



BONNIE PEREGOY'S POSITIVELY STRESS FREE DOG GROOMING

INTRODUCTION

I own a grooming salon on Capitol Hill, in Washington DC, called Dog & Cat Grooming. Capitol Hill is the 20 blocks of residential neighborhood surrounding the US Capitol building.

Through the years I have trained and exhibited my own dogs in AKC competition obedience. I started in 1973 with the old fashioned technique we call “pop and jerk.

My approach to obedience training changed in 1994 when I saw Ted Turner (and I’m not talking about Jane Fonda’s ex husband), this Ted Turner is a marine mammal trainer and he was the curator of animal training & a vice president at SeaWorld, when I met him. Are you also a dog trainer? Well that’s a trick question if you think you just groom dogs. If you are a dog *groomer*, you ARE a dog *trainer*. Every time you groom a dog he is learning, and you are influencing his future behavior, because behavior is always changing, and to quote Ted, “the behavior you see today is a function of the past” From Ted I began to learn about behavioral science and learning theory and as a result, in 1994 I made a commitment to find ways to use positive reinforcement with my own dog training which caused me to also began to examine my handling of the dogs I groomed in my shop.

Over the next several years I worked to develop a method of grooming, a way of handling the dogs, and even a way of supervising my employees which incorporated the same behavior principles I was using in my competition dog training. That is, the behavioral principles based on learning theory and behavioral science with the deliberate application of positive reinforcement. I tried to develop a grooming method in which we

never yelled at the dogs, never disciplined them in any way in order to get them to comply with grooming and I'm going to explain why that's the best behavioral approach, and how we do it in my salon.

I have to tell you, that I know that some pretty harsh treatment is going on in many salons today in the name of discipline, because many groomers and unfortunately some grooming schools think it's necessary. It is NOT necessary. It's not necessary to discipline a dog to groom it or to teach it to behave calmly for the grooming process.

In my grooming salon we groomed more than 4,000 dogs and cats each year. That's an average on weekdays of 15-25 animals and 35-40 pets on Saturdays. We do that with a staff of 3-5 people during the week and 5-7 on Saturdays. Washington DC is an area with a large turnover in population, so we average 10-15 new dogs each week, first time grooms. Unknown quantities.

As you can see, we are situated in a glass sided building, and I actually had to stop people from walking through the frame to get the shot outside the front door, because it's a very busy street corner. We are next door to the only grocery store on capitol hill, and just one block from the local metro station, so we have lots of foot traffic all day long stopping and peering in at us as we work. We do all of our finish grooming, and 95% of our bathing and brushing in one room in front, in full view of anyone who cares to watch, or listen. Plus, we use one of those tubs for a self serve dog wash. So we have a lot of people watching us while we groom AND bathe. (This is similar to working at PetSmart, except our tubs are in the front room too, nothing is done out of sight.)

As any of those observers of our salon can tell you, this business is a testament to the fact that there is NEVER any necessity to discipline a dog in order to groom it. You can stand and watch us all day long and you won't hear anyone yelling at the dogs, and you won't see anyone trying to "dominate" a dog or rough handling the dogs in any way. So we've proven it can be done. We've also proved it's *profitable* to work this way. The beauty of using positive reinforcement and behavioral science is that once you understand the principles, and begin to apply them, the dogs you groom just get better, and better behaved with each visit.

THE FOUNDATION BEFORE GROOMING

When you use positive reinforcement to shape behavior there are two elements, which must be in place before you start. And they are: Relationship, built on trust and cooperation and Management, which means setting yourself up for success. Once you have those in place, the grooming, is the easy part!

Starting with relationship: Relationships take time to develop. Behaviorists call relationships “reinforcement history”.

To build a strong relationship the animal has to trust that you’re not going to punish him, and he has to learn that over time, and multiple visits to the shop. Relationships take time to develop.

So now you’re thinking: How do I have time to build a relationship when I have to get this dog groomed? Today? And I have to do it as fast as possible. How am I’m going to make any money, if I stop and worry about taking time to build a relationship?

Well you actually have a several very important advantages for building a relationship with your grooming dogs and it doesn’t add time to the grooming process.

Before we can talk about your advantages, I need to explain a little bit about what the scientists have proven about learning, and about changing behavior. And it’s important to understand that this is scientific fact, proven and supported by empirical data, we have evidence from experiments (much of it done on dogs as a matter of fact). This is not somebody’s idea of what they think dogs are thinking, or my idea of what would be a nice way to teach dogs, it’s not a mystery, its not pack theory. It’s not about being dominant or alpha or in charge. I’m not a grooming whisperer. It’s scientific, it’s proven and it’s called Operant Conditioning. Have you heard of that term” Operant conditioning? Do you know what Operant Conditioning actually is?

