The Other End of the Leash: Why We Do What We Do Around Dogs Study Guide

The Other End of the Leash: Why We Do What We Do Around Dogs by Patricia McConnell

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The Other End of the Leash by Patricia B. McConnell is a "root cause" approach to dog training and ownership. In her position as an Applied Animal Behaviorist, ethologist, and longtime dog lover, McConnell examines how dog behavior relates to ancestral canid behavior (wolves) and compares to our own primate tendencies. Using this knowledge will allow humans to better understand dog behavior in order to control dogs and maintain a happy home.

While humans show affection and companionship with closeness, touching, kissing, and hugging, dogs are quite different. Closeness, direct eye contact, head petting, and hugging are all "rude" gestures to dogs, gestures which they take as a sign of an owner asserting undue dominance. Dogs, and especially strange dogs, should not be subject to such gestures until they are fully familiarized with a human.

Dogs are very visual. They are especially attune to shapes; an owner who comes home with a large hat on may look like a completely different person than the hatless owner they are accustomed to. They also respond to minute differences in their owner's body and posture. A mere leaning forward may be enough to telegraph aggression to a dog. To take the aggression from a dog, one should lean backward, avoid eye contact, move slowly, and maintain a generous distance.

In the world of vocal instructions to dogs, owners should make efforts to maintain consistent commands. For example, "Come" and "Here, boy, come" sound like two entirely different things to a dog while we understand they are variations of the same command. Even, normal volume tone should be used; yelling at a dog shows a dog that an owner is not in control.

Like us, dogs are highly socialized animals, and this socialization must be understood. During the first months of a puppy's life, known as the sensitive period, it is crucial that the dog be introduced in a positive way to as many humans as possible, in order to breed familiarity with owners and strangers alike. Abused or neglected dogs who pass by their sensitive period without this acclimation usually develop behavior problems that run deep and many times cannot be cured.

Dominance is a misunderstood term in dog training. The author recommends against the advice of many dog trainers, that is, to establish dominance over a dog with "alpha rollovers" or punishment. Instead, the theory of "benevolent leadership" is encouraged, in which an owner behaves with confidence, politeness, positive reinforcement, and clear leadership, and never with yells, threats, and physical violence.

The author also emphasizes the fact that dogs have personalities, and just as with human friends, owners should evaluate a dog's personality tendencies and determine if that personality meshes well within the human family. Breed, though it can tell a lot about a dog, should not be confused with personality. In the end, should owner and dog be completely incompatible, it is more humane to find the dog a new home (rehoming)

than it is to force both parties to continue to suffer, even if there is a lot of love and affection involved.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Author Patricia B. McConnell is an applied animal behaviorist and well-known dog trainer. She relates an event in which she was training an aggressive mastiff dog before an audience. She mistakenly got very close to the dog while fielding a questioning, and made the further mistake of looking the dog right in the eye for a second. The dog lunged at her and she retreated.

This episode shows the importance of a trainer or owner controlling his or her physical movements when with a dog. Small movements impart big meanings to dogs. This is unsurprising, considering how humans are in tune with tiny movements (of the face) as well. Both species are highly visual and social.

An owner must train the body much like an athlete trains the body. The tendency is to think that our voice is the biggest influence on a dog—"Sit! Stay!"—but in fact several studies and the author's decades of experience have taught otherwise. Only some dogs respond reliably to aural stimuli, but almost all do to visual stimuli. That dogs give their owners "unconditional positive regard" is a myth. Like humans, sometimes dogs want to left alone and are irritable. Especially, dogs do not always like to be petted.

The author suggests being a student of minute behavior, not only in oneself as a dog trainer but in a dog. Most important physical behaviors in a dog include center of gravity (leaning forward, leaning back), breathing rate, and a dog's mouth and eyes. The suggestion is to take a sketchbook out with a dog and write down exact impressions of the dog's behaviors; that, or videotape a dog to examine later. Also, have a friend videotape an owner, in order for the owner to examine his or her own physical tendencies. Sending mixed signals to a dog will panic and confuse them; consistency is the key.

Especially with strangers, dogs do not appreciate closeness, face-to-face contact, and direct eye contact. This is highly rude in the language of dog behavior. The first step to ingratiate oneself with a strange dog is to throw treats at it from about 10 feet away; in this way you are not invading their space. Unfortunately many people, even die-hard dog lovers, insist on getting very close to strange dogs, hugging and petting them. When petting a strange dog, it is in fact best to pet on the chest rather than overhand on the head, which is treated as a threat or domineering gesture.

Though hugging is ingrained as a sign of affection in humans, hugging is rude and domineering to a dog and should be avoided.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Dogs are especially attune to shapes. For them, a human they are accustomed to, but who is wearing a hat or carrying a cane or a package, becomes a stranger because the shape of the body, the silhouette, has changed. Wear a hat around the house for a couple of weeks with a new dog to get them used to the idea that humans' shapes change.

Next discussed is getting a dog to come to you. The command "Come!" said in a clear, cheery voice is a start, but not enough. Ideally, an owner should point their feet and head in the direction they want to dog to go. Usually, that means an owner should turn away from a dog, yell "Come!" and then begin walking in the opposite direction, accompanied by a single clap. The author also recommends the "doggie play bow" stance (slightly crouched down) when performing this command to further entice the dog.

Getting a dog to "stay" is primarily about controlling the space around a dog. In wolf packs and similar, canines use what are called "hip slams" and "shoulder slams" to stake out their territory, warning other dogs away with physical pushes. The author's equivalent for owners is called a "body block," and it involves anticipating a dog's movement and stepping into a space you do not want a dog to enter. With enough practice, it may take only a forward lean of the body to communicate a body block. Rewarding a dog with treats for staying is also a great way to maintain rock-solid stays.

Body blocking must be tempered with giving a dog their own personal sphere of space. Just as humans do not like to be leaned into and come within inches of an angry person, for example, dogs become threatened if humans come too close. Once a body block is initiated, the next step is to lean backward and "release the pressure" of the block so the dog feels unthreatened. Leaning is a crucial component of interaction with dogs. One can tell a threatening dog by the fact that he is leaning forward, or a submissive dog by the fact that he is leaning backward. Similarly, people should greet a new dog by leaning slightly backward, so as not to appear aggressive or "rude."

