



The Woof-Meow Show

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The “Woof-Meow” show is on every Sunday at 8:30PM on WVOM, 103.9FM, the Voice of Maine. Hosted by Don Hanson of Green Acres Kennel Shop, the show focuses on educating dog and cat guardians about their dogs and cats.

AIR DATE: 27MAY07

GUEST: Don Hanson & Dutra

The Importance of Training Your Dog

Why is training a dog so important?

Dogs are a separate species from people and as such have their own special needs and natural instincts. They communicate differently than we humans do, and many of their normal behaviors are counter to our own. When we bring a dog or puppy into our homes and our lives we are asking them to change much of what is natural about their existence. We not only need to teach them how to fit in but also teach ourselves about their needs so that we can learn to accommodate them and adjust our expectations to make the best possible situation for both species; dog and human. If we do not take the time to train our dogs and educate ourselves we will both be frustrated and not nearly as happy as we could be.

What is the best way to train my dog?

First and foremost you want to make sure you train your dog in a manner that is “Dog-Friendly.”

What is “Dog-Friendly” training?

There are several training groups and individuals that talk about “dog-friendly” training and as a result there are several different definitions. At Green Acres “dog-friendly” training is all about understanding and meeting the needs of our dogs as their own unique species, while keeping in mind that each dog is an individual and training them with methods and tools which are humane, gentle, kind and effective.

“Dog-Friendly” training means we encourage behavior we like with frequent and high value rewards and either prevent or ignore behavior we do not like. We do not use or recommend any methods or tools that work on the principal of intimidation or coercion or that have been designed to cause the dog physical, mental or emotional pain. That means we never use or recommend shock collars, choke collars, prong collars, squirt bottles, scruff shakes, alpha rollovers or other inhumane tools and techniques.

Organizations which share our view on “Dog-Friendly” training are; TrulyDogFriendly.com and the American Humane Association (www.americanhumane.org) which established clear criteria for humane training in their 2001 publication *Guide to Humane Dog Training*.

What is the best way to train my dog in a “Dog-Friendly” manner?

The first step in training your dog is to educate yourself on the principles and methodology of teaching desired behaviors. You can do that by reading books, watching videos or attending a class. Just be careful and make sure you select books, videos and classes that are truly “Dog-Friendly.” You can find a list of recommended books and videos, as well as an article on how to select a dog training class/instructor on our website. I suggest people start with a good “dog-friendly” training class and supplement their learning with books and videos.

Why do you prefer dog training classes?

There are several reasons I prefer “dog-friendly” classes over any other method of dog training. The first is that you have an instructor of whom you can ask questions. Good dog training instructors recognize that individual students may learn differently. Some learn best by reading, some by observing and some by doing. The best classes will provide you with ample written instructions, a demonstration of how the instructor would train the behavior, and then an opportunity for you to practice the behavior while the instructor observes and assists you. Additionally, group classes form a valuable social function, providing an opportunity for puppy and dog guardians to share frustrations and more importantly successes. They also meet part of the dogs need to be socialized with other people and dogs.

At what age should I start training my dog?

The best time to start training a dog is when they are a young puppy, which is why we start dogs in our Puppy Kindergarten class when they are between 9 and 17 weeks of age. It is never too late to start training, but the earlier you start the easier training will be because neither you nor your dog will have acquired bad habits which will require “untraining.”

Does a puppy need to wait until they have completed all of their vaccines before starting a training class?

Sadly, this is still one of the biggest misconceptions that people have about training classes. While it is important that your puppy be started on vaccines that you and your veterinarian determine are necessary, it is absolutely critical that you start training and socialization before those vaccines are completed. In a letter to all veterinarians, Dr. R. K. Anderson, Professor and Director Emeritus, Animal Behavior Clinic and Center to Study Human/Animal Relationships and Environments at the University of Minnesota states: *“Experience and epidemiologic data support the relative safety and lack of transmission of disease in these puppy socialization classes over the past 10 years in many parts of the United States. In fact; the risk of a dog dying because of infection with distemper or parvo disease is far less than the much higher risk of a dog dying (euthanasia) because of a behavior problem.”* If you want to see that letter yourself, you can find it at our website.

What types of classes does Green Acres offer?

Green Acres classes focus on training your dog to be a fun, well-mannered companion. We offer two introductory classes; a Puppy Kindergarten for young dogs (9 to 17 weeks of age) and a Basic Behaviors class for dogs older than 17 weeks of age. We also offer advanced classes for dogs that have completed one of the two introductory classes. A full description of our classes can be found at our website or we can mail you a brochure.

What will my dog and I learn in a class?

In Puppy Kindergarten or Basic Behaviors we will teach you how to train your dog to pay attention, sit, and lie down when given a visual or verbal cue. We teach you to use visual cues or hand signals before verbal cues, because that is our dog’s primary means of communicating. We will also teach the dogs how to take things and to leave things when asked. Preventing undesirable behaviors through proper management will also be

discussed as ways of dealing with jumping up on people, chewing and play biting. Lastly we begin the process of teaching the dogs to walk nicely on a loose leash and to come when called. Both of these are more complex behaviors than sit or down and run counter to the dog's natural instincts, so they will take longer to train.

What is clicker training?

Clicker training is a positive, motivational training method based on the scientific principles of learning theory and operant conditioning. The basic principle of clicker training is that behaviors, which are rewarded, are made stronger and occur more frequently. A small mechanical clicker is used to mark the precise instant your dog is performing a behavior as requested and then is followed by a reward, usually a tasty treat. Clicker training makes our dogs active partners in the training process. By having to think about what we want, dogs generally learn quicker, retain lessons better and have more fun doing so. Once a dog has learned a behavior such as “down” we will associate it with both a hand signal and a word cue and start to phase out the use of the clicker.

So what is it about the clicker that makes it work so well?

There is nothing magical about the clicker. It is just utilized to make a sound which is used as an event marker to indicate to the dog the precise instant it has done exactly what we wanted. The trainers at Sea World use a whistle as an alternative to the clicker, and I know trainers that have used a flashlight to train deaf dogs and even goldfish. What makes these event markers work so well is that they mark the animal's behavior precisely and with no emotional baggage. The animal learns that the flash of light or click means they have done a good job and will be rewarded.

Will clicker trainer work with all dogs?

Yes! Clicker training, or more precisely positive reinforcement training with an event marker, will work with all species of animals. The same techniques we use in our classes at Green Acres have been used to successfully train killer whales, tigers, cats, cockroaches, and even people. There are unfortunately a few “old-fashioned” trainers out there that say clicker training does not work on all animals simply because they do not understand the science behind clicker training and operant conditioning.