It simply means that ***consequences control behavior***. The actual definition, the scientific definition is: What happens during, or immediately after a behavior is going to determine if that behavior increases, or decreases. It’s that simple, but the key word there is immediate. Dog Trainers call that “timing”. Scientists call it the “law of contiguity”.

The law of contiguity says that the consequence that happens during a behavior or within one second of a behavior is what’s going to be associated with that behavior.

If the consequence comes even a few seconds later, it will probably be associated with a different behavior.

So what does all this mean in plain English? Every behavior has 3 elements, and they're as simple as ABC.

That's an easy acronym to remember. But what does it mean? Let's take the example of stopping your car at a stop sign as a good way to illustrate this. The stop sign is the signal, the "A", the antecedent, the behavior, "B", is YOU stopping the car, and "C", the consequence is that you won't get a ticket, or get hit by opposing traffic. So if you come to a stop sign, to cross a 4 lane road with 2 semis coming at you from each direction. You WILL come to a full and complete stop. But if you come to a stop sign, at an intersection on a quiet country road, where it's flat, like Kansas or the Eastern Shore of MD, where you can see for miles in every direction, and you KNOW there's no possibility of getting hit, or getting a ticket, you won't come to a full and complete stop. Your behavior is different because of the consequence, not the because of the signal. It's the same stop sign, red, white and octagonal, but the consequence has changed, and the ***consequence is what controls your behavior***, not the sign.

Good thing to remember when you want to put signs up n your shop. Signs don't control behavior, consequences control behavior, and that's operant conditioning.

When I first learned about shaping behavior with positive reinforcement as my consequence, it was while I was producing videotapes with Ted Turner. I learned that I could radically change an animal's behavior by doing nothing but looking for opportunities to *reinforce behavior that I wanted* and, this is the important part, ***ignoring the behavior that I wanted to go away***.

Do you know what the scientific definition of "Reinforcement" is?

Reinforcement is *anything* that INCREASES behavior. So reinforcement is defined by what effect it has on the behavior, not whether or not you thought it was nice. What's been discovered, through empirical testing; and experiments and collection of data, is that any behavior, which is not reinforced, will go away. The scientific term for that is extinguished.

That means that if your grooming dogs aren't getting calmer with each visit, it's only because you're not effectively reinforcing calm behavior, and you're probably, inadvertently, reinforcing behavior you don't want, or else it would have been extinguished.

So, what's the word that means the opposite of reinforcement? What is the word that means to decrease behavior? If reinforcement

increases behavior, what is the scientific word for the consequence you use to decrease behavior?

Punishment.

This is a very unfortunate choice of a word by B.F. Skinner because the word punishment carries so much emotional baggage. So try to remember, in scientific terms, it just means something you use to decrease or suppress behavior. How you are trying to change the behavior defines whether or not it was punishment, not if you meant to be mean.

So that means when I talk about punishment today, by *scientific* definition, punishment doesn't have to be something really awful, *anything* you do to make a dog *stop* a behavior is punishment. Simply yelling at a dog to stop, or saying NO when you want a dog to stop struggling is defined as punishment because you're trying to decrease that behavior.

But, in contrast to stopping reinforcement, using punishment as a consequence will not actually make a behavior go away. It doesn't extinguish behavior, like stopping the reinforcement will, it only suppresses the behavior. The difference is, instead of the behavior disappearing (like a species of animal going extinct), it's just being held down, and waiting for an opportunity to come back.

Unless the reinforcement changes, the behavior **WON'T** go away completely. It's like a dog trying to get to the roast beef on your counter. No matter how much you punish him, he'll still be waiting for an opportunity to get up on that counter. Until the roast beef goes into the refrigerator, the behavior is not going to stop. The reinforcement has to disappear for the counter jumping behavior to extinguish.

What really changes behavior?

Reinforcement changes behavior, because behavior is reward driven.

If you knew that every time you came to a full and complete stop at a stop sign, you would miraculously receive a thousand dollars. Your behavior would change. Because behavior is reward driven. Your behavior of creeping through stop signs when you thought it was safe, would extinguish it would go away, you wouldn't do that anymore. You would be stopping for the reward instead, and that other behavior would just disappear.

Now there's another catch with punishment. Punishment does decrease behavior, it does suppress behavior, but it has to have 3

important elements to even do that effectively. It has to be perfectly applied to really suppress behavior.

Here's a great human example that Jean Donaldson uses in her book: Culture Clash. She uses the example of getting a speeding ticket, as almost perfectly applied punishment. For punishment to work to suppress behavior it must be applied **immediately**, as the behavior is occurring or within one second of the behavior occurring. (Remember our law of contiguity.)