The corners of the mouth are crucial indicators of temperament in a dog. Pushing these corners of the mouth (called "commissures") back is a sign of fear and submissiveness, akin to a "nervous smile" in humans; commissures coming forward is a sign of aggression. The author always looks to a dog's mouth for clues as to what they might do next.

Looking away, and similar movements with the head, are also an important weapon for an owner to use in dog communication. In primates, looking away is a method of avoiding contact or conflict. The same is true in dogs. Should an owner want to discourage a dog's behavior or interaction (for example, a dog trying to crawl up into an

owner's lap), the best way to do so is a torso "body block" followed by a purposeful turn away of the head. This is a clear signal to a dog to cease their behavior. Similarly, a cock of the head is a useful gesture for an aggressive animal. Cocking one's head an at aggressive dog defuses the conflict and tells a dog, "I am no threat to you," probably because the cocking of the head is usually done in a relaxed state.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

The more scientists have learned about primates, the more it is obvious that there is one true difference between primates and humans: speech. We are "living, breathing verbal machine guns" that constantly use sound to communicate. Unfortunately this can lead to confusion for dogs for several reasons. While we as humans use synonyms and similar phrases to enrich meaning and introduce nuances, dogs have no way to understand similar phrases, and so to a dog these phrases sound completely different. "Come here" and "Here, come" are the same to us, but two different things to a dog.

There is also the problem of habituation, which happens in many animals, including humans. When a stimulus (visual, aural) is constant, it loses its meaning and we have a tendency to tune it out. Translated to dog training, when a dog hears "Come" a dozen times from the motor-mouth of an owner, they may learn to tune it out. Humans also confuse dogs by saying the same command for different behavior. For example, an owner may say "Down" to get a dog to lie down, but may also say "Down" to get a dog to jump off a couch. To a dog these are entirely separate behaviors.

The author urges the reader to carefully monitor what is said to a dog. Eliminate synonym-type phrases for a consistent, single command. Do not say a command over and over, but once in a clear, cheery, but commanding voice. Use different commands for different behavior. An owner may even consider videotaping him or herself to catch verbal excess.

Also, it only leads to confusion to repeat the same command, only louder. While this is common in primate culture, loudness is equated with weakness in dogs. In wolf studies, only juvenile wolves bark; confident adults stay silent. A loudly barking dog is a scared dog, to another dog. Similarly, an owner should not telegraph fear or submissiveness by being overly loud with commands.

It is counter-intuitive to yell "Shut up!" or "Quiet!" at a barking dog. By yelling, an owner has actually encouraged barking, because in dogs barking is a kind of communal activity. You yell, your dog yells. To truly stop barking, use treats to lure the dog away from whatever it is barking at, and then reinforce the silence by feeding the treat. "Enough" is suggested as the best word to encourage silence, said in a low, even tone.

From research into 104 animal handlers using 16 different languages, the author concluded that rapid sounds/utterances were used to spur animals on or make them go faster, and slow, continuous notes were used to get them to slow down, such as the iconic "Whoa" in English used to get a horse to stop. This is a pattern ingrained in a sort of universal speech, "Motherese" as it is called, that transcends individual languages.

As a result, the suggestion is to use short, repetitive notes to encourage movement in a dog. Perhaps "Pup, pup, pup" might be used to get a dog to come. Conversely, a drawn out "No" is useful to get a dog to stop its activity (barking or running).

Similarly, high pitches are associated with positivity, cheerfulness, and encouragement, while low pitches are reserved for authority, threat, and disapproval. Also, pitch modulation does better to get attention than a single, steady pitch.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Dogs are known for their remarkable smell, but it is a little known fact that human smell is very important to humans as well. Unconsciously or not, studies prove that humans are able to tell whether a shirt has been worn by a man or woman. Smell is crucial to pleasurable sexual intercourse; one study shows that half of adults who lose their smell report lack of pleasure with sex.

However, much of this, at the level of the pheromone, remains in the realm of the subconscious in humans, where in dogs it is very much conscious. All mammals use smell in one way or another; some primates use scents to mark territory, for one example.

As a nose-opening exercise, the author suggests the reader sniff different parts of the home—plants, books, sheets—and see whether there is a distinct odor. Most likely, there will be. The best way to sniff is to use short inhales rather than one long inhale, as dogs have taught us.

Dogs have 220 million scent receptors, while humans only have 5 million. Anatomically dogs also have the advantage—their nostrils can move independently of their face, they have a structure called the vomero-nasal organ that smell molecules stick to, and a "smell" part of the brain four times larger than a human's, proportionately. Dogs can sniff out land mines, and even cancer. Dogs can also associate smells with pleasant or unpleasant memories. The example is given of a dog who growled and snapped at visitors who had recently eaten pizza. This was because when the dog was six months old, a pizza delivery boy had kicked her. From then on, she had associated pizza smell with that unpleasant violence, and thus acted accordingly.

Smell relates to the age-old issue of housebreaking a dog. In order to effectively teach a dog to only use the outdoors as a restroom, one needs to completely eliminate the odor of urine and feces from the home. A dog's sign to go to the restroom is where they smell those odors.

We tend to think of all dogs as great sniffers, but in fact breed type affects smells significantly. A beagle is known as one of the greatest sniffers, for example, while a Scottish terrier has a relatively poor sense of smell.

There are several theories why dogs not only love but seem to roll around in ostensibly smelly things—cow pies, urine, maggot-infested meat. The author's preference is the "guy-with-a-gold-chain hypothesis." The theory is that the dog, with its ancestry as a scavenger, enjoys advertising to other dogs that they have been in contact with food-related things. It is a sort of bragging about their material wealth.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Humans and dogs are alike in that they both like to play games, well into adulthood. This is known as paedomorphism—the retention of juvenile qualities (here, playfulness) into adulthood. Humans and dogs are rare in the animal world when it comes to this retained playfulness.

