

Bonding for Life

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Foreword

Bonding for life is a system of dog training that advocates the bountiful rendering of rewards and the judicious application of discipline. Sounds like just about everybody's dog training 101, eh? If you tally up the *Bonding for Life* reward-correction ledger, it's about ninety percent reward and ten percent correction; and that includes corrections so gentle I call them "suggestions." I think few would argue with that ratio, but some dog trainers may disagree with the prolific amount of food rewards I prescribe early in the dog's training; especially because the rendering of those rewards starts one full week before the actual "meat and potatoes" behavioral training begins. I call that reward process **bonding conditioning**, which I describe in Chapter One. I believe I make a compelling case for this procedure, which is mostly about feeding your dog directly from your hand several times a day. Later in the book I explain how you will gradually cut down on the food rewards and come to rely on three acquired secondary reinforcers I call the affection rewards: *praise, stroking,*

and *positive eye contact*. You will learn about them in Chapter One; a chapter that also gives a “ballpark” explanation of the evolution of wolf to dog.

Bonding for Life is a system of training for anybody who has a dog, but much of the information I describe in the book published on this website is for people who own adult dogs that have “issues,” and therefore need significant “leadership” to direct the resolution of their various difficulties. In Chapter One I explain the concept of what I call the *benevolent alpha* – a kind and loving person who is thoroughly cognizant of his or her dog’s psychological needs, and that person diligently seeks to satisfy those needs. Nevertheless, that person is also an alpha leader who is not trepidacious about using *fair* and *humane* discipline to establish a reasonable and comprehensive structure for their dog’s behavior. Dogs, like all of us, must abide by a set of rules, but dogs trained with the *Bonding for Life* system (which depends on the aforementioned **bonding conditioning** and another important exercise called **control-relaxation**) will develop a *joyful* and *alacritous* attitude about behaving properly and responding promptly to their owner’s commands. *Bonding for Life* dogs are high-spirited, self-confident, and joyfully obedient.

The *Bonding for Life* target reader is a person who knows little of dog training and wants a highly detailed, step-by-step explanation of *how to* train their dog, as well as an explanation of *why to* do the things I recommend. The book is not about the various training specialties such as agility, search and rescue, police work, and et cetera. It is for the “home consumer” who simply wants a well behaved and responsive dog that functions properly around people and other dogs, whether in its own or another’s home, or out in public. Also where unexpected and “stimulating” events are encountered, such as at the dog park. In the Overview and elsewhere in this book, I am more specific about the positive things you will get from your dog when you use the *Bonding for Life* methodology.

I recently heard a young dog trainer say that dog training should not be about dominance, but instead about communication. In this book, starting with Chapter Three, I stress the notion of *intelligent communication*. I will tell you how to communicate with your dog in such a manner that he or she will understand exactly what you want and thereby avoid a correction for behaving in ways that you don’t want. Having said that, the fact remains that no matter the age of your dog or its age when you acquired it, the issues of dominance

and subordination will *always* be at hand. For example, suppose your young puppy wanders into the laundry area and starts chewing on the Clorox bottle. What you do is gently pick the puppy up and place it someplace where it is normally allowed to be. What you did was to *physically dominate* your dog. It had no other choice but to *submit* to your whisking it away from the Clorox bottle. From the first day of its life, a puppy should understand that humans are bigger and stronger, and they make the important decisions that are often enforced by someone physically “managing” them. If you train your puppy using the *Bonding for Life* system, its understanding of its submissive and obedient role in life will carry forward throughout its entire life. That’s good. And when you train or retrain an adult dog with the *Bonding for life system*, that dog will likewise grow to be your dutifully obedient companion for the rest of its life.

Note: By age, I classify dogs into six categories. 1. Junior Puppies: birth to age two months. Senior puppies: age two months to four months. Junior adolescent dogs: age four months to eight months. Senior adolescent dogs: eight months to one year. Adult dogs: one year to ten years. Seniors: ten years and over. This temporal delineation is of course flexible due to the wide genetic, personality, and temperament differences between all dogs.