So **while you're speeding**, you hear the siren, and see the flashing lights in your rear view mirror. Caught in the act. **Perfect timing** to effectively suppress behavior. Then the **2nd element of perfectly applied punishment** comes into play. For punishment to effectively suppress behavior it must be **BIG**. It has to really hurt.

It can't just be annoying. In many states speeding more than 15 or 20 miles an hour can get you a really big fine, in the hundreds of dollars, so it can be big. And now we come to the last rule for punishment to work, and the reason people are still speeding down the highway as I type. For punishment to work effectively to suppress behavior, it has to be applied every time the behavior occurs.

If any of those elements aren't in place, **immediate, big, and every time**, all that happens is that we just get good at avoiding the punishment. With speeding for example, how do we avoid punishment? We buy radar detectors. We signal each other with our high beams. We slow down in the spots where we've seen speed traps regularly set up.

But we don't stop speeding because the reinforcement hasn't changed. What is the reinforcement that hasn't changed? Why do we speed? Speeding still gets us there faster, and behavior is reward driven.

Reinforcement changes behavior.

Sometime after I heard this example I experienced a similar example in my life that really proved the punishment science to me. When I travel to work each morning I have to make a left turn, across two lanes of traffic at a very busy intersection of commuter traffic. And everybody at the intersection is in the same hurry, and although the left is controlled by a left turn signal, only about 25 cars can get through each green arrow. As the line of cars waiting to turn starts to back up it can take 2-3 cycles of the traffic signal to make it through on the green arrow. Consequently as many cars as possible squeeze through on the yellow light as it changes to red. Rarely does the light turn red without a couple more cars making the turn before the opposing traffic starts to move. Actually that's the way it used to be before they installed a photo enforcement camera at

the light. I got caught sliding through as the light changed yellow to red. I got a ticket and a **\$75.00** fine. I was sure the light was still yellow. I was hopping mad, I was going to fight the ticket, until I realized it just wasn't worth it, I would have to take time off from work and I probably wouldn't win anyway. But as I whined about my ticket, and to anyone who would listen, I discovered that almost everyone I knew, who made that turn with any regularity, had gotten a ticket. Several of them had gone to court to fight their ticket, and found the courtroom full of other drivers like us, trying to fight the same ticket. (We were all convinced that the light wasn't really red when we entered the intersection, even though we had the photo in hand that they sent us with the ticket.) No one won their fight. And no one runs that red light anymore. Now as the line of cars races to get through the green arrow, when that light changes to yellow, everyone comes to a screeching halt. Very, very rarely I'll see someone try to cruise through on the yellow. And when I do see that, you know what I think? "They must be new here."

That's an example of perfectly applied punishment. **Immediate** (the camera flashes bright just as you go through the intersection), **big** (it certainly pained me to write that \$75 check to save 30 seconds of my commute), and it happens **every** time. There's no getting past that camera.

It's also a good example of the fact that the behavior is only suppressed, because I didn't stop turning on yellow lights at any other intersections. So that behavior hasn't gone away. It's just suppressed at that one light.

So, if you want to effectively change behavior, not just suppress it, like punishment does, you need to find ways to reinforce the behavior you want, and not reinforce the behavior that you don't want. If you inadvertently reinforce behavior you don't want, it's going to become stronger. And in grooming as I said earlier we are often reinforcing behavior we don't want; when we **think** we are punishing the behavior we don't want.

Now, what do I mean by that? How do we actually reinforce behavior, when we think we're punishing it? If you are trying to shave poodle feet on a dog, and it's pulling and struggling, or even if the dog is trying to bite you and you stop shaving for 1 second to say "NO", or you stop for 1 second and smack it, you have effectively reinforced the behavior you are trying to stop. Remember the law of contiguity?

The law of contiguity: the consequence that happens **during** a behavior or with in **one second** of a behavior is what's going to be

associated with that behavior. If the consequence comes even a few seconds later, it will probably be associated with a different behavior.

What happened during or within 1 second when that dog struggled or started to bite? You stopped grooming. You reinforced the behavior you didn't want by stopping grooming. The dog struggled to get you to stop, and you stopped. It's that simple. Now you may have also yelled at him, or smacked him, but that was 2-3 seconds later, and he's going to associate that consequence with holding still, because that's what he was doing when you disciplined him. It's too late already, he was biting you a few seconds ago, but you effectively punished him for *stopping* biting! That's the law of contiguity, timing.

One last word on punishment, before we go on to what you can do to really change your grooming dogs' behavior.