Paedomorphism can go as deep as physiology. A study with foxes, in which researchers bred generation of foxes, selecting for the greatest docility among foxes they mated, showed that the resultant adult docile foxes retained physical traits normally reserved for the juvenile foxes—floppy ears, curly tails, and even different brain chemistry. In the case of dogs, paedomorphism dictates that dogs behave like the juveniles of their ancestors—wolves. This in part accounts for the strong bond humans have with dogs. We are both playful.

A special section is devoted to our mutual playfulness with balls. Many dogs love ball games, just as humans might like basketball or baseball. This "object play" is associated, on the human side of the equation, with our primate heritage. Primates frequently use tools and other object manipulation to get food. A chimpanzee, for example, might use a stick to hunt for termites. This is traced to our fascination for manipulating objects around us.

Which brings us to playing ball, and teaching a dog how to properly play fetch. Some dogs love to play "keep away," refusing to give a thrown ball back. This is another natural game, but it can get annoying if an owner does not want to chase the dog around the yard to get a ball back. Owners are advised to turn the tables, and make themselves the object of the chase. Walk away from a dog bringing back a ball, rather than toward it. That way the owner controls the situation, and the dog is scrambling to get the owner's attention. When first training a dog to play fetch, only throw it a few feet away; dogs lose focus if the ball is tossed very far away. Never pry a ball from a dog's mouth; instead, be patient and show the dog that dropping the ball will result in a reward—namely, the instant re-throwing of the ball.

Play can become dangerous in "wrestling" and "play fighting," which especially male humans tend to engage in. Surprisingly, there seems to be no difference between male and female dogs in this willingness to wrestle; both sexes do so equally. The problem of course is that the play fighting can get out of hand. Unlike humans, who use hands, dogs are using mouths full of sharp teeth and crushing power. The potential for an accident is high. Moreover, a dog can get "fed up" or angry with play fighting just as a human can, and lash out. Also, say the father of the family wrestles with the dog. There is then a chance that the dog will then use the same amount of energy and violence in play fighting with the mother half the father's side, or more tragically, the 5-year-old

daughter. There is too much potential harm in play fighting, and so the author recommends other play forms instead—fetch, hide and seek, teaching tricks.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

The time from when a puppy is born to about 3 or 4 months is called the "sensitive period" and it is a crucial stage of development. A dog must be introduced and made familiar with humans during this period. They must also learn to not urinate and defecate where they sleep. Otherwise they are nearly impossible to housetrain, and they develop a host of behavioral disorders. They may snap or bark incessantly at strangers. Much of a dog's behavior has to do with what is familiar versus what is unfamiliar. Constant human (and preferably, other dog) contact is crucial to making relationships with humans a normal, healthy occurrence rather than a strange one.

However, humans must be smart about this contact, and learn to understand the vast difference between canine and primate behavior. While humans display affection by hugging ("ventral-ventral contact"), kissing, direct eye contact, or otherwise being physically close, oftentimes dogs do not display affection in the same way. While some dogs may like licking faces, other dogs display affection by curling up at an owners' feet. Grooming is also a primate way of socializing; chimpanzees for example spend up to an hour at a time carefully grooming another chimpanzee's fur. While many dogs do enjoy similar contact in the form of petting, other dogs may not like petting; these dogs should be identified and treated differently.

One form of petting that is usually disliked by dogs is the top of the head pet. This is a form of dominance to a dog. Also, an owner should not assume that a dog wants to be petted all the time. In fact, many owners make the mistake of petting the head as a reward for some behavior, such as coming or sitting. This "rude" and domineering gesture is little reward for most dogs and should be avoided; a treat is much more appreciated.

Moreover, short rapid pets may cause arousal or agitation when the desire is for calming and soothing, such as at the vet's office. Long, slow pets are much preferred when trying to calm a dog down. Also, some dogs like hard pets, while others prefer softer touches. Take the time to know your dog.

The author next turns her attention to the seduction of puppies. People are attracted to puppies for the same reason they are attracted to babies—large hands (paws), big eyes, large heads, clumsiness. Humans are hardwired to find babies adorable because babies depend upon a large amount of parental nurturing in order to survive. Something must keep a parent going through the difficult process of rearing a baby. In the same way, people want to own puppies because of the "aww" factor. This is dangerous, of course, because puppies are only puppies for so long. A potential owner must want a dog, not a puppy.

Our love of puppies has led to so-called "puppy mills," essentially mass-production centers for breeding dogs. Dogs are usually kept in bad conditions—confined in small cages, sleeping in their own urine and feces, not adjusted to humans or other dogs. To be sure one is not purchasing a puppy from a puppy mill, one should buy from an animal shelter, rescue organization, or certifiable breeder.

The author lastly expresses concerns over modern breeding techniques, such as breeding dogs smaller and smaller (toy varieties) and breeding flat-faced dogs. It is theorized that these breeds are being popularized because they also retain that puppy, baby-faced quality. However, we as a society must be mindful of the effects of these breeding techniques; flat-faced dogs could have trouble breathing, for example. This should go into a decision as to what breed of dog to buy.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Some trainers and dog training books suggest establishing early dominance over one's dog through what is called an "alpha rollover," in which an owner forces a dog on its back in a submissive position. This, or taking a dog by the scruff of the neck and shaking them. Establishing dominance in general over dogs is something the author does not condone. Submission should be something given by a dog after a relationship is established, not forced upon them.

In a dog-to-dog relationship, submissiveness is easy to spot. A tucked tail, lowered head, back-pointing ears, and a leaned-back body are all signs of submissiveness, of deferring to the other dog. Submissive dogs will urinate before a more dominant dog (who will "overmark" the submissive dog's urine).

Dominance of course relates to the social hierarchy that inevitably happens in many species of the animal world. Chimps and bonobos, our closest primate relatives, have distinct social hierarchies and submissive/dominant behaviors. Even cows and sheep will form hierarchies, in which a leader might decide when and where a herd or flock will go.

How importance is social hierarchy in dogs? Some would point to the dog's ancestor, the wolf, and argue that social hierarchy must be very important to the dog because it is important to the modern wolf. However, the author argues that we must keep in mind, as from a previous chapter, that dogs are much akin to juvenile versions of wolves, and that juvenile wolves have less social structure than adult wolves. Therefore, social structure may not be as important to dogs as many think, which is why common advice to "break" a dog's will or force submissiveness is ultimately misguided.

