

FINDING A DOG TRAINER

By Dorothy Turley, CPDT-KA, CNWI

How do you find a trainer that is right for you? First, anyone looking for a trainer must find some names so they have a place to start. The goal should be to have several names of trainers to begin your search. Some ideas for “mining” names of people to investigate further include:

- 1) Ask anyone you know who has a dog.
- 2) Ask other dog professionals including your Vet, groomer, pet store employee, local shelter, etc.
- 3) Do an internet search for dog trainers in your area.
- 5) Check out these websites;

Association of Pet Dog Trainers (www.APDT.com).

Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (www.CCPDT.com).

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists (<http://corecaab.org/>).

National Association of Canine Nose Work (<http://www.nacsw.net/> or <https://www.k9nosework.com/>).

Once you have a few names, you can interview trainers to find the right one for what you need. In order to help you make a decision, below are some thoughts on what to look for when seeking a dog trainer. They may not be right for everyone but I hope they will give you something to think about or perhaps a place to start to develop your own list.

The top 5 priorities when choosing a trainer for your dog.

- ☺ The emphasis is on positive reinforcement of dogs and humans.
- ☺ Only humane methods are used on dogs and people.
- ☺ The trainer has experience and education and regularly attends events to continue to improve their education, skills and knowledge.
- ☺ You are comfortable with the trainer. You do not have to be best friends but if you are put off by their personality, you are unlikely to be happy with the class.
- ☺ You are allowed (and even encouraged) to visit and observe a single class. As part of this, the trainer takes time to answer your questions about methods (though not necessarily at class time).

Some extra credit items that could lead you to a really great trainer.

- 👉 They are a member of one or more professional organizations.
- 👉 They have professional certifications that apply to the dog training field.
- 👉 They provide verbal instruction, demonstration, practice and written details for exercises in class.
- 👉 In a class setting, the human and dog participants should be comfortable and relaxed. If anyone is stressed, the trainer trying to help them.
- 👉 The goal of the class matches your goal for your dog.

- 👍 They have positive references with specifics from former clients.
- 👍 They have positive references with specifics from other dog professionals.
- 👍 They have a genuine love of dogs and people.
- 👍 They have diverse experience with breeds and problems.
- 👍 They can adapt methods to the individual needs of the human and dog students.
- 👍 They offer small classes (6-8) for more individual instruction. Or the classes may be a bit larger (in a larger space) and they have a capable assistant.
- 👍 Family members encouraged to attend.
- 👍 The emphasis is on helping you understand your dog and reach long term goals.
- 👍 They have a good sense of humor and lots of patience.

Red Flags

- 👎 Methods or equipment used causes intimidation, pain or fear in dogs or humans.
- 👎 Little to no emphasis on teaching and education background in credentials. In addition to being good with dogs your trainer should also be able to teach and train people.
- 👎 Dogs or people seem uncomfortable or stressed and trainer does not offer assistance or support.
- 👎 Trainer has poor communications skills despite good dog handling skills. Dog training lessons should be almost entirely about teaching humans and passing skills on to them.
- 👎 There is more time spent training you to think like a wolf so you can train and live with a wolf rather than teaching humans how to train and live with domestic dogs in the human world.
- 👎 Punishment is the primary solution offered for problem behaviors.
- 👎 They “guarantee” easy solutions and fast results.
- 👎 You just don’t like the trainer or he makes you feel uncomfortable. Remember, this relationship should last longer than just the 6-8 week course, so you want to feel at ease with your trainer.