Punishment has predictable fallout. That means it does long-term damage to your relationship; that relationship of trust and cooperation that you're trying to build. Punishment will cause the dog to become increasingly afraid of the grooming shop, the grooming process, and you. As punishment continues, over time, it may lead to: fear, anxiety, avoidance, flight, and even aggression and finally something called learned helplessness.

Learned helplessness is evidenced by urinating, defecating, releasing anal sacs, and it's probably all behavior we've all seen.

So even though when you stopped grooming that dog, and said no, or smacked it, even though what you did isn't going to extinguish the behavior you wanted to change, it was punishment, and it still has the predictable fallout. So you've got the worst of both worlds, because now not only have you failed to change the dog's behavior, you've also damaged your relationship.

Here is another disconcerting scientific fact, (I'm just full of bad news, but don't worry, I have good news too). Punishment often has to increase over time to continually, effectively, suppress behavior.

So even if you *are good* at punishment, and you *have suppressed* unwanted behavior that way, because you *are* immediate and you *are* big and you do it *every* time, you're going to have to be more and more violent over time, for the same result. So that means a dog you're fighting with today, is probably going to be worse next time, and you're going to have to fight harder, and you're headed on a downward slope.

So, the reason we don't want to use punishment with our grooming dogs? It only suppresses behavior, it doesn't really change behavior, and

even then it only works if it's immediate, it really hurts, and it happens every time. Plus it destroys our relationship with the dog.

Now for the good news: This is what you've been waiting to hear.

Do you remember when I said you actually have a several very important advantages for building a relationship with your grooming dogs? When, we first started to learn about this science, from Ted Turner, those of us who were training dogs thought that the marine mammal trainers had an unfair advantage in their training. They couldn't really understand our training challenge, because they didn't have to live with the Dolphins and Whales, in their homes. When you live with an animal, you are often inadvertently reinforcing behavior you don't want, or ignoring behavior that should be getting reinforced, simply because you can't be giving 100% attention to your dog training all the time. Sometimes you have to do laundry, or talk to your family or read a book. In the real world all kinds of behaviors are being shaped by mistake, all the time.

But we, as dog groomers, have the same advantage with our grooming dogs that the marine mammal trainers have with their whales and dolphins. We don't *have to live* with the dogs.

We have them for a specified period of time, under very controlled conditions, with our full attention. Just like the marine mammal trainers. We always have them in the same context. It's always in our grooming shop. So we can reinforce all the behavior we want, and extinguish all the behavior we don't want as it relates to the grooming process, in the context of our grooming shop. (We don't have to generalize the behavior to other places.) That means we can change their behavior very quickly, sometimes in just one visit, and when you see that happen, it's a real miracle.

You never get a 2nd chance to make a first impression Have you have heard that before?

Well it's true with dogs as well as people. And it's another advantage that you have. The first time a dog comes into your shop, his first impression of that experience will affect all subsequent visits. (In neuroscience this is explained by "Hebb's rule".) You have one chance and only one chance to make that first impression. So you have an opportunity, if you're prepared to take 2 or 3 minutes with each new customer, to set yourself up for a lifetime of successful grooming visits. As I said we get a lot of new customers because DC residents move around a lot.

So when a new dog first comes to our salon, I greet them with treats; I make eye contact with the dog and the owner, and I start talking to the dog in a gentle voice. I'll ask the dog's name, and find something nice to say about him. It can be something specific, like "What a great color", or "what great ears", or very generic like "Aren't you cute". Meanwhile I'm offering treats. If the dog takes the treats readily, I continue talking to the dog as another employee begins to take a customer record from the owner. I might ask the dog to sit and reward it, I'll ask the dog to "catch" a treat, and I may even pet the dog if they seem relaxed and are taking treats easily. Labs and beagles are good at this because they're *a/ways* looking for something to eat, so often with mixed breeds I'll start the treats with a comment like "Let's see how much lab is in there" (or "beagle" with small mixes) This really breaks the ice with the owner too.

Let me just take a few seconds here and talk about treats. The treats have to be really good. Dogs are carnivores. They like meat. Period. If the treats you use have ANYTHING in addition to meat in them, you probably won't be successful with this. I actually used to cook roast beef to use, and I still occasionally have that at the shop because I sometimes use it for my own dogs. Roast beef may sound extravagant but it's not only the most successful treat you can use, it's also one of the cheapest. You can get stew beef, or bottom round roast, on sale, or at a place like Sam's club, or Price club, for a couple of dollars a pound. I bake it, and cut it into pieces the size of a raisin. Tiny pieces. More often I use Bravo liver treats, which work just as well because they're pure meat and I also sell them. Owners are always amazed that their nervous dog will eat them; and they can be broken up into the tiny pieces you need to use.

Do you know the difference between primary reinforcement and secondary reinforcement?