There tend to be three types of individuals in social hierarchies: the alpha (the leader), the betas (status-seekers who wish to improve their position) and the omegas (followers who are content with their station and do not seek dominance). Just like humans, dogs are different and can fit in any one of these categories. It is wrong to assume all dogs want to be alpha dogs, and in fact an "alpha" dog can turn outright submissive if greeted with a new, "more alpha" dog.

The most aggression occurs within the "beta" group jockeying for dominance. Many dog bites and fights between dogs can be viewed as beta groups grappling for position in the social hierarchy. The alpha, confident in his position, is less violent and more tolerant, not needing to fight for position. The question is raised: do humans and dogs living together constitute a single, unified social hierarchy? The author believes they do, and that the human, operating as the "alpha" in that relationship, has the choice to either be a cruel, punishment-oriented leader or a benevolent, wise leader, tying back to

owners being encouraged to punish their dogs or compel them into submission. The preference is obviously for benevolent leadership.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Just like children, dogs need to learn how to deal with frustration and disappointment. Behavior problems can arise when dogs are catered to constantly and always get what they want. For example, a dog used to playing fetch and always getting a thrown ball as a result of bringing a ball back may bark or bite if the ball is suddenly withheld. Similar behaviors involving petting or feeding.

Actually, many behavior problems also arise from boredom. A dog is built for constant activity, and cooping them up all day is contrary to their nature. Regular exercise may alleviate many common behavior problems; dogs not only crave but need exercise.

Back to curbing unwanted behavior, the author suggests the command "Enough" followed by two pats on the head. As discussed earlier, a pat on the head is mildly annoying to a dog; the dog will get the message that what they are doing is not well-liked. If the dog persists in the behavior (begging at the table, wanting a pet), turn away from the dog and avoid eye contact. Eye contact avoidance is especially useful, because lack of eye contact signals to a dog that interaction is over for the time being. Other ways to stop a dog's behavior is to give it food, or to make it do another command to distract it from its behavior.

To get a dog to wait patiently at a door rather than charging out, the suggestion is to use the command "Mind" (as in, mind your manners), and use body blocks at the door to impede the dog from rushing out. Only repeat the command once; say "no" with body blocks, not words. Once the dog waits, even if just for a moment, say "OK" and let the dog go out. Eventually, the dog will learn to wait until that "OK" signal.

Stopping a dog from leaping into one's lap also involves body blocks. Meet the about-to-leap dog with a torso or shoulder body block, avert eye contact, and let them know the behavior is unacceptable with "No." Once it refrains, reward the dog with praise and treats.

In general, a theory of "benevolent leadership," the ideal way to deal with a dog, includes de-emphasizing "dominance" and social status. Teach a dog that patience and politeness pays off instead of pushiness and aggression, that social status and becoming the "alpha" is not as important as the aforementioned qualities. On a related note, hitting a dog or yelling at a dog is a sign that the human master is not in control, does not have power, and that is a sign for some dogs to assert more control rather than less. Or, it may frighten the dog to the point of confusion, making bad behaviors worse.

Instead, correcting a dog ideally should be about interrupting bad behavior, and redirecting the dog into desired behavior. Startle the dog with a noise—such as

slamming a book down onto a table or ratting a soda can full of pennies—to get attention away from an unwanted behavior. In that short amount of time the dog's focus is now on the owner, the owner must redirect the dog into good behavior, always supplemented by praise and treats.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Undeniably, dogs have personalities, and can be described like humans are described—shy versus bold, trusting versus suspicious, active versus passive. A prospective owner should carefully weigh personality (of themselves as well as a potential dog).

Breed is not personality. While dogs of a breed share certain traits, globalizations about breeds (such and such breed never bites) are rarely correct, and they do not account for personality differences. Owners should not choose a breed type when they want a personality, nor should they be impressed by show dogs-type breeds who are bred for physical traits and good coats rather than their capacity to live with a family.

Prospective owners should look to the mother and father of a puppy if possible for likely personality traits, and feel free to ask breeders lots of questions about the dog's lineage.

Unfortunately, many owners choose their dogs based on looks. Right after a preference for sex (male or female), looks is the biggest factor in choosing dogs for new owners. However, naturally, a cute dog can be a nasty dog and vice versa.

Many owners also fall into the trap of "But he never acts this way at home!" Dog behavior changes according to environment, just like human behavior, and also just like humans, dogs can be moody. Owners sometimes expect dogs to behave exactly the same all the time, calling any deviance from normal behavior "disobedience" when in fact they are neglecting personality.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

The worst experiences the author has as an applied animal behaviorist is telling a family that their dog should be rehomed, and that no amount of training can cure their particular dog. To these owners, who often love their dogs and get their hearts broken, the author has the following comfort: rehoming a dog into a situation where it will be safe and happy is not a betrayal. In fact, wolf packs can be quite fluid, with individual wolves entering and leaving depending on the season or situation. Even in the humans' case, a child will grow up and then leave the family unit.

Most commonly, dogs are wrong for a home when they are underemployed; that is, they are a working breed of dog that has little or nothing to do. A Border Collie, for example, is a smart, active dog that must have a lot of exercise and tasks to perform. Cooped up in the city and taken outside only to pee or be briefly walked once a day is usually a disservice to this type of dog, and this will result in behavior problems.

Death of a pet can be a very difficult thing to deal with for an owner, just as the death of a friend or family member might be. Studies have shown that owners grieving over a dead pet go through the same stages as humans grieving over the death of another human. Take the time to acknowledge the passing of a dear friend, and rely on your human support structure to get through it. What death does to the companion of an animal is a poorly understood phenomenon. Some animals look as if they are grieving, pining away at a window looking for something or refusing to eat, while some animals do not appear affected at all, even if it is their own child that just died. Be able to understand that your dog might grieve if a family member or fellow dog dies, and allow them that time.

