Low Risk vs High Risk Dog Training

John Visconti, CPDT-KA

- This looks more like a torture device than a dog collar. Why? Because it is.

***Low Risk vs High Risk* dog training**

If you are in the process of hiring a dog trainer, please choose carefully. Heavy handed, high risk trainers have employed a new code speak for their outdated and high risk methods.

Shock, prong and choke collars are now being calling e collars, training collars, stim collars and other such misrepresentations.

Training plans centered around *showing the dog who the pack leader* or *boss* is, and/or advocating *dominance* and *Alpha* theories (David Mech, the scientist who helped to popularize the "alpha" theory, has since retracted his findings http://www.davemech.org/news.html) are the rantings of uneducated, HIGH RISK quacks.

Countless scientific studies have shown that the use of force or physical discomfort to "train" a dog results in many unintended and often, dangerous consequences. It's not a matter of whether or not the method works; its a matter of what the cost is in terms of the high risk consequences of such methods.

From the Amerian Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB):

*AVSAB's position is that punishment (eg, choke chains, pinch collars, and electronic collars...*as well as other aversive techniques) *should not be used...due to the potential adverse effects which include but are not limited to: inhibition of learing, increased fear-related and aggressive behaviors, and injury to animals and people interacting with animals.*
AVSAB recommends that training should focus on reinforcing desired behaviors.

The adverse effects of punishment can put the safety of the pet and the person admininstering the punishmet at RISK. Because of these safety RISKS, people recommending these techniques are taking a liability .

With **HIGH RISK** training, the trainer *assumes* that the dog connects the punishment with the unwanted behavior. Often, a dog might be focused elsewhere (particularly if the timing of the punishment isn't perfect) and associate the physical discomfort with that object. Sometimes the "object" is a human being. The result is that the dog has now obtained a highly negative association toward an object, environment, or person, which can often result in **HIGH RISK** consequences.

Many **HIGH RISK** trainers will suggest that the dog doesn't feel the pain, that in fact, the shock or aversive punishment, like jerking a choke collar, simply *catches the dog's attention*. Pure nonsense. The point of the aversive is to cause enough pain to, in theory, make the dog not repeat the offense.

One problem with this approach is that science has proven that animals acclimate to repeated low levels of pain, therefore, the pain being administered must be increased. Where does this cycle end, with plastic explosives?

Additionally, the lesson the dog learns is, how to avo*id the punishment* but the dog has not learned what you want to *replace the undesired behavior* with. It is vastly more effective and efficient to reward a dog for performing a behavior the *one* correct way, than to constantly punish for the *countless* ways he/she can get it wrong.

Finally, even if the lie was true (the leash jerk is only to "catch the dog's attention") what happens when the choker is jerked, accidentally (perhaps the dog has lunged at the same time as the "correction" is administered) with too much force? Hello veterinarian bill. Or worse.

Why take that risk?

Low Risk Training

You can establish leadership quite easily without resorting to high risk, physical abuse of your dog. You control all that your dog needs to survive in this world. Food, water, going outside, going for walks, are all within your control. Without you, your dog would perish. Isn't that enough ammunition to establish leadership?

When searching for a dog trainer, look for a trainer who employs LOW RISK positive reinforcement/force free methods. This type of training is defined by rewarding the dog for doing the right thing, rather than punishing her/him for doing the wrong thing.

"LOW RISK" doesn't mean "High Permissiveness" I am very specific about what I want my dog students (and owners) to do. The goal is rock solid reliability for every cue your dog learns

With **LOW RISK** training the worst you can do is give the dog an extra treat that he/she didn't quite earn. With **HIGH RISK** training, the consequences can be quite dangerous.

The choice is yours. The consequences aren't.