Primary reinforcement is reinforcement that the dog, or the human, or the organism needs to survive. That means: food, water, air, and maybe sex. There's some conversation about sex, because although the species needs it for survival, individuals don't. Primary reinforcement is reinforcement that doesn't have to be learned, it's innate. Everything else is conditioned or secondary reinforcement. So meat treats are primary reinforcement which is the strongest kind you can use.

Back to our imprinting: The dog's reaction to my approach is going to tell me volumes about what their behavior might be like during the actual grooming. Because often instead of the dog taking the treat, it will only sniff the treat and either not take it at all, or take it and drop it on the floor. Now if they take it and drop it on the floor, I offer another treat,

which they may also take and drop on the floor. But if they continue to take treats, 9 times out of 10, after the 3rd or 4th treat, they might swallow one, and often go back and eat the ones they dropped too. This is great, because if you can get a dog to eat, you have successfully relaxed him. But if the dog won't take the treat at all, or just sniffs, or ignores the treat, then I take the leash from the owner, who is now more or less distracted by filling out the customer record card with another employee, and I'll sit down in a nearby chair. For small dogs that seem just a little nervous, I usually ask the customer to put the dog onto my lap. Standing over a nervous dog is often very threatening. Holding the leash of a big dog, or holding the little dog in my lap, I'll talk to the dog. I usually say something like, "You think this might be the vet? It smells like it might be the vet? Don't worry this isn't the vet; it's just the beauty parlor! We don't give shots here, just haircuts." This is really more for the benefit of the owner than the dog. Because the owner is worried that their dog seems scared and nervous, and this gives them a reason for the dog's behavior. I will continue sitting with the dog and talking to it while the owner leaves. We never drag dogs away from their owners. If the owner is standing around, waiting for us to take the dog into the back room, we ask them to leave while we are holding the dog's leash, let the dog watch them go, and then, with just a little verbal encouragement once the owners gone, the dogs always turn and follow us to the back willingly. All of this takes less than 5 minutes, and makes the customer completely comfortable about leaving their pet in this new shop. And the imprint with the owner is just as important as the imprint with the dog. The owner loves it that you have actually taken the time to try to connect with their dog and that you seem to like their dog, and that you seem understanding and patient about the dog being nervous.

Also you will find, amazingly, no matter what happens in the grooming process itself, if the dog is resistant, or difficult to groom, because of that first imprint of coming in the shop, and your greeting, they're still happy to come into your shop, because they just don't seem to associate the actual grooming process, with the positive imprint of treats and friendliness they associate with entering the shop!

Do you know why? It's the Law of contiguity.

It's a law, it always works! You didn't groom the dog immediately after he walked into the shop. You gave him treats! You were friendly and that's the consequence the dog is going to associate with walking into the shop in the future, and with greeting you.

So think about what you're doing NOW immediately after a dog enters your shop for the first time. Because if you're taking him and stuffing him in a crate, with no effort to make a connection, and start to build that relationship with him, you're probably setting yourself up for trouble in the grooming process, unless that dog just happens to be rock solid, and most aren't rock solid, stuffing the dog in a crate, in a new and possibly threatening environment, with strange and barking dogs, can cause all the fallout of punishment.

Do you remember what the fallout of punishment was? Fear, anxiety, freezing, flight, aggression. Those are the dogs, when you go to get them back out of the crate, are backed into the corner with that look in their eye. You know that look? You know what I'm talking about? "I dare you to put your hand in here." So you have to be pro-active, and build that relationship right from the start, with your very first contact with the dog.

The imprinting usually heads off that problem of the dog crouching in the back of its crate when you go to get it out to begin your grooming, because you have already befriended the dog, they usually remember and come out willingly. But just in case, we also leave the dog's leash and collar on until we are ready to start them so we can lead them out of the crate. So Imprinting is just the beginning of a relationship built on trust and cooperation

What I've just described to you, is how it goes with about 99% of the new dogs that come into our shop. And remember what I'm going to talk about now is only 1%, a tiny fraction of the dogs we see. But occasionally, with a nervous dog, as we sit down in the chair, the dog will exhibit some kind of behavior that's more unsettling

It will back up to the end of the leash and thrash to get away, or it will freeze, unwilling to make eye contact, or even more unsettling it'll give that hard threatening eye contact, maybe even growling, with its hackles up.

