairs or the back of trucks.

## **FEEDING REGIMES**

To set feeding regimes is very sensible as early as possible, and to control when the dog is fed, by whom and how is also advantageous. To control the area the dog is fed so that it is the least accessible spot for children to accidentally play or unaware people to enter, limits the dog's ability to display or build guarding or defensive behaviours of it's food or feeding area. To instil a strong thought pattern in the dog's head that humans do not try to steal it's food, rather they actually give more food when touching the food bowl. Any tidbits should be given in either a learn to earn manner or in a controlled exercise after a favourable response is achieved.

## **RE-ENFORCEMENT REGIMES**

Reinforcement regimes are a strategic plan of when to utilise both positive and negative reinforcement. Timing is one of the most important aspects of reinforcement as an incorrectly timed positive reinforcement may actually teach or enhance an unwanted behaviour, but on the other hand an incorrectly timed negative reinforcer could also diminish a good or wanted behaviour. The word negative reinforcement over the last five years has conjured up the thought of aggressive or abusive training but in fact negatives used correctly should not take the dog over its stress threshold or pain tolerance hence they should not damage the dog's learning ability. I can not recall a single species on earth that has been brought up without some form of negative situations in its upbringing. We as humans are definitely not living on all positives and are generally bombarded by negatives all day but we still manage to learn and function extremely well. Positive reinforcement should be the majority of most reinforcement regimes and could be as subtle as a happy thought and a smile right through to verbal, tactile, food or play and extra privileges. Whilst negative reinforcers should be an extreme minority of reinforcement regimes and could be as subtle as a stern look to a stare or being put outside, right through to being scuffed like an alpha bitch would do to a naughty puppy that will not take head of ensuing discipline. Consistency is also a critical factor in reinforcement regimes.

## **CORRECT PACK STRUCTURE**

Most pet dog owners who are aware that dogs are pack animals usually believe that they are the pack leader when in fact very few pet dog owners are truly pack leader. The whole pack leader issue is an extremely contentious one and can be so variable across the board when we consider that the dog is a biological masterpiece that has managed to evolve from a wild predator to the most loved, owned and trained or used domestic animal on earth. This pack animal after thousands of generations of breeding has been able to be changed to suit mans needs in almost every respect except one — it is still definitely a pack animal. Due to this, all dogs are going to try to elevate their status in a pack where possible. So this means that correct pack structure is not something that once it is gained is guaranteed to remain that way. In fact it is a situation of constant reshuffling and resetting and must be constantly considered and worked at to remain correctly structured.

Correct identification of the leader and its subordinate is imperative, so that feeding regimes, attention and discipline can be appropriately distributed. A subordinate dog that is elevated out of correct rank structure can cause many problems and can be injured, whilst a pack leader animal may appear to be the troublemaker when in fact an incorrectly elevated rank subordinate is most likely instigating the problems and often owners can not realise there is actually an underlying rank structure problem.

## **ADULT DOGS**

Choosing an adult dog is always an option when a puppy is not desired due to their high level of labour intensity and dreaded puppy behaviours that can turn beautiful living environments into disaster zones. But for the very reason many people don't want young puppies is why I believe they are generally more viable. With an adult dog even with anecdotal information, it is not always reliable and if no previous history is available an adult dog can be a huge gamble as you do not know if it was split from its litter at an appropriate age or was a single puppy litter. Social exposure is next point to be considered, but at least you can get help on identifying the levels of natural drives and instincts. When it comes to knowing if the dog has had past productive or unproductive environment, good or destructive discipline plans, correct or incorrect feeding regimes and reinforcement regimes which could all add or subtract from whether the dog has had a sound pack structure previous to the new owner acquiring the dog which may make the job of gaining correct structure extremely difficult. All these factors unless you are an extremely experienced trainer or behaviourist whom has some set profile or structured testing procedures could leave you with a dog that possesses too many negative aspects or a massive liability situation. Whilst puppies are at first a lot of extra work and effort, you get the advantage of being able to split them from the litter at the most appropriate age for your needs. You can ensure a sound social exposure level is achieved, you can also ensure a productive environment is provided and that feeding regimes, reinforcement regimes and discipline plans are correctly developed and adhered to hence ensuring a far greater chance of gaining correct rank structure and a great canine companion.

## **PREVENTATIVE MEASURES FOR DEALING WITH AGGRESSION**

1. Choose breeds that are noted not to display aggression or fear or heavy instincts and drives.
2. When acquiring a pup, ensure parents are sociable with animals and humans — confident but not overly dominant.
3. Before acquiring older dogs, test sociability with children, animals and adults under a controlled situation. Check that the dog's level of prey, predatory, guarding and defence are not pronounced and that the dog does not have too high level of dominance for perspective owner to manage.
4. Split pups from the litter in the opportune time to reap best benefits.
5. Ensure social exposure is correctly timed and targeted.
6. When dealing with drives and instincts, do not allow them to build beyond the handlers level of stimulation control.
7. Create productive environmental effects.
8. Build and maintain successful discipline plans.
9. Utilise passive dominance feeding regimes.
10. Employ productive reinforcement strategies that enhance wanted behaviours and diminish unwanted behaviours.
11. Set and maintain correct rank structure procedures.
12. Consult experienced credible help when unsure or needing more education.

## CONCLUSION

Prevention is better than cure. It would be far more beneficial to the community and canines alike to develop education programs that utilise sound knowledge and are designed to teach the public how to identify desirable behaviours in older dogs and how to customise the raising of a puppy to limit the number of dog bites. In the case of shelters, pounds and welfare groups whom rehome adolescent and adult dogs it would also greatly benefit the community if they were taught and qualified to identify dogs that possess a greater risk of developing behavioural problems and especially aggression problems.

This would also allow them to concentrate on rehoming only the best candidate dogs that possess the least risks to the public. Sound education programs should be developed that deal with giving perspective dog owners an overview of what breeds would be likely to suit their needs and desires without being either a mismatch or a high risk of developing problems later. The education program could be designed to give the layman enough information and experience to identify sound temperament, to understand the consequences of incorrectly splitting pups from the litter too early or too late. Social exposure times and targets could be taught also to realise that natural drives and instincts play a big part in the development of some unwanted behaviours if not correctly identified and controlled. The programs could demonstrate how to produce productive environment practices, workable discipline plans, passive dominance based feeding regimes, constructive reinforcement regimes which would all greatly enhance the perspective pet dog owner's ability to gain and hold correct pack structure with their family and canine companions. A program that could pass on even the very basics of these phases would certainly increase the pleasure humans would gain from owning a pet dog. The benefits of this program would considerably lower the incidents of complaints to authorities from behavioural problems and would also diminish the number of dog bite incidents on humans and other animals.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Craig is presently contracted by the Department of Primary Industries, Queensland, to develop two world first Chemical Residue Detection Dog Programs, to train the dogs to performance specification criteria and then develop a training program for handlers to operate and maintain those dogs. He is also involved in producing an Urban Disaster Dog for the Queensland Ambulance Service Urban Reach and Treat Team. Craig has also previously been hired and utilised by five State Police Departments for specialist dog skills in cadaver recovery and search and rescue. He has also been a permanent part-time lecturer for the Queensland University Veterinary Science School for seven years and has authored hundreds of articles on specialist dog work.

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