Characters

Patricia B. McConnell

Patricia B. McConnell is the author. As someone presenting herself as an expert on canid behavior and the human-dog relationship, she has very impressive credentials. She has a Ph.D in Zoology from the University of Wisconsin, where she also serves as an adjunct professor. She is also a certified Applied Animal Behaviorist. For over twenty years she ran and founded a dog training company called Dog's Best Friend Ltd., where she dealt with some of the most difficult dogs around. She also owns a sheep farm where she owns four dogs and uses them to help herd sheep.

McConnell uses all these experiences in the book. She frequently refers to her dogs and various episodes she has had with them on her sheep farm to illustrate points or make abstract concepts more real. For a woman with her credentials, McConnell is also self-effacing and humble; at the beginning of Chapter 1 she describes how she made a mistake in training a dog that resulted in the dog lunging at her. Though she does cite various studies and commands an impressive vocabulary of behaviorist terms, McConnell presents herself as down to earth and approachable, a dog owner and lover just like her intended audience.

The Benevolent Leader

The benevolent leader is the author's ideal kind of owner. The benevolent owner seeks to de-emphasize the struggles that come with socialized animals (dogs and humans included) and struggles for status. They show their dogs that patience and politeness will win the day instead of the usual social status posturing, like aggression, biting, barking, and other unwanted behaviors. The benevolent leader uses praise and positive reinforcement rather than punishment and displays of dominance. The benevolent leader realizes that using punishment and yelling in fact undermines an owner's position of leadership, demonstrating insecurity that might be picked up on and exploited by an aggressive dog.

The idea of the benevolent leader does away with recent instances of what the author calls "old-fashioned" dog training, insofar that establishing dominance is not a component. Negative reinforcement (punishment, physical blows, yelling) gives way to positive reinforcement. Undesirable behavior is stopped by startling a dog (with a loud noise, such as a can full of pennies or a book slammed onto a table), after which the dog is directed toward desirable behavior.

The benevolent leader employs even-toned, consistent commands, proper body posture such that aggression is not telegraphed, consistent hand gestures for commands, and an understanding of canid culture and how it differs from primate culture.

Jane Goodall

Jane Goodall is perhaps the world's most famous behaviorist, due to her decades of work with chimpanzees and her advocacy of animal and environmental rights. McConnell frequently cites her work with primates in order to underscore a truth about primate behavior.

Beagles

Beagles are widely known as a breed with the best noses and hunting instincts among dogs. McConnell uses beagles as an example of an owner making smart choices when selecting a dog. If an owner selects a beagle to take home, that owner should be aware of the breed's tendencies and be prepared for a dog that will chase squirrels and rabbits to the ends of the earth.

Cool Hand Luke

Luke is one of McConnell's four Border Collies, and perhaps the most beloved by McConnell of her dogs. Luke is described as "handsome like Rhett Butler" and a confident, sophisticated alpha male. Luke once saved McConnell from serious injury or worse by fending off a raging ewe on her sheep farm. Cool Hand Luke is named after the famous Paul Newman character in the film of the same name.

Calvin the Puppy Mill Dog

McConnell describes Calvin, a dog who spent the first six weeks of his life in a puppy mill, and the next five months in a pet store cage before getting an owner. During this time he had urinated and defecated directly in his confined cage. Calvin had passed the crucial "sensitive period" in which a dog learns basic concepts like where to go to the bathroom and how to react with strange humans. As a result, he constantly relieved himself in the house and was a barking terror around strangers. McConnell worked with the dog carefully and his behavior was improved, but a dog like Calvin will never fully shake off the trauma of his unfortunate upbringing.

Pip

Pip is one of the four Border Collies McConnell owns at the time of the book's writing. Pip is described as an "omega" personality, the most submissive of her dogs who is content to remain at the back of the pack. Sweet-natured and shy, Pip will always defer to McConnell's other dogs for anything from meal time to order of who goes to the bathroom.

Tulip

Tulip is one of the four Border Collies McConnell owns at the time of the book's writing. She is clearly an alpha female, always acting with supreme confidence. However, she is less confident of her station than alpha male Luke, and so she displays some aggressive, "beta"-like behaviors, using growls, nips, and physical intimidation to perform her tasks and keep the other dogs in line.

Lassie

Lassie is one of the four Border Collies McConnell owns at the time of the book's writing. She is Cool Hand Luke's daughter. She was given to McConnell temporarily, but McConnell and Lassie bonded very quickly and so McConnell decided to keep the dog. Lassie is very smart like many Border Collies and very obedient, always ready to honor any command and please her owner. She was named after the famous 50's television dog who was also very smart.

Scott

Scott was a Border Collie McConnell owned for a time. However, with so many dogs already doing sheep herding, Scott started to act out from boredom and being underemployed. McConnell simply did not have enough for Scott to do. Additionally, Scott was inherently fearful and aggressive towards strangers and strange dogs, which was unfortunate with an owner who so often worked with strange dogs. After a lot of thought and crying, McConnell realized it was best to "rehome" Scott and send him to another sheep farm where he could do his job and not have to deal with strange dogs.

Objects/Places

Doggie Play Bow

The doggie play bow is a position assumed by a human. It involves being bent over slightly with the knees bent. This body position is read by many dogs as "my owner wants to play." Fun and play can be initiated with the doggie play bow, including frisbee, fetch, tag, and other activities.

Body Block

The body block is one of the tools an owner can use to control a dog's behavior. Arms and hand should not be used; instead, use of the torso, use of the shoulders, and physically stepping into spaces are the best kind of body blocks. This can discourage such behaviors as a dog putting his paws up on a person, or leaping into their lap, or stopping a dog from running. An owner literally places their body in such a way as to inhibit and discourage the movement of the dog.

Habituation

Habituation is the tendency to ignore stimuli if they are frequent and devoid of meaning. For example, a person living near an airport may eventually learn to "tune out" the sound of jet engines passing overhead. In the context of dog training, owners should realize that repeated commands are not effective. They do nothing to aid the dog's understanding, and they may be repeated so often as to lead the dog to tune them out.