The Clorox bottle example serves to demonstrate the *Bonding for Life* philosophy regarding all puppies, junior and senior. When you dominated the puppy by relocating it from the laundry room to someplace else, what you absolutely *did not do*, was to behave in a malevolent manner so as to frighten, intimidate, or physically “correct,” i.e. render pain or significant discomfort to the puppy. In fact, you didn’t even use a loud and/or harsh voice or a noxious sound to “correct” it. The word “correct” is in quotes because it is specious. A puppy does not have the necessary neurological development to associate a specific behavior with a specific correction unless that so-called correction is oft-repeated and unreasonably severe. That of course would be seriously psychologically damaging to the puppy. Any other dog, for that matter. I’m sure you don’t want a frightened, intimidated, and dispirited dog. A dog like that is virtually untrainable unless it experiences a profound healing process before a legitimate training approach can begin. That would be one based on love and reward. I believe you will see that *Bonding for Life* is the best candidate for that new approach. Chapter Four is about using *Bonding for Life* to train a very emotionally damaged dog; my dog, Cleo. It’s a great chapter

for people who have rescue dogs. The bottom line for all dogs – puppies, adolescents, adults – is that the corrections you render should not hurt the dog. In the book I say: “discomfort, yes; pain, no.” Therefore, indeed, some corrections may cause your adolescent or adult dog to feel some degree of discomfort, but to reiterate with regard to puppies (and some of the “more sensitive” adolescent and even adult dogs): there should be no physical, noise, or verbal correction that will cause them to feel any palpable distress – with one *possible* exception. That’s if you are dealing with a serious biting problem.

Finally, regarding the issue(s) of dominance and submission, here are two more commonplace yet meaningful examples no matter the age or size of your dog. Firstly, when you walk your dog. You are holding a leash which obviously keeps him or her relatively near you instead of it galloping off into the wild blue yonder. You are using the leash to dominate your dog and require that it be submissive to you. Chapter Six is about teaching your dog how to walk properly on what I call a **free leash walk**. In Chapter Nine you learn the **heel walk**. The second example is when you teach your dog to do something new, such as a new skill. Chapter Five is about teaching your dog how to **sit-stay**. Chapter Seven is about teaching him to go to the **down-stay** position. Chapter Eight is about the **long stay**. You dominate your dog by withholding the food reward until *after* he performs the required **sit-stay**, **down-stay**, or **long stay**. The person who controls the food is dominate. The dog must submit to your command to get the food reward.

Rule: no dog in training should have a bowl of food simply sitting on some floor somewhere so that he or she can munch from it anytime it so chooses. No motivation, no learning.

The point of my various remarks on dominance and submission is to assure you that your *appropriate* dominance over your dog is *sine qua non* for all of his or her training and handling. In other words, you must become that firm but *benevolent alpha* I spoke of earlier, i.e. a person who will cause your dog to submit to your direction, i.e. your will. I emphasized the word “benevolent” because the verbal, noise, and physical suggestions or corrections you will use to eliminate unwanted behaviors are, as I also said earlier, *fair* and *humane*. Withholding a food reward until after the dog performs a required “target response” is also a *fair* and *humane* correction. It’s a correction simply because the mere passage of time before the reward is rendered serves as a negative

reinforcer. Chapter Six is much about *fair* and *humane* corrections. Even the more strict corrections I talk about in Chapter Eleven, *More Correction Techniques*, are likewise *fair* and *humane*. Moreover, importantly, after any kind of correction you will immediately render food and/or one or more of the three affection rewards – *praise, stroking, positive eye contact* – to positively reinforce the alternative behaviors you are “showing” your dog how to do. Naturally, that positive reinforcement will cause the new behaviors – I call them *alternative affirmative behaviors* – to quickly replace the old, unwanted behaviors. In Chapter Two, I’ll talk about *alternative affirmative behaviors*. In its most minimal form, an *alternative affirmative behavior* can simply be the dog’s successful performance of a target behavior soon after the preceding failure to attain that same behavior. A target behavior or response is simply the exact response that you want.

Chapter Ten is about teaching your dog some tricks. Tricks are excellent *alternative affirmative behaviors*. Just like with **sit-stay** and **down-stay**, the food reward comes only after the successful completion of the trick – or an acceptable vestige of it when the dog is first learning it. It’s called *shaping by successive approximation*. It’s the “showing” your dog how to do something I spoke of just earlier. I’ll explain it in Chapter Ten, but there are examples of it before you get there. Note, however, there are certain behaviors like **sit-stay**, **down-stay**, and the **long stay** are not trained by rewarding successive approximations. They are all-or-none behaviors that are rewarded only after a perfect response.

Chapter Two also explains some of the essential elements of learning theory, and it gives examples of operant conditioning. Chapter Seven, *Down-Stay*, further helps the reader understand operant conditioning from his or her reading of the section titled *Intermittent Reinforcement*. Finally, the Appendix titled *Operant Conditioning Revisited* gives the reader a much better way to conceptualize operant conditioning instead of using the confusing pseudo-mathematical paradigm, the *Four Contexts of Operant Conditioning*, that too many learning theorists teach today.

