

Don't ban training tools. Ban bad trainers!

Lots of politicians, organizations, and animal right defenders are struggling to find a way to stop the abuse of animals and punishment-based training. My mission is to stop the old, traditional, punishment style of dog training. Training tools are being "black listed" everywhere...but will this resolve anything?

Let me be crystal clear. Using training tools as punishment tools to "get behavior" is absolutely wrong, and the trainers who believe this to be the way must be fired and never allowed to work with animals again. But forbidding training tools, such as e-collars or the heavily discussed prong collar, is not the solution to stop punishment. Why not? Because humans will continue using all sorts of training tools and will be able to turn even the simplest tools into punishment devices. I've seen brutal results of punishment by a simple leather leash. It's not the tool we need to focus on, but the 'trainer'.



A training tool blacklist will not help. Humans can turn every tool into a weapon to hurt or punish an animal. The way to stop punishment training is education. How, why, and when do we use tools? What sort of tools? What do we want to achieve? How to select the best options? Are there alternatives? What will be the result? A clear useful schedule to answer related questions can be found in the [Professional Standards For Dog Trainers 2001 Delta Society](#) figure 2.4 page 15.

This brings us directly to the question of "what is training?" and "do we need correction?" I had a interesting discussion with the amazing animal behaviorist and author, the [Kimberly Artley](#), this week about changing behavior. To highlight some interesting points, we discussed a situation going on in her neighborhood. There is a speed limit of 25 miles per hour on a certain stretch of road, but after some months of no police control, the average speed of drivers is around 40 or 50 mph. So, after repeated concerns and complaints, local police finally placed a mobile radar with a matrix. If you approach this above 40 mph, a red sign will flash SLOW DOWN. And under this limit drivers will see what their actual speed is in yellow flashing numbers. Drivers were slowing down as soon as the radar came into view. But why? Because they expect a police officer down the road to stop and punish them for unwanted behavior? In this case, the mobile radar unit is not equipped with a camera and there is also no police officer nearby, but there's still a behavior change going on and local citizens are learning fast. Within a few short days, the speed limit became the average speed.

We all know that those individuals who keep pushing the limits will eventually get caught and "punished" or "corrected" (in the form of a fine) when police do a actual speed check. We like to use the word "correction" more than "punishment", but it is the same. The goal is to change behavior, and- to be more precise- unwanted behavior. Would we be able to change unwanted behavior by giving positive reinforcements? Imagine as a driver that you slow down. The matrix shows you in yellow flashing numbers 24 in this 25 mph zone. After the radar unit a police officer orders you to stop. You pull over, and he thanks you for not speeding too fast.

To make it even more positive, he hands you 100 dollars and wishes you a pleasant day. Would this change your behavior the next day when you drive the same route to work?

We can change behavior by [reinforcement or punishment](#). But, eventually, it all boils down to motivation. What will be my motivation to give wanted or unwanted behavior? And are we crystal clear what is wanted or unwanted behavior? Driving 25 or less in the neighborhood is wanted behavior. But would being a trauma medic on my way to a serious accident or as a businessmen on my way to a million dollar deal motivate me to drive faster? So motivation, wanted or unwanted behavior, how to change behavior, is not always black or white.

This brings us back to animal training. In the beginning of the 20th century, it was [Ivan Pavlov](#) who showed us that classical conditioning is always going on. So even behavior that we humans will point out as "unwanted" will- in certain circumstances- be conditioned into humans and animals. To change behavior, [B.F. Skinner](#) introduced operant conditioning to us. He studied the work of [Edward Thorndike](#), who taught us his theory of [Law of Effect](#), which states that behavior changes because of its consequences. Skinner told us about these consequences. He defined positive and negative reinforcement, and positive and negative punishment.

In modern day animal training, lots of people use only positive reinforcement to change behavior. It's very good method, and proven by Skinner and many others that it works; but it's only one of the four quadrants out of the operant conditioning as a whole, and these quadrants are all interconnected. All trainers will use, sometimes subconsciously, all these techniques to change behavior. If your animal doesn't meet criteria for positive reinforcement and you put the cookie back in your treat bag, are you ignoring the animal or using negative punishment? To be clear, "negative punishment" is when you take away something the animal wants. A young dog steals food from the kitchen table. The owner runs with an angry voice towards him. Is he punishing the stealing of food, or negative reinforcing staying on the ground instead of jumping on the kitchen table?

Modern society has changed how we look at animals. A lot of our animals have moved into our houses and are a part of our families. Dogs get chairs and sit at the dinner table. Dogs sleep in our beds. They have their own seatbelt in the car. They sit next to us on the couch watching TV. When they are left alone, the owner stays in contact by a pet app. They can call each other, set up a video link and even dispense treats by remote feeders. Where restrictions and boundaries were clear in the past, now seems to have become extremely vague. Don't get me wrong~ I love dogs, and have changed my ways in how I work and live with them even in the last few years. You can read more about this through what [Gregory Berns M.D./Ph.D.](#) and [Dr. Brian Hare](#) are showing us through their amazing research.

To wrap this up, vague rules and hardly any boundaries will also create severe behavioral issues. Each day, many pet animals get euthanized because nobody wants to have them in their family. I admire and deeply respect the work of many behavioral experts, like [Kimberly Artley](#). They're very experienced and skilled trainers zooming in on both the animal and their owners. Each day they work to restore boundaries and leadership. They are empowering both people and animals. Don't take away their tools. Help them to educate people and animals on how to understand each other better so they can all live together in greater harmony.

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