And that brings us to the next element that we need for positive reinforcement to be successful. Remember if you have relationship, and management, the grooming is the easy part? Management means planning ahead, to set up for success

There are 2 parts of management; first the dogs you groom, and secondly the equipment that you use. Management is anything you do in the grooming shop, other than grooming itself, which helps you to be successful in finding opportunities to reinforce calm behavior. Management means planning ahead, to avoid those situations where you

won't have an opportunity to reinforce behavior you want. It's setting yourself, and the dog, up for success. So the first part of management is determining whether or not this is a dog that you want to have as a grooming customer for the next 5-10 years. Is this a dog you're going to be happy to have come back? Or is this a dog that you are going to dread? Because do you know what your reward is if you groom this dog? This dog that's giving you every warning that he is dangerous and the grooming is going to be risky? What is the reward? As my staff would tell you, because this is one of my mantras, your reward is: he will come back. And you'll have to deal with him again. You can decide what kind of grooming business you want to be in.

If you like the challenge of grooming a dangerous dog, more power to you, and the tools I'm going to be talking about today, the equipment, will help you, but in my experience, it is simply not worth it to put yourself, your staff, and the dog at risk. Those dogs are better off groomed at the vet, where they can be tranquilized or anesthetized. Just remember, even if you're confident that you can groom the dog safely; you can get it done keeping yourself safe, there is still a big risk that the dog could injure itself fighting you, and fighting the grooming process, and fighting the necessary restraint you're going to have to use. If he does hurt himself, whether it's during this visit, or a future visit . . . because that is your reward . . . he will come back . . . you can be sure if he gets hurt, that the owner is going to blame you, and expect you to compensate him for the injury or vet expense.

So, I don't do risky grooming. And that's just how I say it to those owners, with those dogs, and they understand, because usually they know what kind of dog they have. They've been through it before, at the vet or at another groomer.

In addition to grooming dogs it is also your responsibility to build a business comprised of customers, staff and animals which foster a stress free environment, and there are plenty enough of all three, to make a profit, so don't give their spots to undesirable dogs, or customers, or employees.

I don't want you to think that what I am saying is that the secret to having dogs behave is to only groom well behaved dogs. I'm just saying that you need to weed out the nightmares, the truly dangerous dogs. You need to weed out the dogs that have such bad temperaments, or even just such bad learning history, (that means it may not be their fault, they might just have had too many bad experiences), that it would make the

grooming too risky. So that's one aspect of management, planning ahead for success, by choosing the dogs you will and won't groom.

The 2nd part of management is the equipment you use; the tools you'll need to increase your opportunities for reinforcement. These tools are going to enable you to ignore unwanted behavior SAFELY. In other words, you have to be able to ignore a dog who's trying to bite you, or who's squirming and you have to continue to groom it without stopping, because if you stop, you're going to be reinforcing their difficult behavior. That means comfortable restraint, so they can't hurt you while you continue to groom

You have to be able to pretend you don't even know the struggling and biting is happening. You have to be an "actor". You have to ignore it so that the instant, the second, that the dog does relax, even if it's just to catch its breath, and regroup, you can say: "Good", "Thank you", "that's better, stay", "easy, good boy".

Now if you weren't familiar with the law of contiguity before today, what I've just said is going to sound crazy. Because you're thinking right now: "Wait a minute, aren't you praising the dog for giving you a hard time?"

No, you are *not* praising the dog for giving you a hard time; you're praising the dog for **stopping giving you a hard time**. And the instant, the second, they start up again; you have to immediately shut up, and continue grooming and be un-reactive. You silently continue grooming, waiting, expectantly, for the next instant they pause, so you can reinforce again.

Here's a **short video** of a dog's first time groom in our shop. As he was trying to bite me, I went and grabbed the camera so I could **show how this looks**. This is the beginning, before his bath. By the end of his first visit, he had completely stopped this behavior. It can work that fast. You'll notice in the beginning he's trying to flatten himself onto the table, but pretty quickly he stands up comfortably. You'll also notice what his owner did to his topknot.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9-K28zgVoo>

Here's a quick look at another dog that's a little more serious about trying to bite, and I did need to use a muzzle for him for his front nails. And notice right at the beginning, I ask him to stay, to interrupt a bad cycle and give him something to do that I can praise, and reinforce. If you get nothing else out of this information, other than replacing your "NO"s with "Stay", saying "stay" and then praising the stay, that alone is going to help you with your grooming.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak_cKINrIRg

So what you saw there was the comfortable restraint, so that you can get the work done, and not get hurt, and not stop grooming not have to use punishment and the dog can't bite you.