Where I see the biggest difference between the *Bonding for Life* system and the attitude that underpins a lot of today’s contemporary notions about dogs has to do with common sense and the way you regard your incredible canine companion. Firstly, you are your dog’s steward and guardian. Your

dog, no matter its age or level of training, is not your peer. Only a human being can be your peer. For one thing, your dog's intelligence is very limited compared to yours, and he or she does not understand the complexities of whatever language you speak; especially when you first begin to train him or her. Its tiny cerebral cortex can only learn a limited number of specific "stand alone" words, and for the most part, you want those words to be commands. Your dog's Commander in Chief – *you* – has no canine peer. Secondly, your older puppy, adolescent dog, or adult dog *should not be treated as if it's a human infant*. Certainly after, say, three months of age, it must be treated like a dog, i.e. a slightly genetically modified wolf. Although I stress the important idea that you must do your best to see the world from your dog's point of view and thoughtfully adjust your behavior accordingly, it is not your role to negotiate with your dog as if it's a human and sometimes or often acquiesce to its willful, defiant, or otherwise unreasonable behaviors.

For example, your dog sits on the couch and barks and growls at you when you try to sit down next to it. I won't tell you to go sit someplace else. I won't recommend that you walk backwards towards the couch and try to sit down hoping the dog won't growl and bark at you because your backside perhaps appears as less threatening. Your audacious dog has commandeered your domain, so I say let's get its limbic system, i.e. its "emotional brain," involved here. That means what you do is to physically remove him or her from the couch – quickly and gently, but with vigor – and then sit yourself down and don't let the dog back up on the couch until he or she fully understands that you are the owner of said couch, not him or her. Who's the boss? It must be you. In fact, if you so choose, you don't need to ever let the dog back on the couch. Chapter Three explains the involvement of your dog's limbic system in all of its behaviors, natural or learned. For now, simply put, dogs don't do well with blah, blah, blah. Another good example of not negotiating with your dog: I stress the importance of *never ever* allowing your dog to tug on the leash. No compromises. Although *Bonding for Life* is largely a reward based training system, it teaches the imperatives of self-control and discipline.

With that in mind, let's take the previously mentioned circumstance of your dog biting. For example, say it's "innocently" biting you on the side of your hand. Puppies do that a lot. Real biting (not mouthing) is in its own special category. I'll talk about it in Chapter Thirteen, *Dealing with Aggression*. Suffice to say here: if your dog is older than three months, and if it is involved

in biting living things such as you or members of your family (as opposed to innocently chewing on inanimate objects), you must immediately get involved. That's certainly the case for unrelenting and robust biting that may be indicative of aggression, or in the case of a puppy, perhaps portentous of future aggression issues. Believe it or not, I've heard several dog trainers recommend that you rub a stick of butter on the areas of your body where your dog or puppy is biting. Okay, so now you slather some butter on the side of your hand. Now the dog or puppy will lick the skin where the butter is instead of biting it. I respectfully consider this type of mamby-pamby advise beyond the pale of reason. In Chapter Thirteen I will teach you how to correct this problem with discipline rather than by obsequiously smearing yourself with butter. What does Papa wolf do to stop one of his puppies from biting his tail? Put some butter on it?

When you use the methods I recommend in this book; especially the **bonding conditioning** and **control-relaxation** exercises I describe in Chapter One – no matter if your young “new to you” dog is out of control, or if your “long time family member” is ornery and stubborn – you will see a remarkable change in both its behavior and attitude; especially its attitude towards you. Of course those changes are much for the better. So let's get going. Read the Overview next and then Chapter One. Not to worry, everything I mentioned in this Forward will be thoroughly explained somewhere in the book. Also not to worry, there are many things I did not foreshadow herein you will also read about. For example, I'll teach you how to teach your dog *not* to careen into the street and get hit by a car. Boundary training.

The average amount of time it will take you to teach your dog the basics of *Bonding for Life* is six weeks. Yet, although after six weeks your dog will be well up on the various learning curves, he or she will need a few more months before those curves reach their maximum asymptote. But even after that, the training is not over. Your relationship with your dog is a mutual lifestyle you and he or she will share with each other 24/7/365. That means to some degree, you will always be correcting unwanted behaviors and rewarding the ones you do expect. As I said at the beginning of this Forward, after, say, six months of training, the ratio of reward-to-correction will be about 90 to 10, and most of the corrections will be so gentle I call them suggestions.

Finally, starting with Chapter One and thereafter, for the purpose of succinctness, I will usually refer to your dog as a member of the male gender,

i.e. as *he* or *him*, not as “it” or “he or she” or “him or her.” However, within this book, I will use several female “demonstration” dogs for instructional purposes. They of course will be referred to as she or her.