



FEATURE

# HOW TO BE *a dog trainer*

Words Kathy Reidy

*Dog Trainer, Dog Behaviourist, Dog Behaviour Specialist, Dog Psychologist, Dog Behaviour Consultant – dare I say it... Dog Whisperer. These are all terms that people use when they are advertising their services to the dog owners of Australia.*

*Unfortunately the dog training and behaviour industry is not regulated at this time and as such, anyone can use these titles in their business name. Anyone can call themselves a dog trainer or behaviourist without having any qualifications in this field.*





## FEATURE

# HOW TO BE a dog trainer

There are many in the industry without formal qualifications and doing a great job, but this is outweighed by the ones who are out there pretending they know the best way to deal with dog training and behaviour modification. A true professional will continue their education through seminars and workshops and are members of professional industry organisations that set and enforce standards or codes of ethics.

## Does it really matter?

Of course it does. Using incorrect or even outdated methods can be downright dangerous as an incorrect approach to behaviour modification results in the behaviour becoming worse, potentially causing damage to both the dog and their owner. With seeking professional help, this could be prevented.

Dog training has come a long way since I was a young child, spending all my weekends at a training club and obedience trials. Education in this field has introduced me to scientifically proven methods of training and behaviour modification. As a good friend of mine and qualified animal behaviourist said to a group of students, 'we know better, so we do better'.

Watching a television program or living with dogs does not give you the skills to be a good dog trainer or the knowledge on how to modify behaviour. Many dog industry professionals such as groomers, boarding kennel operators, shelter workers, even veterinarians are often asked to give behaviour and training advice and, even though very experienced in what they do, they may not be up with the latest information in the dog training world.

Go on any social media and watch how the arguments flow about 'training methods'. I have had conversations with many 'so called' professional trainers claiming they do not have a 'method.' They have lived with dogs and just know dogs' minds and how to control them. However, there is science that backs up how behaviour works in all animals and we can thank the study of animals to find answers in human behaviour for the way we can modify behaviour and train dogs today.

## Now on training methods

The term 'Balanced Trainer' is being bandied about of late in training circles and I consider myself balanced as I know and understand the

### '4 quadrants of operant conditioning'

that we can use to train our dogs.

**Operant conditioning is a theory of learning that generally follows "Thorndyke's Law of Effect."**

**This law states that behaviours that are reinforced will become more likely to occur, and behaviours that are not reinforced will become less likely to occur.**

It seems like common sense to reward good behaviour and punish bad behaviour. However, "bad" behaviour in dogs can have a lot of causes, including stress, fear, anxiety, pain, illness, boredom and more. Any trainer that determines bad behaviour should be punished without taking these factors into consideration is a bad trainer.

Rewarding good behaviour and not reinforcing bad behaviour, or diverting bad behaviour is the best option for all dogs. Many of the bad behaviour cases I have seen come from fear, frustration, boredom or pain. None of which is going to be remedied by punishment. Using positive reinforcement makes for a happy dog, who chooses the behaviours we want as we make it worthwhile, and it also increases the bond between dog and his trainer.

## THE 4 QUADRANTS OF OPERANT CONDITIONING

When training an animal, there is one behaviour that we want to **reinforce** (increase), and another behaviour that we want to **punish** (decrease).  
We can add something good or bad (+ **positive**) or remove/delay something good or bad (- **negative**) to get the behaviour we want.

**IN THIS EXAMPLE:** The reinforced behaviour is **LOOSE-LEASH WALKING**.  
The punished behaviour is **PULLING ON THE LEASH**.

**+R** POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT  
ADDING GOOD STUFF TO  
INCREASE A BEHAVIOUR



**-P** NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT  
DELAYING GOOD STUFF TO  
DECREASE A BEHAVIOUR



**+P** POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT  
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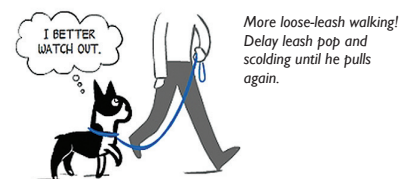


Illustration inspired by "Clickertraining 101" / ClickerExpo 2011 *Lili*

## How do you obtain skills & qualifications?

I have researched the following qualifications, which are available in Australia, that the industry recognises, and should be a minimum for anyone charging clients for their services. There are many Registered Training Organisations that offer courses in animal care and training so research what they have to offer.

- **Certificate IV in Companion Animal Services-Knowledge assessed and Skills Assesses.**

This qualification is nationally recognised and currently is the highest qualification delivered in Australia for Dog Trainers. Several training organisations offer this qualification and it is made up of core units that must be included but the remaining units can be selected by the RTO. Therefore each institution that offers this qualification can differ in the subjects that students need to complete.

- **Richmond NSW College offers Certificate IV Companion Animal Training & Behaviour.**

This course has been developed especially for people who want to become companion animal trainers and learn about companion animal selection, identification, husbandry, health, training and behaviour. It also includes a unit for small business management as many trainers wish to open their own business in this field. It aims to educate on providing advice to animal owners on all aspects of responsible pet ownership with a strong focus on training and behaviour modification.

- **Delta Society Australia offers Certificate IV Companion Animal Services.**

This course offers students a program of instruction in the management of dog training classes and private lessons using positive reinforcement. Students who successfully complete all units of competency and also complete a Senior Human First Aid certificate are awarded a Certificate IV in Companion Animal Services (Delta Canine Good Citizen™). After successful completion of the course trainers can join the Delta Professional Dog Trainers Association.

- **National Dog Trainers Federation offers Certificate III Canine Training & Behaviour-Knowledge Assessed and skills assessed.**

Certified Professional Dog Trainer - Knowledge Assessed & Skills Assessed (CPDT-KA/CPDT-KSA): A CPDT-KA has met minimum requirements as an instructor (including a minimum length of training experience), has submitted references from a client, a veterinarian, and another training professional, has passed a certifying examination and is required to meet a minimum of continuing education every two years. A CPDT-KSA (Knowledge & Skills Assessed) has passed an additional certification process by providing evidence of training skill.

- **Veterinary Behaviourist**

A veterinary behaviourist can be invaluable for dogs with behaviour problems, especially when the cause is medical or requires the use of medication to overcome the problem. A Veterinary Behaviourist is a regular veterinarian that has gone on to further specialist study on animal behaviour and passed an exam. Veterinary behaviourists and dog trainers may often work together on dog behaviour cases.



There are also many veterinarians who have a special interest in behaviour and take additional courses to learn more. However, not all veterinarians do so and dog owners should seek additional opinions when a veterinarian recommends aversive techniques.

## The last word on Animal Behaviourists

As mentioned previously, in most countries anyone can call themselves a 'behaviourist,' just like they can call themselves a 'trainer'. In the animal industry, a behaviourist is similar to a trainer. In the academic world, an animal behaviourist has undergone formal training in animal behaviour. Undergraduate degrees e.g. Bachelor of Animal Science majoring in Animal Behaviour, to postgraduate masters and doctorates e.g. PhD in Animal Behaviour, graduates often use the title 'Animal Behaviourist'. It is important to know that a person may have a PhD in Animal Behaviour but may have spent 5 years studying the mating habits of the *Drosophila* fly, which doesn't give them any further skills... especially in the world of dog training. These days we find that the title is irrelevant- it's the skills, expertise and contemporary know how, also known as 'the proof is in the pudding'.

Using the term trainer or behaviourist does not mean that all are knowledgeable and experienced in all areas of training and behaviour, but attending seminars and workshops to update skills and knowledge and also knowing when to refer to others in the industry are the signs of a true professional.

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