

# GOOD DOG!

A small, light-colored dog is balancing on a golden and silver soccer ball. The dog is upside down, with its front paws on the ball and its hind legs tucked up. The background is plain white.

## Positive Training Yields Fast Results

by Sandra Murphy

Dogs love to learn and live to please at every age. Teaching a pet good manners, social skills and YouTube-worthy tricks are great ways to build a bond and have fun, too.

“When a fearful or shy dog associates a new situation with good things, the dog blooms. I love to see it,” says Victoria Stilwell, of Animal Planet’s *It’s Me or the Dog*. “It’s the basis for positive reinforcement training.”

Stilwell explains that her method, known as Positive Dog Training, is all about spotting and rewarding the behavior you like as it happens. “Thus, the good behavior is likely to repeat, encouraging the dog to learn to live in a human world successfully.” Each dog has his own idea of the best reward—some favor toys, some work for food, others simply want approval.

Training doesn’t have to be time-consuming, repetitive homework. Once you and your dog learn the basics, you can do short sessions.

### The Clicker Method

A click of a small noisemaker used in training lets the dog know when he’s just done the right thing. As soon as we see the behavior, we’ll click faster than our brains can tell our mouths to say, “Good dog!”

For example, to train “Watch me,” sit down with your dog, the clicker and some tiny treats. If he focuses on the treats or looks away, do nothing. If he glances at you, click and toss him a treat. A few click/treats later, your dog will figure out he did something to make the reward happen. Be prepared, because that thought will be followed by a very deliberate look at your face. After that, training will move at high speed.

“Work on the basics first,” counsels psychologist Linda Michaels, owner of

Wholistic Dog Training, in San Diego. “Four commands—sit, down, wait and come—will get you started. You can do mini-training sessions throughout the day, such as ‘sit’ for breakfast or dinner, ‘come’ when called, ‘wait’ before going out the door, and ‘down’ during television programs. Continue practicing during commercials.”

“How my service dog, Hunter, figured out what I needed and how to help me, I don’t know, but I have great respect for the intellectual abilities of dogs. Training is a way of opening communication; just like with a human, you can never be sure where the conversation will take you,” remarks M. Shirley Chong, a professional clicker trainer in Grinnell, Iowa.

“Positive training lets a dog be your friend, not a boot camp soldier obeying orders,” advises Patricia McConnell, Ph.D., a certified applied animal behaviorist in Black Earth, Wisconsin, and author of multiple titles, including *The Other End of the Leash*. “When he exhibits new behaviors, capture them, add a cue and give them a cute name. Always, the basis of the best tricks happens when the dog offers his own ideas.”

Pat Miller, of Peaceable Paws, in Fairplay, Maryland, also respects an animal as a thinking partner, “You get to see them figure out how things work,” she says. Miller, who serves as



“Dogs like to obey. It gives them security.”

~ James Herriot, author, *All Creatures Great and Small*



“For me, a house or an apartment becomes a home when you add one set of four legs, a happy tail, and that indescribable measure of love that we call a dog.”

~ Roger Caras, president emeritus,  
American Society for the Prevention  
of Cruelty to Animals

the training editor for *Whole Dog Journal*, has trained dogs, cats, horses and a pot-bellied pig.

She's particularly pleased to have transformed a terrier, previously deemed unadoptable by a shelter because of his biting, into a happy, stable patron of New York's Central Park. Positive dog training literally saved his life.

## Retraining/Renaming Bad Behaviors

With patience and know-how, jumping up on people can turn into dancing the conga. Grumbly growling noises can turn into “Whisper,” or “Tell me a secret.”

Excessive barking can be interpreted as bored whining: “There's nothing to do!” Or, your pet could be answering another dog that you can't hear. Changes in weather also can make a dog anxious and vocal. Of course, he may just want attention. If you find the reason, it's easier to find the cure.

Is a dog shy or fearful? “Don't put him in a situation beyond his comfort

zone,” counsels Cara Shannon, an expert in curbing aggressive dog behavior in Austin, Texas. “Let him observe from a safe distance, but not interact, perhaps watching his surroundings with you from inside the car.”

She also relates the story of a fearful foster dog that learned nose work (scent discrimination) and can find a small vial of essential oil hidden in a room. “The praise she receives gives her confidence to try other new things,” observes Shannon.

Stilwell remarks, “Learning to cope with newness is a huge benefit for any animal.”

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*Connect with positive trainers: Victoria Stilwell, Positively.com; Linda Michaels, WholisticDogTraining.com; Pat Miller, PeaceablePaws.com; M. Shirley Chong, ShirleyChong.com; Patricia McConnell, PatriciaMcConnell.com; Cara Shannon, BuddysChance.com/Caravacchiano.html.*