

AnimalKind News

Happy New Year, everyone!



Nicholas Higgenbottom in the snow

2011 was a challenging year for me for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the passing of my dear cat Nickie, aka Nicholas Higgenbottom. We found Nick as a small kitten, standing in the middle of a busy road as cars went around him. He didn't run or struggle as I scooped him up, and he lived with us for sixteen years. In his last days I was finishing my master's thesis in Humane Education. Very bittersweet. I want to note the passing of my friend Linda's goat, Elmo. I am very partial to goats, and Elmo was exceptional. I've spent a fair amount of training time in Linda's pasture, and Elmo

was always right there, butting in as only goats can do, convinced that he deserved a click and treat too. I know many of you also lost cherished animal friends and you have my sympathies. The Hawaiians say death is simply a "change of address." I kind of like that idea.

Read on for an article about punishment in training, (no, I'm not advocating it!). Also take a look at the calendar for fun AnimalKind Events I have scheduled for this new year, including some free community education seminars at Skagit Farmers Country Store in Stanwood.

WELCOME!

Welcome to the first issue of The AnimalKind News. In this newsletter I will share training theory, philosophy and advice as well as other tidbits I think will be of interest to you. My aim is to do this quarterly, and then maybe monthly.

I hope you will have a look at the articles even if they aren't about your particular species. Training is training, and the techniques and principles of kindness, understanding and respect are the same whether we're working with a cat, a dog, a horse, or a person. If you have questions or issues, send them to me to answer here, because others are likely struggling with those very same issues. We can all learn from each other.

-Shannon Finch



SOME THOUGHTS ON PUNISHMENT, POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Tristan is a 16 year old Morgan, and the first horse I trained entirely by myself. Over the years, he has developed a habit of pawing the stall mat at his door when it's time to get turned out in the big pasture and at mealtimes. It creates a big mess. Bedding gets jammed up under the mat, and he tears up the footing, spewing little bits of gravel in the stall. He's not stuck in a stall all night, he has access to a smaller pasture all the time. He is the first one to get fed, and the first to go out of the barn. It was beyond annoying. I started raising my voice at him, telling him to stop it. Did it work? Nope. Yet I did it day after day, with the same result: Tristan still pawed.

One day, I was so irritated by his pawing that I threw a small bucket at his door. It banged into the door, making a huge racket, and he jumped back. Did he stop pawing? Oh, you bet. Instantly. It appeared that I had solved the problem. That is, until I opened Tristan's door to let him out, and he hung back in his paddock, clearly waiting for the bucket monster to jump out at him again. When he decided to come out, he did so at about five hundred miles an hour. Okay, slight exaggeration, but believe me, it was fast.

Charging out of the stall was not annoying like the pawing, it was dangerous. And on top of that, the next day he was still pawing. He was also very skittish and wary when I'd get close to the stall. I had so scared him that he was doing his best to stay away from me and the flying bucket monster. So I hadn't solved the problem, and I now had the additional problem of his unsafe stall exit. And, worst of all, I looked a little scary and unpredictable to my horse, whom I love dearly.

Throwing that bucket was a form of punishment. Punishment doesn't have the same connotation in science as it does in our regular lives. It's not about getting even or being abusive. It does involve the use of punishers--jerks on the collar, yelling, throwing a

bucket--that if applied immediately after a behavior, can make the behavior less likely to happen again. The animal's behavior makes something unpleasant happen. In dog training, leash corrections for pulling and shocks for barking are examples of this kind of punishment. So is smacking a horse who is pawing or won't stand still.

When a trainer steps back and takes her attention away from a horse who is mouthy, or from a dog who is jumping up, that is a different kind of punishment. In this case, the animal's behavior



makes something good go away. Parents often use this one with kids, taking away privileges because of bad behavior. The scientific term for this is negative punishment, which has nothing to do with good or bad, but rather, it means the handler is taking something away. And in case you're enjoying all of this science, the bucket throwing is an example of positive punishment. Again, not because it was good, but because I added something--the flying bucket--in response to Tristan's undesirable behavior.

There's no question that punishment can work. But behaviorists say that if it is going to be effective, punishment should work within three applications, so I shouldn't have to throw that bucket more than three times for Tristan's pawing to stop. Punishment

SOME THOUGHTS ON PUNISHMENT...continued

should also be administered without emotion on the handler's part. Well, I don't know many people, myself included, who can punish without being emotional. In most cases, we punish *because* we're emotional: we're angry, irritated, or hurt (I mean physically, like if they bite or kick us, though emotional hurt maybe comes into play too), and we lash back. That's not the proper application of punishment in behavior science.

