

Risk assessment, Evaluations,
and how not to get bitten! (we
hope...)



LET'S START WITH BASICS:

- To interact with a dog, we have to do one main thing:
 - **COMMUNICATE!**
- Communication presumes that information is passed from a sender to a receiver, and that the message sent is the same as the message received.
- Problems:
 - Noise
 - Lack of common language

COMMUNICATION WITH DOGS IS

- The foundation we need for later in order to evaluate, handle, and understand the dog(s) involved in an incident.

COMMUNICATION WITH DOGS IS NOT

- Whispering...
- Magic...
- Only for the select...

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION? WHAT IS “SPEAKING DOG”?

- 95% or more of canine communication is non-verbal.
- And effective communication requires both transmission *and reception* of the same message.

HOW DO DOGS COMMUNICATE?

- **If the receiver does not understand the message, no communication occurs.**



BODY AND FACIAL POSITIONING



BODY POSTURE



FRONTAL STANCE-SECURE DOG



PLAY BOW



SOFT EYES AND FACE



AVERTED GAZE



HEAD TURN AWAY



FEARFUL



HARD EYES



ANGLED BODY POSITION-FEAR



TIGHT, CURLED LIPS, BARE TEETH



SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

- Working with dangerous or potentially dangerous dogs is not for everyone.
 - You have nothing to prove.
 - If you do – take up training tropical fish.
- **SCARS ARE NOT MEDALS.**
- You need to assess the risk, your talents, and the options available to you.

EVALUATE THE STORY: WHAT HAS BEEN PRESENTED AS THE SITUATION?

- Are you being told **ALL** of the information?
- What is the **DOG** telling you?



WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON?

- *Is the dog signaling?*
- *Are you receiving?*
- *Are the dog's actions consistent with what you would expect in the surroundings?*
 - *Allow for environmental contributors to the observed behavior.*
- *What is the dog's physical condition?*
 - *Are there any possible effects from the incident or from treatment by captors/handlers/staff?*

EVALUATE YOUR NEEDS. DO YOU HAVE:

- Enough space?
- A way out?
- Safety equipment?
- Defensive handling?
 - Equipment?
 - Size?
- Spotter or safety backup?



O.O.D.A.

- U.S. Special Forces.
 - But we aren't killing anyone – we are trying to save lives.
- OBSERVE
- ORIENT
- DECIDE
- ACT

OBSERVE: WHAT IS THE DOG DOING?

- ***Posture***
- ***Position***
- ***Movement***
- ***Tension***
- ***Tail***
- ***Gaze***
- ***Lips***
- ***Tongue/mouth/teeth***
- ***Arousal level***



ORIENT: WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

- **What is around you?**
 - *What do you SEE, SMELL, HEAR, FEEL?*
 - *What is YOUR...*
 - *Posture*
 - *Position*
 - *Movement*
 - *Gaze*
 - *Facial expression*
 - *Tension*



DECIDE: WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH?

- Direct – or indirect?
- BIG or small?
 - You may want to increase or reduce your profile.
- Stay fluid
- Consider the consequence of each option.
 - Best case?
 - Worst case?

ACT.

- Commit to your decisions.
 - But keep your options open as much as you can.
 - Be ready to go to Plan B.
 - **THERE MUST ALWAYS BE A PLAN B.**
- Stay calm.
- Don't escalate – NEGOTIATE (more on negotiation Friday)

DOCUMENT

- Nothing is done until the paperwork is over.
 - Notes taken immediately after an evaluation.
 - Full documentation – objective, not subjective.
- Video whenever you can.
 - Video can support your physical documentation.
 - Video may catch things you missed.

BEHAVIOR EVALUATIONS

■ Many tools-mileage may vary.

