

MANAGEMENT VS TRAINING

Copyright © Leonore Abordo CPDT

Management is physically controlling the dog and his environment in such a way to prevent unwanted behaviors.

Training is putting behaviors on cue and under stimulus control, such that those behaviors are performed reliably and only when cued.

Frequently we manage unwanted behaviors until an appropriate behavior is trained. We use head collars until the dog has learned, through training, to move in a specific position with the handler and to keep the leash loose. We may body-block and use social pressure until the full meaning of “Stay” has been learned. Puppies are tethered, confined, monitored and regularly taken to an appropriate potty area until they learn how to “tell” us when they need to go outside. A leash is used to prevent dogs in a class from interacting with each other until they learn to remain focused on their handlers. A baby gate or closed door keeps dogs out of a room that is off limits (such as a spare bedroom).

Sometimes, management is for life. This is common for safety issues: Fencing is used to

keep dogs confined within an appropriate area, such as an owner’s property. Crates or seatbelts are used to confine dogs to the appropriate area of a vehicle, as well as for safety. Baby gates keep dogs out of kitchens, where the probability of rehearsing unwanted but self-reinforcing behaviors (counter surfing, dumpster diving) is very high. Leashes prevent dogs from dashing into oncoming traffic.

It is essential, however, to recognize that, *eventually, management always fails*. A choke chain prevents a tragic collar-slip at a rest stop next to the highway – but someday the weld will fail. Gates get left open, guests forget to put cleaning products away, tree limbs knock fences over, leashes break... the list is endless.

So, what are we to do? I believe: Manage where necessary, train wherever possible.

Training reduces or even eliminates the need for management *and* increases the potential number of cued behaviors. If a dog knows how to ring a bell to indicate a desire to go outside to potty, then there is no need for confinement and supervision in order to prevent house-soiling

accidents, with the bonus that the person is trained too (to respond to the bell). A dog that learns the “other” side of the pipe corral is off-limits will stay on “this” side, and is in less danger of getting kicked by a horse. A dog that is bonded to and focused on his handler doesn’t need a leash, because he is utterly attentive to the handler. Such dogs are then able to learn an endless variety of cued behaviors through training.

Good trainers know the difference between management and training, the appropriate applications and limitations of each, and choose optimum solutions for specific situations.

Leonore lives in New Mexico with her incredible husband and the world’s greatest cat. When not training her own dogs, she runs Chile Agility, a performance dog training business. She can be reached at Leonore@Borzoi-Oxota.com