Guy-With-The-Gold-Chain Hypothesis

This theory is meant to explain why dogs not only love but seem to roll around in ostensibly smelly things—cow pies, urine, maggot-infested meat. The theory is that the dog, with its ancestry as a scavenger, enjoys advertising to other dogs that they have been in contact with food-related things. It is a sort of bragging about their material wealth.

Paedomorphism

Humans and dogs are described as "paedomorphic," meaning that they retain some juvenile qualities well into adulthood. In the case of this book, the specific paedomorphic trait is playfulness. Humans and dogs, unlike many other mammals, like to play games and generally have a playfulness about them well into middle and even old age.

Sensitive Period

This period, alternately known as a critical period, is the important time for a dog to develop trust in, and familiarity with, humans. It varies between about five to about twelve weeks. If a puppy is not properly introduced to humans within this period, they are likely to develop behavioral problems and otherwise display aggression towards humans.

Alpha Rollover

The alpha rollover is a technique many dog trainers (but not McConnell) advocate in the process of "breaking" or establishing dominance over a dog. It involves forcing a dog on its back, a submissive and even humiliating position for a dog to be in, in the hopes of demonstrating the owner's dominance over the dog. McConnell prefers to avoid any displays of dominance, de-emphasizing social hierarchies in general in favor of a more civil and equal relationship between dog and owner.

Aggressive Obsequiousness

A dog that is aggressively obsequious is the equivalent of a human who is described as passive-aggressive. This type of dog will employ seemingly submissive behaviors—whining, crawling, downcast head turns—but will employ them so frequently and determinedly that they are in fact ultimately aggressive in their overall behavior. This type of dog will deceptively use submissive behaviors to aggressively get what they want.

Juvenile-onset Shyness

Beyond the "sensitive period" of a dog's development, described as the first 3 or so months of life, there is a period McConnell has deemed "juvenile-onset shyness" in dogs. This may occur anywhere from 6 months to a year in a dog's life. Like the sensitive period, the period of juvenile-onset shyness is very important to a dog's development. They may suddenly become fearful of strangers and develop a too-strong attention to a single person (their owner). As a result of the potential dangers of this period, McConnell suggests a dog's development be closely monitored and nurtured through the entire first year of a dog's life, not just the first few months.

Rehoming

The last resort in dog training is rehoming, in which a dog is sent to a new owner and home. Many owners obviously agonize over such a decision and endure heartbreak and similar emotions. However, McConnell states that rehoming is not a betrayal but is

something that is best for both dog and owner. In fact, the true tragedy would be to refuse to rehome a problem dog, such that the owner and dog remain miserable.

Themes

The Importance of the Visual

McConnell exposes the myth that dogs have poor vision or otherwise rely more on their nose and ears than eyes. Like humans, dogs are in fact intensely visual. They pick up on minuscule movements and gestures in their owners in their near-constant attempt to divine human intent. As a result of this, owners must be very aware of their body when engaging with a dog. Particular attention must also be paid to a dog's body and behavior, as a wealth of information is contained therewith. The author suggests a sketchbook or videotape to record behaviors of both man and dog.

Traits to look for include location of the center of gravity, commissures (corners of mouths), erect hindlegs or forelegs, location of head, and amount of eye contact. A dog leaning forward is usually telegraphing aggression or a desire to assert dominance; backward leaning is a sign of submission. Commissures pulled back is the equivalent of a "nervous smile" in a human, and can mean a dog is panicked, frightened, and may lash out. A dog with its head held high and centered and its legs square to the body and erect is also a sign of an aggressive dog who may be ready for a conflict. Similarly, a dog which maintains direct eye contact is aggressive and looking for a fight.

An owner who can discern these "warning signs" can defuse aggression by behaving with typically submissive behaviors. Leaning back, avoiding the use of the arms by tucking them in pockets, maintaining a good ten-foot or so distance, and avoiding eye contact are all good ways to take any tension out of a violent confrontation with a strange dog.

Visual emphasis also translates of course to everyday relationships with dogs and training. Owners must be certain to behave in consistent ways with their dogs. For example, if a "palm-down" gesture with the arm outstretched is associated with the "Sit" command, the same gesture should be used every time a sit is desired. Submissive visual behaviors are also key in discouraging unwanted behavior. Breaking eye contact with a dog, as well as turning away with one's head or body or walking away, are clear signs to it that say, "interaction time is over with for now." Whether it is begging at the table, trying to leap in an owner's lap, refusing to give up a ball during fetch, or whining for more petting, behaviors can be ended by simply ignoring the dog through visual cues.

The Importance of the Aural

As humans, we tend to use speech a lot; in fact, it is probably the most defining difference between humanity and other primates. As a result of our "chatterbox" tendencies, we can send confusing signals to dogs, and so owners must learn to be very conscious of their speech patterns for maximum effectiveness.

Firstly, an owner must use consistent speech patterns in issuing vocal commands to dogs. While we understand that "Sit" and "Here, Sit" and "Sit, boy, sit" mean pretty much the same thing, to a dog that cannot grasp verbal speech, they might sound like three completely different commands. Similarly, "Sit" should only be used for one specific behavior. An owner should not use "Sit" to order a dog to sit on their haunches as well as use "Sit" to mean "get off the couch and sit on the floor." Consistency is the key.

Pitch is also a crucial factor in communication with a dog. Studies have shown that short, high-pitched, frequent sounds can energize a dog and cause it to move faster, while low, slow tones serve to slow a dog down and telegraph the need to stop behavior. So, "Come here boy, come come" said in a high, cheery voice could be used to make a dog run to an owner, while "Chester, Enough" could be said to a dog named Chester in a slow, even, low tone in order to make Chester stop chewing the furniture.

Repeating a command over and over does little for a dog's understanding, and can in fact lead to a dog ignoring an owner, or confusion. Many animals exhibit what is known as habituation, meaning they filter out stimuli (aural, visual, or otherwise) that is frequent and has no meaning. In context, this means a dog could ignore an owner constantly saying "Come." Also, volume is important. An owner yelling does nothing to better a dog's understanding, and can lead to panic and fright in a dog. It can also show that an owner is not in control, is not an "alpha"-type leader, and a dog may question the owner's position in their relationship. Instead, even tones should always be practiced.