NECESSARY EQUIPMENT

The equipment that I've found to be essential to do this starts with 3-point restraint on the grooming table. You should have grooming nooses that can be locked (clipped) in a secure position; grooming nooses which have a sliding piece are useless. You should NOT BE USING a CHOKE CHAIN as a grooming noose, (not in the tub, or anywhere else). Chokes are dangerous, and they're NOT comfortable if the dog starts to struggle. They get tighter, and they make the struggling worse, because choking a dog cuts off its air, it cuts off its breathing and it hurts its neck. And as we know air is primary reinforcement. There's not much that's more punishing than cutting off a dog's ability to breathe.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aVwOOdR25I>

Most groomers *do* use one grooming arm for the front, and what do we do when the dog starts to struggle, or give us a hard time, and we only have one grooming arm? Most groomers, who only use one arm, will raise the arm as high as possible to attempt to keep the dog still, the dog ends up "strung up" and now he's struggling against the choking sensation too, and you're getting more frustrated. How do I know this? I know, because I used to groom that way too, it was all I knew. We're all human, we do our best. I was doing my best, and it was the only thing I knew how to do, but now I know better.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1y1TNs53j0>

Every grooming table should have two grooming arms, or some kind of piece of equipment to restrain both the front end, and the back end of the dog, like a LIPPS.

If you're grooming without using *any* grooming arms, to keep the dog safely on the table, it is just dangerous. I know a lot of groomers have operated that way for years with no problems, but we didn't have safety belts in our cars until the 60s, and most cars didn't have airbags until the 80s. We have the equipment to do safer grooming today, and everyone should be using it. If you're not using any grooming arm, you're asking for trouble, you're just waiting for disaster. Of course it takes a few seconds to secure the dog, and it may be a bit awkward to get used to working around 2 arms, or a LIPPS system at first, but any extra time you have to spend, will be more than made up for by the fact that the dog is being

held still. He will be still, because he's comfortable, because with 3 restraints, none of them have to be tight. When the back end is secured with a loop, the dog can't spin in circles, and the front grooming noose can stay low enough to keep the dog comfortable, which also make them calmer. The 2nd arm also helps in scissoring the dog and you're not constantly fighting to keep the dog from sitting.

The third tool which I and my staff have found invaluable is a Groomer's Helper. And although I think it's a pricey piece of equipment, it's very well designed and well made, and it's also easy to make a home made alternative cheaply with an old leash or old grooming noose.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vl9zNFIZz4A>

We have 5 tables set up in our salon and it took years before I could afford to have a groomer's helper on all of them. I bought one at a time, over time, as I could afford them; I still have a 6th table in the back with a homemade contraption, an old grooming noose.

To demonstrate how valuable this 3 point restraint is to keep you from being bitten watch this next video. And I want you to remember this clip, because we're going to see this dog again in a few minutes

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueCpLCcR1Ms>

Muzzles. You won't need them as often, when you're using the 3 point restraint, because you won't have your hands in a position where the dog can bite you easily. She simply won't be able to bite you easily. She won't be able to reach you. But occasionally you will need one, and when you do, it's very important to have enough sizes so that you have one that actually fits. And it's important that they can't bite with the muzzle on. The muzzle needs to be enclosed, but with plenty of breathing access. And it's important that the muzzle is comfortable.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezyPFz9Hr9o>

And remember what your approach to the dog that's trying to bite, is going to be? You're going to ignore it. You're going to ignore it and praise the pauses. That's how you extinguish that behavior.

Grooming – The easy part

It's important to remember, if you're going to use positive reinforcement that you shouldn't be waiting for "bad" behavior to use it. If you never use positive reinforcement, until the dog starts to act up, what are you actually reinforcing? If you don't think to praise calm behavior until the dog starts to be difficult, what are you reinforcing? You're reinforcing them for being difficult *and then* calming down; it's actually a behavior chain.

Now it is important to know that sometimes you **do** have to do that to break a bad cycle with a dog. That's what we've been talking about so far. That's what you're going to do if a dog is giving you a hard time, instead of punishing it - Ignore it and wait for an opportunity to reinforce.

But if you don't even think about reinforcement, until the dog starts to get difficult, you've already lost your biggest opportunity with that dog. If you don't say anything when the dog allows you to trim all it's back toenails, and then the dog pulls away as you try to do the front ones, you've thrown away your golden opportunity. I start praising the dog from the minute I take it out of the crate. Just letting me reach in and pull it out of the crate is behavior that I appreciate. "Good boy", (out of the crate), "good", (as I put him on the table and hook up the restraints), "that's a good boy", "Stay", "Very good, 'Max'" as I start to run the clippers down his back. And so on. Dogs are giving us great behavior all the time, and if we ignore it, what's going to happen? What happens to behavior we ignore? It goes away. And remember behavior is always changing, so if you take good behavior for granted and ignore it, don't be surprised if that dog isn't so great next time; and doesn't come out of that crate so easily.

PROACTIVE REINFORCEMENT OF CALM BEHAVIOR

Don't wait for the dog to be "bad". Does it make sense to ignore a dog when he allows you to trim 3 toenails and has no reaction, and then get irritated when he tries to pull away on the 4th, nail?

