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*The Art and Science of Animal Behavior*

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Understanding an animal's expressions and knowing what motivates him helps you **connect with your pet and build a trusting relationship.**

- [Leadership Without Force](#)
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The dominance approach creates an atmosphere of fear, and competition between humans and pets which can gradually ruin a relationship.

## Leadership Without Force vs. The Old Way: Conflict and Coercion

We've all heard advice that relates dog behavior to wolf social behavior: "Always eat before your dog and go through doorways first because that's what a dominant wolf would do." "If your dog growls or barks inappropriately or otherwise misbehaves, put him in his place by doing an alpha roll where you force him onto his back until he submits. That way you can be the boss."

20 years ago when I started training, this is the type of advice I gave because it was all I knew. At that time, like everyone else, the choke chain and pinch collar and a well-timed correction formed the cornerstone of dog training for me. And I thought that dominance was the root of all behavior problems. Combined with a strong ability to read aggressive dogs, a lack of fear of being bitten, and fervor for trying to master the techniques of whomever I could, these methods and ideologies served me well.

### Times Have Changed for the Better

Because I am always searching for ways to improve, as knowledge of dog and wolf behavior trickled down from the research and field scientists, my knowledge of animal behavior expanded and consequently my philosophies changed.

In the past two decades our understanding of dog behavior in relation to wolves, as well as our understanding of dominance and social hierarchies has advanced. Wolf biologists now rarely use the term alpha when referring to pack leaders in the wild. Careful observation has revealed that dominant wolves do not force subordinates onto their back (incorrectly termed an alpha roll). Rather subordinates offer the posture as a sign of deference (more appropriate term, submissive roll). In addition, ethologists agree that studies on the process of domestication and on canine communication are making it more and more clear that a dog is not a wolf.



To change behavior  
we have to focus  
on rewarding  
desirable behavior  
and removing  
rewards for  
undesirable behavior.

## Dominance is Not the Root of Bad Behavior

It is also now clear that dominance is generally not the cause of bad behavior. This is evident once you know the definition of dominance. In animal behavior, dominance is defined as a relationship between individuals that's established by force, aggression and submission in order to gain priority access to resources. A dominance relationship is not established until one individual consistently submits. With this definition in mind, it is clear that most of the unruly behaviors we see in our pets are not due to a desire to gain higher rank. Consequently, dominance theory becomes irrelevant for most behavior problems in our pets.

## Leadership Without Force

So what is the root of unruly behavior? The psychology studies on learning and behavior of the last 60+ years have shown us that animals (and humans) behave in undesirable ways because these behaviors have been reinforced. To change behavior we have to remove the rewards for undesirable behavior and focus instead on rewarding good behavior.

The simple approach, along with attention to the nuances of timing, body language, and motivation, forms the basis for establishing a relationship of trust between the human and the pet. Training becomes a joy rather than a chore and the methods open up a whole new connection with your pet.

I invite you to read more about the techniques for training your pets and clients. This web site has many free

ing philosophy and establish better connections with your clients. Please explore and use right away.

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