– *SAFER*

– *CGC*

– *TDI*

– *Obedience*

– *Match-up*

– *APDT C.L.A.S.S.*

ATTS

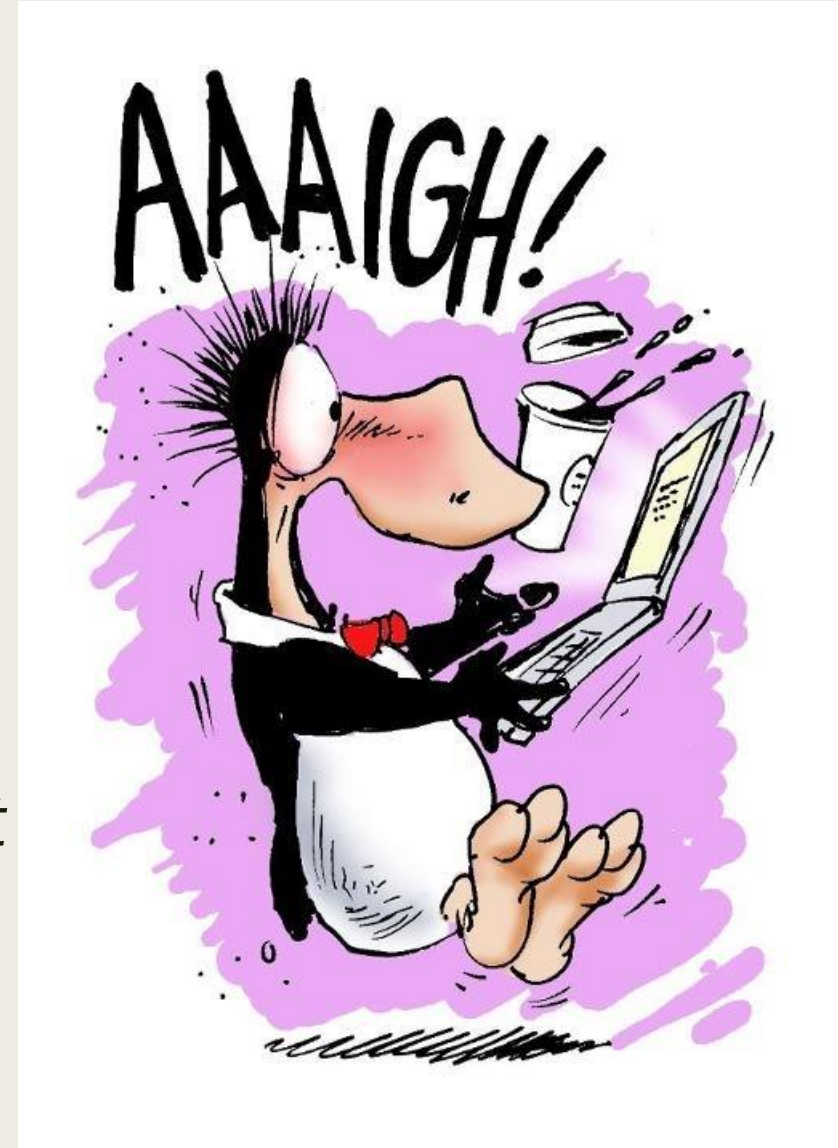
SafeDog

Delta

Cornell assessment

AKC CGC

B.A.R.K.



Behavior evaluations

Perception vs observation



Evaluation tools

- Evaluations are, in my view:
 - *A single snapshot*
 - *With a particular person*
 - *In a particular environment*
- I use evaluation tools as *diagnostic*, to find out:
 - *A guide to what has happened*
 - *A guide to determining problem areas that need help.*
 - *A guide to building a treatment plan, based on a dog's reactions, by seeking to reduce triggers and replace unwanted behaviors.*
- THEY ARE NOT "LIVE OR DIE" tests.!

What should they be?

- Planned
- Consistent
- Reproducible
- Quantifiable
 - *"Energy", if it can't be measured for court, is meaningless.*
- DOCUMENTED.
 - *No "secret sauce" here!*
 - *Stick to a plan—but be ready to adapt to situations.*

What is an evaluation NOT?

- A contest to see who can be the “baddest” handler.
- Pushing a dog until it snaps.
 - *If the dog growls when you approach an empty bowl, you don't need to push farther.*
- General waving things about.
- Magic or whispering.

Not an evaluation...



What am I looking for?

- Triggers for the particular incident.
 - *Ideally re-create the incident as close as safely possible.*
 - *Does the dog have the ability to recover from a stimulus?*
- Behavioral deficits for treatment.
- Assessment of the dog's current state.
 - *Direct, quantifiable, non-judgmental observations of behavior.*

To what purpose?

- Establish a plan to treat behavioral deficits.
- Establish management practices to keep both humans and dog(s) safe.
- Assess the likelihood that a dog will respond to intervention.
- Consider whether the dog's condition is such a risk as to make recovery unlikely.

Limits to evaluations:

- It is never the exact same situation.
- Possible post-bite action that has linked new consequences.
- Dog may not show typical reaction in strange environment
- Dog may be reacting to the stress of transfer and holding.
- The tester may behave differently than the victim.
- The dog may respond differently in the presence/absence of the owner

Cautions in interpreting cause

- Don't apply human motivations.
- Look at the incident from the dog's point of view.
- Try not to make assumptions without sufficient information.
- Do not reflexively blame the dog.
- Don't mistake the target for intent.
- Beware of depending on tools

