

Oh behave3! Practical solutions to problem pets and people

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Abstract

Understanding behaviour problems and their solutions may be easy for some people working in urban animal management but actually solving problem pets and their people can be extremely frustrating. Companion animal owners are often non-understanding, non-compliant and some even non-caring.

Tips for managing difficult problems, difficult pets and difficult people will be discussed and demonstrated, enabling anyone that works in the companion animal industry, especially those who deal with people directly, to increase the efficacy of their work and ultimately decrease the extent of urban animal problems in our communities.

Discussion

We may be able to understand the problems that we are faced with working in the companion animal field. We may even know the solutions. Actually achieving solutions to pet and pet owner problems within our community can be extremely frustrating.

Some behaviour problems are particularly difficult to understand. Some pets are very difficult to deal with. Some people can be equally hard to manage. These difficult scenarios can make life at work less efficient and ultimately very stressful for us to handle.

This paper will be given in a practical format with a chance to discuss and practice some difficult scenarios. Some examples of these are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Potentially difficult scenarios in the companion animal working environment

Difficult scenarios		
Problems	Pets	People
Those that are chronic eg. barking	Those with persistent or repeated problem behaviours eg. escaping	Those that don't care
Those that are acute eg. dog attack	Those that society dislike eg. pit bulls	Those that don't listen
	Those you have a personal bias against	Those that do not believe their pet is badly behaved
		Those who blame/ are judgemental/ pessimistic
		Those who are upset or angry

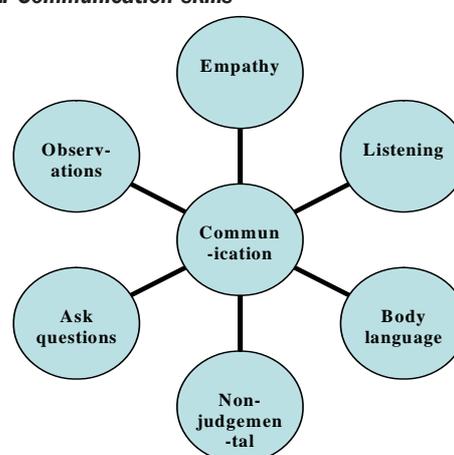
People skills

Skills for dealing with people, difficult or not, are useful if you wish to solve companion animal problems in society. While skills in handling people often come down to effective communication, it can be useful to think of the various individual skills required to communicate effectively (Figure 1) and to practice these:

1. **Empathy** – the ability to understand another person's situation and feelings
2. **Listening** – hearing what others are saying, not interrupting. If they don't talk, then ask eg say "tell me about...". Use eye contact to listen.

3. **Asking** open questions – questions that you cannot answer "yes" or "no"; use of "who, what, when, where, how". Choose words carefully – eg. "it sounds like you feel..."
4. **Body language** – postures, gestures, eye contact. Body language observation skills are also invaluable for assessing animals.
5. **Being non-judgemental** – you may have personal beliefs about a situation. These should be withheld to enable you to get as much information about the situation as possible.
6. **Observation** – of people, animals, environment and the interaction between these.

Figure 1: Communication skills



Conflict resolution

Solving difficult problems often requires skills at resolving conflict. While the topic and practice of conflict resolution skills is outside the scope of this paper, it is useful to know some of the strategies that may help deal with difficult scenarios. Some of these include:

1. The win-win approach: devising a solution where everyone wins.
2. Managing emotions: understanding what emotions people are communicating to you and how they make you feel.
3. Willingness to resolve: understanding how someone's behaviour makes you feel and acknowledging our qualities.
4. Negotiation: includes focusing on needs not people; emphasis on common ground; being inventive about options and discussing clear arrangements.

Solutions

Developing effective solutions to difficult problems, pets and people requires knowledge and experience. Developing effective communication skills and conflict resolution skills requires knowledge and practice. This paper is designed to begin that practice for those people working in the companion animal industry.

NOTE: Biography for the author can be found at the end of previous papers.