

BEWARE OF THE BULLY

By G. & A. Williams, B.C. Pet Connection, February 2012

This is a caution to the public about people who choose to use what I can only describe as bully tactics when training animals.



Why are animals so vulnerable to mistreatment? Because they can't talk and they can't sue. Trainers with respect for sentient beings welcome public discussion into what constitutes a competent and compassionate trainer. A diploma certificate adorned with a fancy seal may look impressive but not all education is created equal. *"Be your own boss and become a dog trainer in just four weeks"* quickie courses just don't cut it. Continuing education based on behavioral science, humane training techniques and high principles builds competency.

Grandiose claims and guarantees should be viewed with suspicion. Unmasking the existence of bully trainers will only elevate the status of the rest of the profession.

A bully owner or trainer doesn't train; instead, they force animals to obey commands under the threat of pain. It is taking advantage of one's position of power over another. So why would a trainer engage in such tactics? It is a quick easy way to get an animal's attention and change behavior when sensitivity and knowledge are in short supply. Not healthy change but rather a repression of natural expression. Bullies not only use shock, they may also subject dogs to slamming, choking, hanging, pinning, flipping, hosing and screaming.

So, when looking for a skilled trainer, would it be prudent to choose one who is a member of an association? Perhaps, but there are no guarantees. The industry is unregulated and mission statements are often

nothing more than wish lists of what an association strives to be, not what it is. It may come as a surprise that there are training associations while stating they promote humane methods, still accept members who use, promote and sell electric shock, choke and prong collars. The reason given (by one association) is that by including these trainers they hope to be a positive influence on them. Their intentions may be honorable but the odds are not in their favor. It's hopeful reasoning at best and can easily backfire by not positively influencing trainers but instead giving them credibility with the public.

Another policy that has the potential of cutting both ways is the prohibition of members publicly critiquing other members. The intent of such policies is to maintain a level of professionalism and courtesy. That is to be applauded. However, I can't imagine it was meant to stifle free speech. To remain mute, when animals are put in harm's way is a culture of silence no reputable organization wants to foster. Otherwise, it creates the perfect environment for abusers to escape accountability; join an association! Silence can enable the proliferation of shock collars, allowing their use to grow unhampered. This can damage the reputation of the training industry in general.

It stands to reason every trainer has a different level of experience and knowledge. Education and techniques, while obviously important, only need to meet the level required for the job; you don't need a physics professor to teach elementary arithmetic. On the other hand, complex issues will require a credentialed animal behaviourist. What's critical is the method used is safe and humane. Whatever the circumstances, never be too timid or too busy to thoroughly research a trainer's methods.

For help finding a competent and humane trainer please visit
www.BanShockCollars.ca

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