

# Management vs. Training

Written by Bryan Konowitz

Patient: "Doctor Doctor, It hurts when I move like **this**."

Doctor: "So don't move like **that!**"

Pet owner: "My dog jumps up and snatches food from the counter when I am prepping dinner."

Dog trainer: "Don't let him do that... anymore."

We've all heard it a thousand times. We live in a "quick-fix" society; we want the problem solved yesterday. When the results aren't fast enough, or the solution simple enough, we just dodge the problem all together. No need to treat the source when we can simply avoid the symptoms. But where do we draw the line? And what does any of this have to do with dog training?

Doing a Google search on dog training and management will provide a wealth of articles. There are articles discussing safety through management, aggression controlled through management, management devices, and preventative management. All great topics when used in the right context. The problem arises when real training goes out the window in favor of management techniques. There is a distinct difference between management and training. Management implies controlling the environment and subsequent access to resources. Training focuses instead on communication and clearly defining rules and etiquette for interaction with that very environment management seeks to control. Management aims to create an ideal world with ultimate control over variables. Training recognizes the existence of a real world, and approaches with the goal of internalizing lessons so that variables are no longer problematic.

Now don't go jumping to the conclusion that I feel all forms of management are detrimental to the learning process. Quite the contrary, management can be a wonderful thing. Benefits include instant results, providing an environment for your dog to be successful, and offering a reasonable, temporary solution while the real work gets done. However, management alone should never be seen as the completed goal. Wherever management falls short, the real problems begin.

Let me draw some examples for your vivid imagination.

:: Casey is an intact male Presa Canario at 5 months of age. His still-bubbly personality leads him to overt displays of exuberance every time the doorbell rings. At a rapidly increasing 67 pounds, his pouncing on guests, full body sliding, and excited mouthing are simply intolerable. What's Mom's solution? Put him outside each time visitors arrive. The problem is solved, or at least managed. Now fast-forward four months. Casey is 9 months, and just starting to develop his natural territorial instincts. The doorbell rings, while our poor pup is once again shuffled outside. Desperate to get back into his house, Casey begins a frantic search of the perimeter, discovering a screen door left open. Through the door, around the corner, and ... there, across the kitchen and heading toward the bedrooms. An intruder is in **his** house, with **his** family. Moments later, Casey has received his first live bite. Already on the wrong path, this young pup's future looks none too bright. ::

:: Larry the lethargic yellow lab always amazes his family when the rigors of old age melt away in favor of a rousing game of "dine and dash". His counter-surfing habits have long been known to the immediate family. Certainly everyone is aware that when cooking time arrives, Larry must go to his kennel. Well, apparently not everyone has been brought up to speed. Offering to prepare dinner for the family, Aunt Sue and Grandma Barb are busy searching for the basil when Larry zooms into the kitchen, grabs the whole rotisserie chicken, and has himself a very fine feast. Looks like carryout for dinner tonight. ::

:: A well-intentioned family of three has just saved Angel, a two year-old cocker spaniel from the local rescue shelter. Family dynamics consist of Mother, Father, and their 4 year-old Daughter. After hearing horror stories of our spaniel's abusive past, the family does their absolute best to offer up all the creature comforts denied for so long. Certainly training, discipline, and boundaries are not appropriate for a dog that has suffered so much. Several weeks go by, and as the honeymoon period comes to an end, Angel finally begins to show her true colors. During her evening meal, Dad has the audacity to walk by within several feet. A deep growl ensues,

*exemplifying her displeasure. Remembering all that Angel has been through, the family quickly decides it is best to avoid any contact during mealtime, preventing her “fear” from escalating. Unfortunately, Daughter didn’t get the memo. While everyone is in the living room, enjoying the evening news, the young one goes in search of her cuddly best friend. Cries from the kitchen conclude this story in a most disappointing way. Back to the shelter for the “unmanageable” Angel. ::*

Enter any local pet supply store and you’ll find a large range of “management devices.” These span the entire range, from electronic to medieval, homeopathic to laboratory medication. You’ll see halters that look like they belong on a miniature horse to cages fit for a zoo, fifty-foot retractables and harnesses with more clips and buckles than most racecar drivers would ever need. There is a nearly limitless supply of equipment to keep your pooch in line. Yet, for all the tools in the world, endless management still will not solve the problem.

Real life, and the real world, happens. There is simply no avoiding it. Guests aren’t always aware of the kenneling ritual before dinner. Younger members of the family don’t quite comprehend why puppy needs to be left alone. Sometimes, a door is left open. Even leashes and training collars will break or run out of batteries. Beyond just the symptoms, there are underlying problems of relationship, leadership, socialization, and communication. Skirt the issue for as long as you choose, but eventually the problem must be faced. When all of the tools of control are taken out of the equation, all we have left are the internalized skills and communication system that we hope has been successfully developed.

As with all things in this world, balance is the key. Applying a band-aid to prevent infection is perfectly reasonable, so long as we are also healing the wound underneath. Good trainers use a balancing act: management for immediate relief and restricting a worsening of the symptoms, as well as training to actively repair the underlying problem of a broken relationship. Let training provide what management cannot. Repair the relationship. Lay the groundwork for a viable system of communication, independent of any perceived crutches, and allow your dog to live up to his or her fullest potential. Used independently, management and training will each find themselves lacking in one way or another. Intelligently combined, great strides can be made in minimal time. Don’t seek to just “stop doing that.”

*Written by Bryan Konowitz. Special thanks to all of the trainers who contributed, edited, and assisted in creation.*