Benevolent Leadership

Unlike many dog trainers who emphasize an owner gaining dominance over a dog via "alpha rollovers" (forcing a dog on its back) or stern verbal or physical punishment, author McConnell advocates what she terms "Benevolent leadership." Just like humans, dogs are social creatures that form hierarchies. There are usually three types of individuals in any social hierarchy: the alpha (the leader), the betas (social climbers looking to improve their position), and omegas (those content with their station who do not look to move up). Betas, because they are looking to improve their status, tend to be the most problematic dogs in terms of behavior.

It is the owner's job to recognize this hierarchal tendency in dogs and in fact de-emphasize it. The owner must show a dog that politeness and patience will pay off (in the form of treats and attention from the owner) rather than pushiness and aggression. Instead of necessarily correcting bad behavior, a dog should be redirected into positive behavior. In this way, the normal power relationship and struggles are eschewed. Yelling and physical violence are of course discouraged, not only because they might lead to confusion, fright, and further aggression, but because such behavior reinforces the hierarchal, "king of the hill" mentality in dogs. Simply, punishment and yelling are "beta"-level behaviors, indicative of individuals vying for higher positions and fighting to climb the ladder. "Alpha"-level behavior, by contrast, is confident and benevolent, the result of a natural leader assured of their social status.

Style

Perspective

This book contains expert advice provided by an expert. Patricia B. McConnell has a Ph.D in Zoology from the University of Wisconsin (where she is an adjunct professor) and is a certified Applied Animal Behaviorist. For twenty years she founded and ran Dog's Best Friend Ltd., which provided training and rehabilitation for aggressive or problematic dogs. Also, McConnell owns a sheep farm outside of Madison, Wisconsin, and she owns four dogs.

These qualities allow McConnell to offer advice both as a scientist and as an owner and dog lover. She begins each chapter with a personal experience, either from her company and her many years of dog training, or from personal experiences on the farm. These episodes provide a personal way to approach the more general topic discussed in the remainder of the chapter. The bulk of chapters feature combinations of further personal anecdotes, analogies, workable solutions from an expert and veteran trainer, and more theoretical examples of research conducted in the fields of zoology and ethology from such behaviorists as Jane Goodall and others. McConnell can also point to her own research, conducted for her Ph.D, in which she examined sheep herders and the herder-dog relationship in many different countries.

McConnell's approach is a root cause analysis concentrating on evolution. She believes that, to best understand dogs and maximize human relationships with dogs, we should examine ancestors of both species in order to draw basic conclusions about behavior and motivation that can be used in modern training methods.

Tone

Though McConnell is a professor and scientist, this book is certainly intended for the average dog owner. McConnell is not just an academic but a long-time trainer and dog owner herself. Primarily she speaks from the owner/trainer point of view, offering pragmatic advice, humor, sympathy, and emotion. Studies McConnell cites are mentioned casually and in a conceptual manner most anyone could understand. This book is not an attempt to prove McConnell's theory of "benevolent leadership" in any rigorous or scientific way. Instead, McConnell presents her views as the culmination of many years or practical experience with dogs, experience which is then supplemented and strengthened by scientific studies. On a related note, McConnell urges owners to observe as a first step to enlightened dog ownership. Careful observation (of dog as well as owner behavior) and first-hand knowledge provides a wealth of information.

As stated elsewhere, McConnell begins each chapter with a personal story or anecdote. This sections, printed in italics, differ markedly in tone from the rest of the chapters. They find McConnell at her most vulnerable, her most sympathetic, and most emotional.

She may relate herself sobbing so much she had to pull the car over after "rehoming" her prized Border Collie Scott, or she may intimately relate an owner's grief at having to euthanize a violent dog. McConnell certainly welcomes and encourages an emotional connection between the reader and her material.

Structure

This book is divided into ten chapters, each dealing with a specific aspect of the owner-dog relationship, and the root causes behind both human and dog behaviors. Chapter 1, for example, is called "Monkey See, Monkey Do" with the informative subheading, "The Importance of Visual Signals Between People and Dogs." As such, each chapter heading and subheading succinctly provide the topic of the chapter to follow. Many chapters are dedicated to the senses, such as the importance of visual cues for dogs, smells in both humans and dogs, and sound qualities as they relate to giving commands. The final chapter involves "rehoming" (finding a new home for a dog) as a sort of last resort after the advice in the previous chapters has been tried and proved unsuccessful.

At the beginning of each chapter, and sometimes interspersed within a chapter, is a personal experience of Patricia B. McConnell's, usually in her capacity as a trainer of aggressive or problematic dogs. She will then relate that specific experience to the more general information in the rest of the chapter. These personal passages are made distinct with the use of italics. McConnell's own dogs—Tulip, Cool Hand Luke, Lassie, Pip, and others—are oftentimes the subject of these personal experiences, but other times McConnell will relate the story of a dog she has trained or an unfortunate owner having a difficult experience.

A final portion of the book is labeled "References" and it lists further information specific to individual chapters, as well as recommended books owners could turn to for more in-depth discussions of chapter topics.

Quotes

"So here we have two species, humans and dogs, sharing the tendencies to be highly visual, highly social, and hardwired to pay attention to how someone in our social group is moving, even if the movement is minuscule. What we don't seem to share is this: dogs are more aware of our subtle movements than we are of our own. It makes sense if you think about it. While both dogs and humans automatically attend to the visual signals of our species, dogs need to spend additional energy translating the signals of a foreigner. Besides, we are always expecting dogs to do what we ask of them, so they have compelling reasons to try to translate our movements and postures," (p. 4).

"After years of working with dogs who'd bite me if I didn't read their body language right, I have a hierarchy of body parts to watch. When I first meet a dog, my primary attention is on the dog's center of gravity and his breathing. Is the dog leaning toward me, away from me, or standing square over all four paws? Is the dog frozen still, breathing normally, or breathing too fast with shallow breaths? At the same time, I'm looking at the dog's mouth and eyes, where there's a world of information, but being careful not to stare directly at him. Tails are also important, but not as important as what's on his face, and you simply can't take in everything at once. If there's a lot going on—say, the dog is barking/lunging at me or, worse, standing stiff and hard-eyed with the corners of his mouth pushed forward—I probably won't have a clue what's happening with his tail until a few seconds later," (p. 10).