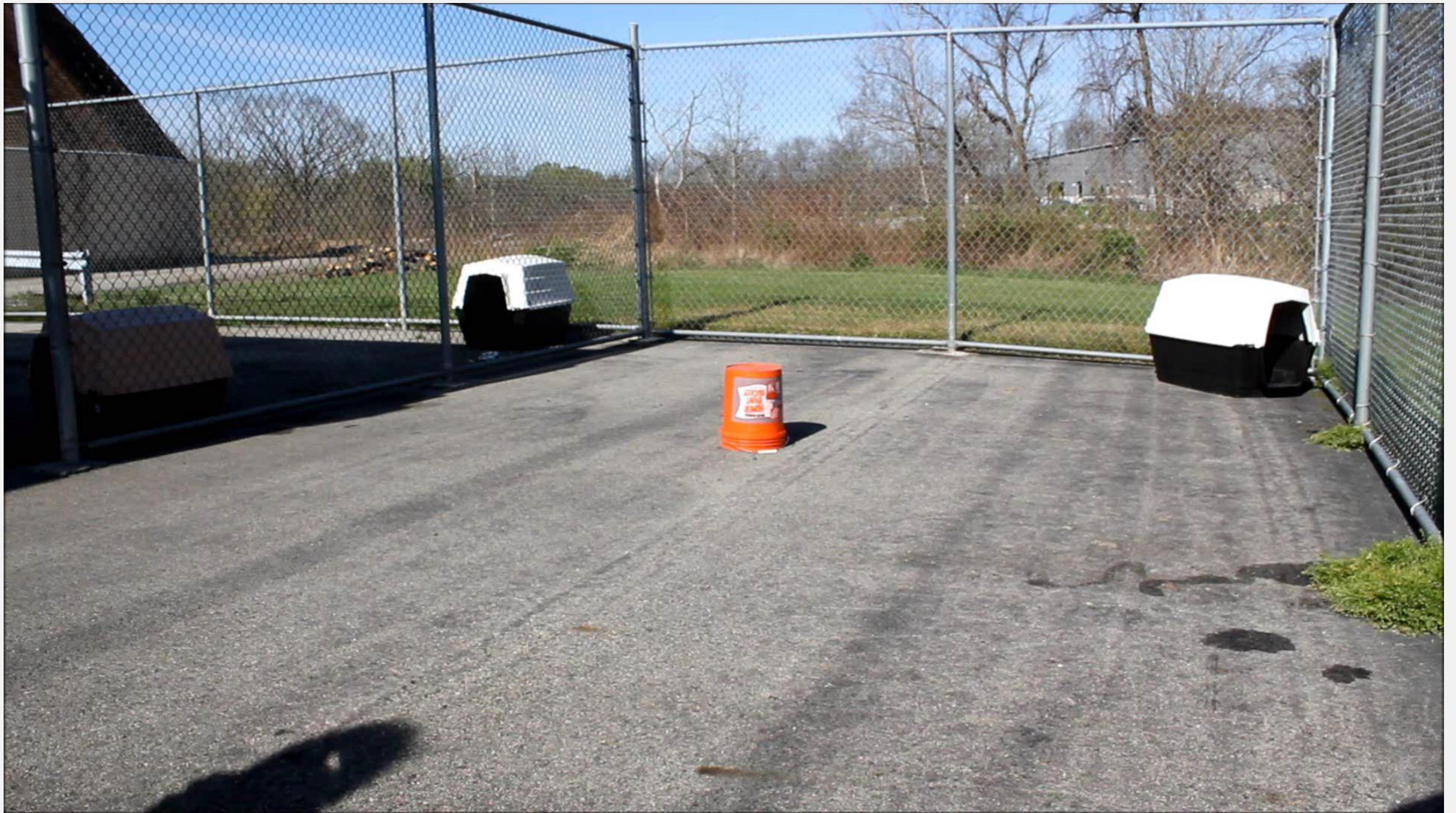
Outcomes:

- You cannot guarantee future behavior.
 - *Dogs are constantly adapting to their environments, activity level, other dogs, people, etc.*
 - *Prediction is NOT reliable with any single test*
- No single test is valid, reliable, and reproducible-yet.
- You can never say a dog is 100% safe.
- Neither can you guarantee a dog will repeat an incident.

Reporting-specific, quantifiable

AVOID EMOTIONAL TERMS

- Memphis. Male, neutered, Pit Bull type dog (owner-identified), approximately 2 years old. Reddish-tan, solidly built . Posture and position on initial observation-alert and calm. When I approached Memphis observed me, standing forward in his kennel, facing frontally. I turned my back and Memphis stayed at the front of the kennel, observing calmly. When I approached with a treat Memphis immediately accepted the offered treat with tail wagging and gently took the treat from my hand. When I stared directly at Memphis (direct eye contact) he barked once but quickly (less than 2 seconds) averted his eyes, tail wagging, and showing several lip licks in rapid succession. When I did not respond by averting my gaze Memphis faced off and barked briefly, but then re-averted his gaze within five seconds, wagging his tail.







Save Bleu!

