



## Your Smart Dog

### The Shape of Things to Come

April 2006

I just returned from beautiful Rhode Island, where I attended *Clicker Expo*, an educational event about the science of clicker training. For those who haven't yet been introduced to clicker training, check out this terrific website: [www.clickertraining.com](http://www.clickertraining.com) to learn more.

Clicker training turns old fashioned obedience training on its head. In the "old days" dog owners were told to be the "alpha dog," to "show their dog who is boss," and training was more an exercise in coercion than it was in actually teaching the dog what he needed to know. The focus of old fashioned training was on what the dog was doing wrong, and on punishing that wrong behavior.

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It's based on cooperation, not coercion. Think of how much more fun this method of training is for the dog, as well as for you. You're not focusing on the bad, you're looking for whatever is right – and rewarding it! It's a winning situation for both you and your dog.

And here's the really exciting part ... the more fun you are having with your dog, the more your dog is going to like spending time with you. Your relationship with your dog gets stronger by just using the clicker training method!

On the other hand, think about what the old fashioned punishment method does for your dog – you're telling him what he's doing wrong, what not to do, how not to do it, etc. How much fun do you think your dog is having? Do you think that you're strengthening your relationship this way?

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Over 300 people attended the *Clicker Expo* in Newport, Rhode Island, and one-third of them brought their dogs with them (I was one of them!). It was remarkable to see that many dogs together in close quarters so beautifully behaved. Most dogs slept comfortably at their owner's feet, happy to spend so much time together with each another.



Among the remarkable things talked about this weekend:

- How clicker-training can help dog-aggressive or people-aggressive dogs
- How you can teach your dog left from right, big from small
- How to turn your puppy into a “super learner”
- How to teach your dog to do what you want, when you want, every time you want
- How the science behind clicker training is being applied to humans (absolutely fascinating work! See [www.tagteach.com](http://www.tagteach.com) for more details on this emerging science.)
- That fish, rabbits, turtles, horses – virtually everything with a brain – can benefit from clicker training

I was wowed by what I saw, first-hand, this weekend as well. Things as remarkable as:

- A frustrated fish who sank to the bottom of the tank when he didn't get the reward he thought he earned (who knew fish could pout?!)
- An outstanding dog-person team who compete in Freestyle – all completely clicker trained. Plan to be amazed and watch a video of the team in action at [www.dogdance.net/home\\_e.htm](http://www.dogdance.net/home_e.htm)
- A miniature horse working as a “guide dog” for a blind woman. To see Panda

at work, visit

[www.theclickercenter.com/2004/Panda/index.php](http://www.theclickercenter.com/2004/Panda/index.php)

It was both an awe-inspiring and immensely satisfying experience for me. This was my third *Clicker Expo* in as many years and I plan to make next year my fourth. If you'd rather foster cooperation than coercion in your relationship with your dog, get to know clicker training – you and your dog will be glad you did!

Happy training!

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