"Our dogs, of course, are just as busy reading us as we are reading them. If you learn to shift your body backward slightly when you greet a new dog, you usually can ensure that the dog doesn't perceive your posture as threatening. When you're slightly sideways with your weight on your back foot, you've taken away what ethologists call an 'intention movement' to proceed forward, and dogs can read it like a billboard. It doesn't have to be much; it's barely perceptible if one isn't aware of it. Of course, you'll want to do the opposite when you're working with some lunkhead who's all tongue and paws and thrashes around ignoring everything you say. Then you want to purposely move forward, both taking space and using your torso to signal your intention to take control, before you ask for that 'sit,'" (p. 31).

"The bottom line is simple: Use short, repeated notes like claps, smooches, and short, repeated words to stimulate activity in your dog. Use them when you want your dog to come to you or to speed up. Use one long, continuous flat sound to soothe or slow your dog, as you might when you're trying to calm her at the vet's. Use a burst of one short, highly modulated note to effect an immediate stop of a fast-moving dog, saying 'No!' or 'Hey!' or 'Down' when you need Chester to pay attention and stop chasing that squirrel in the backyard," (p. 63).

"The sense of smell mediates more of our behavior than we ever imagined. Women who live in close proximity to one another begin to menstruate in synchrony, all because of smells of which they're not even aware. Men who are in intimate relationships with women have faster-growing facial hair than men who aren't, and girls who grow up around men enter puberty sooner than girls who do not. The sense of smell is even an important component of sexual pleasure: fully half of the people who have lost their sense of smell as adults report a decrease in sexual interest. Research on reproductive pheromones (which often can't be consciously detected at all, even if you try) has led to the use of a pheromone called alpha-androstenol in perfume. Not only does it attract members of the opposite sex (both in our species and in pigs—do be careful on a hog farm), but men rate photographs of women as more attractive if it's in the air, and women are more likely to initiate interactions if in its presence," (p. 68).

"Just learning to give or throw the ball back the instant that the dog releases it solves about half the fetching problems that most people have with their dogs. Most of the other problems are solved when people learn to move away from their dog to encourage him to fetch rather than moving toward him. Above all else, remember that in both chimps and dogs, it's no fun to have the ball unless your play partner wants it, too. If you dog simply won't stop teasing you with the ball, turn away from him, fold your arms, look away, and pay no attention to him," (p. 99).

"Your puppy also needs to socialize with other dogs as well as people. It's not enough that you have another dog at home or have the neighbor's dog play with your new puppy every day. Social animals like dogs and humans have a strong sense of 'familiar' and 'unfamiliar,' and dogs need to learn that part of what's normal and familiar in life is to meet unfamiliar people and dogs. As a behaviorist, once I started to see how dogs sort the world into 'familiar' versus 'unfamiliar,' I was able to understand a lot more about their behavior," (p. 110).

"'Status,' 'dominance,' and 'aggression' are completely different things, and it does our dogs no good when we confuse them. Status is a position or rank within a society, while dominance describes a relationship among individuals, with one having more status than others in a particular context. Aggression is not a necessary component of dominance. Aggression, as defined by biologists, is an action that intends to cause harm, while dominance is a position within a hierarchy. A bloody riot in which a monarch is killed is an example of human aggression, while the fact that there was a monarch at all is an example of a social hierarchy. That monarch or president or pack leader might have been selected without violence, perhaps through family relationships with past monarchs or an election. Thus, aggression and the threat of it can be used to achieve a higher social status, but it often isn't necessary," (p. 149).

"You don't need to use physical force to impress your dog. If you do, you're sending the message that you have no real power and no alternative but force and intimidation. It's sad that it is taking us so long to drop the threat of physical injury from our training repertoire, no matter what the species. You may get obedience out of a dog by

threatening him, but mostly you're going to get a dog who is afraid of you. Far too often, you'll get a dog who learns to defend himself by getting aggressive back. Aggression leads to more aggression, and many of the dog bites that I see were made in self-defense. However, there are other dogs who love a good fight and can't wait for you to 'make their day.' You may win the battle with these dogs, but you're not going to win the war, and who wants a battlefield in their living room, anyway?" (p. 181).

"So when your dog is doing something wrong, say 'No' quietly, use another sound to startle him to get his attention, and then redirect him on to doing something that he should be doing. Don't think about physically punishing him; think about teaching him. Replace the hot, red aggression of old-fashioned dog training with the calm, cool benevolence of sky blue. It's a lovely color," (p. 184).

"My love for each of my dogs is different, because each dog is different. Every one of my dogs has a unique set of strengths and weaknesses, just like every one of my two-legged friends. We call it personality, meaning the suite of psychological and behavioral characteristics that unique defines each of us. But ascribing personalities to nonhuman animals is radical to some, who still cling to a mechanistic vision of animals as stimulus/response machines," (p. 190).

"I can't take away the grief that comes when clients say good-bye to a dear friend. But I can say something that has helped scores of people in this situation, and it is this: Rehoming your dog into a situation where he will be safe and happy is not a betrayal. And yet, I've seen owner after owner who might have been sad in anticipation of losing their friend, but whose unbearable pain came from feeling that placing their dog in another home would be betraying a trust. But I don't think dogs interpret it that way," (p. 211).

Topics for Discussion

What, according to the author, would be the best series of behaviors on an owners' part to discourage a dog from jumping into the owner's lap?

What are the general rules laid out for owners vocalizing to their dogs? This would include words said, pitch, tone, and volume.

What steps should a potential owner take in deciding upon a particular dog to own?

What is paedomorphism? How does it apply to the relationship between owner and dog?

What are the disadvantages of engaging in "wrestling" or "play fighting" with a dog, and why should it be discouraged in general?

How can a "body block" be used by an owner to train a dog? In what circumstances should a body block be considered?

What precautions should be taken with an unfamiliar dog? What are the signs of aggression one should look for in a dog, and consequently, what behaviors should be exhibited by a human confronting a potentially aggressive dog?