

Dog Training and NLP

Over twenty years ago I qualified as an Advanced Instructor with the British Institute of Professional Dog Trainers and when years later I started learning about NLP I noticed applications for dog training and canine psychology. More recently I introduced into my home two new puppies and at seven months one has developed a rabbit chasing addiction! Pretty normal behaviour of course but problematic because Buck (the offender) kept disappearing off into the woods and I risked losing him. So time to sort out the problem, I knew the strategy I would use right away and as I started to use it I realised it was a pattern interrupt. I was using "training discs" to interrupt the chasing behaviour. These are a specially designed set of metal discs held together by a ring.

Step One: The dog is first sensitised to the discs in a stimulus low environment to condition or anchor the response of "what ever you are doing stop!" The discs are a kind, pain free way of shaping behaviour used by canine behaviourists the world over.

Step Two: Calibrate the dog's responses to accurately mind read when the chase strategy is about to be implemented and throw the discs on the floor beside the dog. This interrupts the strategy, call the dog and praise. This way the dog does not associate anything unpleasant with the owner and in fact gets to be rewarded for coming back.

Step Three: Once step two has been used for a couple of days the discs can be jingled instead of thrown. Eventually the undesirable behaviour is extinguished.

In reality, there are more steps in most cases. My dogs are very well trained so this was a "top up" strategy and I know I can verbally recall if necessary. Dogs with a less well developed recall would need a few on lead and long line steps before moving onto step two above. This technique is useful if you want to stop your dog chasing anything e.g. the postman, cars, other dogs, children, cats, livestock etc.

The above experience leads me to think more about my work in the past as a dog psychologist and trainer. Listed below are some other NLP applications that can be applied to dogs.

- ❖ Anchoring – the original after all was Pavlov's dogs. Dogs have many anchors that owners are not aware of e.g. dinner time, walkies, car ride, the vets etc. Installing useful anchors is pretty straight forward and exactly the same as with people and is the basis of most dog training.
- ❖ Rapport building – understanding how dogs make friends is key for a trainer.
- ❖ Calibration and sensory acuity – as already mentioned, being able to accurately mind read has many benefits when living with dogs. Unfortunately many owners do this incorrectly. E.g. the dog has wrecked the kitchen when they were out. Owners often mind read the dog as being guilty when it is merely being submissive in the face of the owner's disapproval or anger. The dog is unlikely to connect the behaviour of kitchen wrecking to the owners state unless caught in the act!

- ❖ Pattern interrupts – as mentioned above many and varied uses.
- ❖ Modelling and strategies – particularly useful when dealing with dominance aggression, e.g. the dog that bites its owners. The owner can be taught to model dominant behaviour and thus reverse negative behaviours in the dog. This is done primarily by controlling five interactions; owner as pack leader always eats first; owner controls attention giving and receiving; owner wins all games with toys by keeping the toy at the end of a game; dog is made to accept regular grooming; control of sleeping areas, the owner can sleep or sit anywhere and regularly moves the dog and takes his place, dog not allowed on furniture and in extreme cases not allowed in bedrooms at all. This last strategy is only implemented when the other four have been in place for one month minimum otherwise the owner risks a bad mauling!
- ❖ Map of the world – many owners fail to realise that we need to get into the dogs map of the world not the other way round. As mentioned above it is easy to change behaviour when we understand canine motivation. Dogs are pretty cool and do really well at calibrating us so that sometimes we forget that their map is different from ours.
- ❖ Meta programs – moving away from pain and toward pleasure certainly applies. Inexpert dog trainers often rely on away from pain techniques which sadly can be very effective. My experience tells me that toward pleasure techniques are far more effective and robust. I wonder what other meta programs apply?

My curiosity has now been aroused and I am wondering how the following might apply to dogs and dog training:

- ✚ Representational systems (smell must be a significant one)
- ✚ Sub modalities
- ✚ Eye accessing cues
- ✚ Trance work (rabbit chasing is a pretty deep trance!)
- ✚ Meta model
- ✚ Milton model
- ✚ Time lines
- ✚ Metaphors
- ✚ Other groovy stuff from NLP

Watch this space! I am going to ponder this some more.

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