Reinforcement is another way to influence behavior. Where punishment decreases or stops a behavior, reinforcement strengthens it. Reinforcement is something the animal either wants

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more of (positive), or something to avoid or escape from (negative). Negative reinforcement means that the animal's behavior makes something bad go away. For both horses and dogs, leading is generally trained through negative reinforcement. Walking out of position results in an unpleasant yank on the lead or leash. They work to avoid that yank by staying in the proper position.

Positive reinforcement means that the learner's behavior makes something good happen. Dog heels in proper position, dog gets treat. Horse puts foot on trailer ramp, horse gets a piece of carrot. It's very simple really, and it works, sometimes in just minutes. Yet positive reinforcement trainers are often denigrated as being soft, or worse, labeled a no-good treat-slinger. Punishment is all around us, at work, school, in our government (think IRS penalties); it permeates our culture. I often say that stopping at the stop sign doesn't earn us ten bucks, but not stopping will very likely earn us a ticket.

Tristan's reaction following the bucket incident is a great example of the unintended consequences of punishment. I stopped the undesirable behavior, for the moment, but he became afraid of me, and his stall exiting behavior was dangerous. Research shows that punishment also increases stress, which conversely decreases the animal's ability to learn. I don't know about you, but when someone yells at me, it's hard to learn. In fact, I'm likely to shut down

completely, a response I see very often with animals. Practically speaking, punishment doesn't teach your learner what you want her to know or do instead. "No" can mean a lot of things to an animal, and usually it's not what *we* had in mind. Because of the high potential for fallout, punishment just isn't a desirable training technique. It's more fair, and in the end, easier, to teach learners what we want them to know. I felt really, really bad about scaring Tristan, and I had to fix it.

I could have trained Tristan to stand quietly at the stall door. It wouldn't have been hard to do using positive reinforcement. I could mark with a clicker when his feet were still and reinforce with a treat, or just open the door and let him out, which likely would have been more reinforcing to him in that situation. Here's the thing: I knew I wasn't going to train this behavior. In the morning I'm rushing around trying to get the chores done. I didn't feel this was a life skill that he really needed to know. This is where management comes in.

Knowing full well that I would be inconsistent at best, and that any one else feeding or turning out

Management is a kindness.

would most certainly be inconsistent, I decided to manage this behavior. Management is simply altering the environment to make the undesirable behavior less apt to happen, which prevents the animal from practicing it. To be clear, management is not training, though in many cases it can make training much easier. Management is one of the legs of my "tripod of training," (the others being stress management and teaching life skills). Management is a kindness; really, no one appreciates being constantly nagged or punished. I put an empty plastic clothes hamper inside his stall by the door, right over the spot he pawed. Problem solved. Truly, it was that simple. This wouldn't work for a horse who would drag the thing around, but I knew Tristan wouldn't, so it served its purpose.

But I wasn't done yet. I also had to work with Tristan on coming out of the stall in a calm manner. It took just two mornings of putting a lead on him, clicking and reinforcing calm behavior on the way to the pasture. Tristan was very forgiving, and we're

SOME THOUGHTS ON PUNISHMENT...continued

back to our normal routine. I have a long history of positive reinforcement training with Tristan, and I believe this is why I was able to easily repair the damage to the relationship.

What I strive for in training is this: Reward what I want, ignore what I don't want, and manage the rest of it. If a behavior is dangerous, then I set things up in such a way so that animals and people can be safe and successful. Remember that all of us, animals and humans alike, tend to repeat behaviors that are rewarded, while those that aren't rewarded tend to fade away. If your animal (spouse, kid, coworker) keeps doing something that you don't like, figure out what the reinforcement is. There's a payoff in there somewhere, even if it seems to be negative. For instance, when a dog jumps up on someone, she often responds by flailing around, yelling "off." Well, if the dog is trying to get your attention, you just gave it to him.

For many jumping dogs, the moment they get their front feet off the ground, they are reinforced, and whatever happens after that doesn't matter so much to them. Some behaviors, like jumping up and pawing, can be self-reinforcing. Management and prevention are crucial in these situations. Self-reinforcing behaviors may also indicate that there are some underlying issues—maybe anxiety or lack of self control—that I need to address. But that's another story. I know a lot about the pitfalls of punishment, and yet, in a weak, thoughtless moment, I did it.

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The seduction of punishment is that we are reinforced when it stops an undesirable behavior, even if only momentarily. Remember what I said about behaviors that are reinforced tending to stay? Well, because we are reinforced for punishing, we are likely to try that tactic again. The results are almost always an illusion. We don't realize that we are repeating the punishment the next day, and the next, and the next. If we finally figure out that it's not working, we often escalate our punishment. Not only is this poor training, we run the risk of damaging a relationship, maybe beyond repair.

Considering what many dogs and horses go through in the name of training, throwing a bucket is comparatively mild. But I'm striving to be the most humane human I can be, and if I let one little thing slip by, then it becomes all too easy to let bigger things go by too.

