

What If ...

by Nancy Topp

The following information was obtained from seminars and personal correspondence with Chris Bach, developer of **THE THIRD WAY** of Training.

What if you were told . . .

. . .that there is no other creature on the face of this earth like a dog.

. . .that dogs are a product of nature and nurture.

. . .that dogs are dogs and act like dogs.

. . .that dogs are PERFECT at being dogs.

. . .that there is no other relationship on the face of this earth like a human and a dog.

. . .that dog to dog relationships when under the influence of human beings becomes like no other conspecific relationship on earth.

. . .that the dog as a model for dog behavior is a much more plausible, reliable, and accurate model than the traditional wolf-pack model.

. . .that rank, status and privilege do not play a role in dog behavior and words like defensiveness, familiarity, self-serving are more accurate descriptive terms for dog behavior.

. . .that there is no alpha dog or dominant dog, only alpha behavior and dominant behavior. The "alpha" animal is just the one that is the strongest and most driven at the moment.

. . .that dogs operate moment by moment, experimentation by experimentation.

. . .that dogs are opportunists and master problem solvers.

. . .that dogs are learning every moment they are awake.

. . .that dogs do not understand the concept of "permanently mine" with regards to possessions, only possession at the moment.

. . .that when dogs do act as if they think something is "theirs" it is because they want to interact with it and to prevent others from interfering or taking it away. It is not because they understand "possession". It is because the sight of the item has become a "trigger" or a "stimulus" for the behavior of

interacting with the item. It is a classically conditioned response, not an "I own this thing" response.

. . .that dogs are not the social creatures we think they are and expecting them to get along with every human being and every animal they meet is unrealistic.

. . .that dogs do not understand the concept of "right" and "wrong", only "safe" and "dangerous".

. . .that you will never get to the point where your dog will "trust" you. Trust equals turning your well being (safety) over to someone else. It is not a dog's responsibility to "trust" people for they cannot. An animal's natural defense mechanisms make it impossible. It is people's responsibility to establish and maintain a "safety history" with their dogs so the dog feels safe in the presence of people.

. . .that corrections become cues that a person is turning from "safe" to "dangerous".

. . .that dogs cannot and will not stop defending themselves.

. . .that dogs should not be allowed to interact on leash because a space issue quickly turns into a safety issue when they are restricted by the leash from leaving when feeling intimidated or threatened.

. . .that safety issues stay with a dog for the rest of its life.

. . .that all dogs are unique and they need to be trained to accommodate their uniqueness.

. . .that a dog's motivation in life is to satisfy drives and minimize sensitivities and discovering what these drives and sensitivities are is the owner's responsibility.

. . .that reinforcement is anything that changes a dog's state to a better state, aversives change a dog's state to a lesser state.

. . .that you can't teach a dog "not" to do something but you can teach a dog to "do" something.

. . .that we should take the word "aggressive" out of our vocabulary for describing dog behavior and substitute the word "defensive" instead.

. . .that dogs defend four things:

1. resources

2. possession at the moment

3. space

4. safety

. . .that how dogs defend these four things depends on their:

1. drives

2. sensitivities

3. past experiences

4. experimentation

. . .that bitches are more driven and therefore more likely to fight intensely over resources, possessions, space and safety issues. Females are more necessary for the procreation of a species so their drives are stronger than males who tend to back away from confrontation more easily when their well-being is threatened.

. . .that breeders would be wise to allow the mother dog to participate in the natural weaning process. As she begins to DEFEND herself against the sharp teeth and claws that her whelps are developing her puppies learn valuable lessons such as how to keep their emotions under control. They learn how to approach adult dogs with caution and be aware of what their body language is predicting. And to look to faces for information rather than heading to the undersides of dogs in search of "milk faucets"!

. . .that while defending herself during the weaning process, the mother dog enables her puppies to learn that just because they see a resource does not mean it is available to them. Puppies learn self-imposed, self-control, which is a skill they need to live in harmony with people and other dogs.

. . .that puppies must learn bite inhibition from other puppies and/or older dogs because humans are inconsistent.

. . .that most puppies experience two fear periods: 8 to 10 week old puppies experience the onset of the fearful response, while at puberty, the fear response becomes centered on what is familiar rather than the novel.

. . .that because of this "fear of the familiar", spaying and neutering at this time is imprudent. It would be better to do it at 4 months before the onset of this fear response or after the fear response has diminished.

. . .that socialization with people and dogs past 6 months of age must be closely scrutinized and managed for the rest of the dog's life. Just because a puppy is very social does not mean it will be social as a mature adult.

Now what if you were told that based on these ideas, you could. . .

. . .train your dog with no force (collar corrections, jerks, etc.).

. . .get the behaviors you want on a voluntary basis.

Interested in hearing more? I sure was and so I spent two weekends learning about this new method of dog training called **THE THIRD WAY** taught by Chris Bach of Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

In my first two-day seminar, I learned why, in Chris' opinion, much of what we were taught to believe about dog behavior simply is not accurate. She gave example after example why the wolf-pack model, which so many of us use, does not work when you apply it to dog behavior. Especially interesting was her explanation of aggression. For me, light bulbs started coming on all over the place. Things that had frustrated me about dogs and dog training for the past ten years were finally being explained to me in a way that I could comprehend. What made me seek out a second seminar on how to teach your dog **THE THIRD WAY** was the look on my dogs' faces when I tried "speaking dog" using **THE THIRD WAY** methods.

The "how to" seminar was two days of intense learning for me. I am not a "quick study" and I freely admit I find it difficult to change old habits. With these two strikes against me, I still learned enough to want to try **THE THIRD WAY** of training.

Will I need to attend more seminars to better understand this unique way of training? Yup! After all, it took me ten years of classes and seminars to develop my old method. Will it be reinforcing enough to me to invest the time, energy, and money to change? Yup! The first time I got a behavior because my dog "chose" to do it rather than "had" to do it was all I needed to hook me on this new method.

Is this method right for everyone? If you are totally happy and content using your current method, I say good for you. If you, like me, are frustrated and constantly looking for a better way to accomplish your goals with your dog, then I invite you to investigate **THE THIRD WAY** of dog training.

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