Are we going to get frustrated and mad when we work with our animals, children, spouses or the guy at the bank? Of course. That's part of being human, and it's not the problem. It's what we do with those emotions that matters. We have a couple of choices. We can do something we might not be proud of and wouldn't want caught on tape. Or, we can try techniques like positive reinforcement and management, which allow us to maintain our dignity, while showing others respect, understanding and most of all, kindness.

Shannon Finch

M.Ed. in Humane Education

Karen Pryor Academy Certified Training Partner

Certified Tellington TTouch Practitioner for Companion Animals and Horses

Clinics, demonstrations, and private instruction for all species.

If you have questions or comments, please feel free to contact me. If you prefer to not be on the AnimalKind mailing list, do let me know and I promise to remove you.

360-629-9641

www.animalkindtraining.com

ANIMALKIND EVENTS

Here is the AnimalKind calendar, with more to come. This year I'm doing a lecture series for Skagit Valley College called Dog Shorts. The classes focus on single issues and will offer a number of techniques for students to learn and then try at home with their dogs. Over the years I have refined my training to rely almost solely on TTouch and clicker training, which I've come to call TTouch'n Click. This year I'll be offering two TTouch'n Click classes, one for reactive dogs and one for shy dogs. In the past, I've done weekend seminars on these subjects, but wanted to try a longer class to avoid overwhelming dogs and handlers. I'm also doing the Genius and Old Friends clinics again, which were both really fun, for people *and* dogs. For those who have attended a Snarky Dog workshop, if you'd like to have a refresher course, let me know. If there's enough interest, I'll do it in August. To register for workshops at Black Dog Ranch, contact me at www.animalkindtraining.com, or call 360-629-9641.

INTRODUCTION TO TTOUCH FOR DOGS / PUPPIES

Does your dog shriek and lunge at other dogs? Dig up your yard? Chew your shoes? Do you have a teething puppy or an older dog feeling his age? Then this hands-on, interactive course is for you. Improve your dog's behavior and health using the Tellington TTouch method. You'll discover several of the basic circular touches, lifts, and slides that can help reduce anxiety, fear, and stress in your dog. You'll also explore techniques that address common behavior problems such as digging, barking, chewing, leash pulling, and jumping up. In addition, we will practice TTouch first aid techniques that can save your dog's life. TTouch isn't massage, so knowledge of canine anatomy is not necessary—anyone can use this method. Bring a stuffed animal to practice on, not your dog!

Date: Saturday, January 21, 2012, 9:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.

Location: Skagit Valley College, Mount Vernon, WA

Registration: \$59, register through Skagit Valley College, 360-416-7638, www.skagit.edu, click on Business and Community menu, then click on Community Education.

DOG SHORTS: ROVER, WALK WITH ME!

Does your dog pull on the leash, or worse, bark hysterically or lunge when she sees other dogs or people while on leash? Walking calmly on leash is a skill that can be taught. And you don't have to use harsh equipment or get rough with your dog. In this seminar you'll learn effective and humane techniques to make your dog a joy to walk.

Date: Saturday, February 4, 2012, 9:30 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Location: Skagit Valley College, Mount Vernon, WA

Registration: \$40, register through Skagit Valley College, 360-416-7638, www.skagit.edu, click on the Business and Community menu, and then click on Community Education.

DOG SHORTS: ROVER, COME BACK!

Coming when called is a skill that can save your dog's life, and it's the one thing that most dog owners find really difficult to train or maintain. It doesn't have to be. In this seminar, we'll talk about why your dog doesn't want to come back to you, and learn several techniques to help you and your dog achieve a solid recall.

Date: Saturday, February 4, 2012, 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Location: Skagit Valley College, Mount Vernon, WA

Registration: \$40, register through Skagit Valley College, 360-416-7638, www.skagit.edu, click on the Business and Community menu, and then click on Community Education.

More events ➡

CAT BEHAVIOR SEMINAR

Bring your cat behavior questions! We'll talk about management and training techniques for common behavior challenges, such as litter box problems, aggression towards other animals and people, excessive vocalization, and shyness. Time permitting, we'll also discuss fun activities you can do with your cat.

Date: Saturday, February 11, 2012, 11:00 a.m.-12:00 noon

Location: Skagit Farmer's Supply Country Store, 8815 272nd St. NW, Stanwood

Registration: Free, no pre-registration required

INTRODUCTION TO TTOUCH FOR CATS / KITTENS

Does your cat refuse to use the litter box, bully other cats in the family, or is too frightened to come out from under the bed? This hands-on, interactive seminar is for you! Improve your cat's health and well-being using the Tellington TTouch method. Reduce anxiety, fear, and aggression, and learn first aid techniques that can save your cat's life. We'll also explore techniques for working with feral cats. Bring a stuffed animal (not your kitty!) to practice with.

Date: Saturday, February 18, 2012, 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Location: Skagit Valley College, Mount Vernon, WA

Registration: \$59, register through Skagit Valley College, 360-416-7638, www.skagit.edu, click on the Business and Community menu, and then click on Community Education.

DOG SHORTS: ROVER, WATCH YOUR MOUTH!

Barking, whining, chewing, even biting, are all natural behaviors for dogs, but can be challenging for us. Learn what your dog is telling you when she exhibits these behaviors, and what to do about them in a humane and effective manner. Class applies to all ages of dogs, from puppies to seniors.

Date: Saturday, March 3, 2012, 9:30 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Location: Skagit Valley College, Mount Vernon, WA

Registration: \$40, register through Skagit Valley College, 360-416-7638, www.skagit.edu, click on the Business and Community menu, and then click on Community Education.

DOG SHORTS: ROVER, PLEASE CALM DOWN!

Jumping up, demand barking, hyperactivity, over-exuberance with other dogs, these are all signs that your dog is lacking self-control. This seminar focuses on humane training and management techniques to help him calm down so he's a pleasure to be around. You'll be able to teach your dog how to greet people and other dogs appropriately, stay four-on-the-floor, and settle on a mat.

Date: Saturday, March 3, 2012, 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Location: Skagit Valley College, Mount Vernon, WA

Registration: \$40, register through Skagit Valley College, 360-416-7638, www.skagit.edu, click on the Business and Community menu, and then click on Community Education.

DOG SAFETY FOR KIDS

Kids will learn how to read dog body language, which is key to preventing dog bites. Kids will also practice what to do when approached by a strange dog. Ages 5 and up.

Date: Saturday, March 24, 2012, 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Location: Skagit Farmer's Supply Country Store, 8815 272nd St. NW, Stanwood

Registration: Free, no pre-registration required

More events 

OLD FRIENDS, A CLINIC FOR SENIOR DOGS

Enhance your bond with your old friend in this clinic for "gray muzzles." You'll learn Tellington TTouch bodywork techniques which can help ease the aches and pains of aging, and TTouch ground exercises to help maintain mobility. We'll also explore clicker training, puzzles, and other types of play to keep your dog's mind sharp. For dogs 8 and up, or if you have a giant breed, 6 and up.

Date: Saturday, May 19, 2012, 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.

Location: Black Dog Ranch, Stanwood

Registration: \$65. Enrollment limited to insure individual attention.

KABOOM! HELP FOR NOISE SENSITIVE DOGS

Does your dog hide in the closet on 4th of July? Shake and pant during thunderstorms? Jump into your lap at the sound of gunshots or a car backfiring? Then this seminar is for you. You'll learn hands-on techniques that calm your dog and give her the confidence and coping skills to deal with noise. If you have a stuffed animal, bring it to practice on.

Date: Saturday, June 16, 2012, 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Location: Skagit Farmer's Supply Country Store, 8815 272nd St. NW, Stanwood

Registration: Free, no pre-registration required

TTTOUCH 'N CLICK FOR REACTIVE DOGS

Does your dog shriek and lunge at other dogs or people? Threaten to bite? Go nuts in the car? If you are embarrassed or concerned about your dog's behavior, there's something you can do about it. In this five week class, we'll use TTouch and clicker training techniques for reducing reactivity and fear while increasing confidence, and enable your dog to be in public safely.

Dates: Saturdays, June 30-July 28, 2012, 10:00 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

Location: Black Dog Ranch, Stanwood

Registration: \$145. Space is limited due to the nature of the problems we'll be working with.

TTTOUCH 'N CLICK FOR SHY OR FEARFUL DOGS

For dogs who are shy or afraid of other dogs, people (including kids), or sensitive to noise or movement. Using TTouch and clicker training, your dog will gain confidence and flexibility in all kinds of situations. Depending upon the dogs, we'll aim for at least one field trip. Five weeks.

Dates: Saturdays, June 30-July 28, 2012, 1:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.

Location: Black Dog Ranch, Stanwood

Registration: \$145. Space is limited due to the nature of the problems we'll be working with.

YOUR DOG IS A GENIUS

Unlock your dog's inner genius in this four hour workshop. You'll learn clicker training techniques and games that will help you to bring out the best in your dog. If your dog flunked out of dog school, or you've been told he is stubborn or "slow," you'll gain a different perspective. If you haven't done any training at all because you don't know how to begin, here's the perfect opportunity to jump start your dog's education. This is a nonjudgmental, safe and fun clinic, where every dog can be a super dog. Space is limited, so enroll early. Dog participants should be able to rest (mostly) quietly or be in a crate for short periods of time. Check with me if you are unsure about your dog's suitability for this class.

Date: August 4, 2012, 1:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m.

Location: Black Dog Ranch, Stanwood

Registration: \$65. Space is limited, enroll early.