Remember the video with Viva trying to bite me a minute ago? Well I actually had to set her up to do that, to get her to demonstrate how the restraint can protect you from biting. Viva is actually a dog whose nails I've been trimming for several years. We have determined that she is probably a SharPei, Jack Russel, Pit bull mix. Does that give you any idea of what she could be like for her nails? She used to be a 2 man job, in the beginning with all those restraints AND a muzzle, we needed a 2nd person to hold her front legs, so she couldn't flip the muzzle off, so the "biting" video you saw a few minutes ago was actually really tame, compared to what she used to be like. I've had a lot of opportunity to work with Viva because she gets her nails trimmed almost once a week. We found her on the street, outside the shop, and I ended up adopting her. She's very cute and photogenic, but god help me she's a Shar Pei, Jack Russel, Pit Bull mix. She's been a huge training challenge and a great learning opportunity. The way I set her up, to be reactive and try to bite for that biting video clip was to just grab her back foot and start trimming her nails, without saying anything to her first, without being proactive, without

proactively praising her calm behavior. Now I'll show you how I actually trim her nails today and how far she's come from the nail monster she used to be. After watching that video a minute, would you think I could do this with her?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfLPOnYQ_1E

CONCLUSION

If you're interested in learning more about behavioral theory, I have produced a DVD with an entire Ted Turner lecture. So if you're interested in learning more about this science I have those for sale on my website at:

<http://healthydogstore.com/catalog/index.php?cPath=27&osCsid=f300653e25ecfcb8ff4b12b48b3e11e8>

Remember, when I said at the beginning that I'm not the "grooming whisperer"? Well, I think it's also important to know that I'm also not just someone spouting scientific theory at you. I personally groom dogs this way every day. I've been doing it for years, and I've watched dogs be transformed.

Let me tell you about a schnauzer I groom named "Albee". Albee is a dog that I wasn't sure if I was even willing to groom a 2nd time after his first visit. If you look at Albee's record card you will see the following notes: "Angelo says: this dog is completely crazy", "very difficult", "2 man job", "hysterical", "gave difficult pet notice"

But if you read another line on his card, from his grooming about a year after that first visit, you will see: "Reduced price – good boy now". We had been charging \$25/grooming extra because of his behavior, but now we charge our regular price. I'd like you to watch a video of what Albee looks like today when he's being groomed. I want you to remember the notes on his card, while you watch this video and think about what this dog was like the first several visits he came into our shop.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZ02qkZ9e0Q>

I just want you to remember, if you don't take anything else away from this presentation. When a dog gives you a hard time, it's just behavior. And behavior is always changing. Behavior is controlled by its consequences, and it's not static. The dog that you're grooming today is going to be better or worse next time because of how you treat it today. You have an opportunity to start building a good relationship, a good reinforcement history . . . today.

Don't get mad at the dog. It's just behavior. They're not spiteful, they're not willful, and they're not wicked. They are just doing what works, dogs do what works. It worked for them in the past. So don't get angry. If you find yourself getting angry at a dog, it's time to stop working on that dog. It's just behavior. They're not doing it to make you mad, they're not trying to dominate you and it's not necessary for you to dominate them. Let it go.

You just need to wait for an opportunity you can reinforce. And then remember to reinforce it.

END

DELETED TEXT – long version

Risky grooming – dangerous dogs

At this point when we begin to question if the customer has a dog like that, we have several questions we ask the owner. "Is your dog friendly?" or "Is your dog usually friendly with strangers?" Depending on the answer we may ask, "Has he ever bitten anyone?" If the answer is "Yes", depending on how reactive the dog seems to be at this point, we will suggest that the owner stay for awhile, to put a muzzle on the dog and see if we are going to be able to groom it, or we may suggest that this is a dog which would be better groomed at a vet, where he could be tranquilized if necessary. If we decide to try to groom the dog with the owner present, we will also explain that this is **going to be more expensive**. We may add \$25 priority groom charge; we may double the regular price for the breed, or any amount in between, depending on how we feel about the dog's behavior. We usually justify that by saying it's probably going to take two people to hold the dog for grooming, so we have to double the price. And sometimes that's enough to dissuade the customer from leaving the dog

We'll ask: "Has he been groomed before?" If the answer is "Yes" How did that grooming go? Did they get any feedback from the groomer when they picked the dog up? And I will again either suggest that they stay with the dog for a while, and put a muzzle on the dog for me, or suggest that the dog be groomed at a vet.

If the answer is “No”, the dog has never been groomed before, and this is a dog over 12-18 months old, we explain that **starting** this dog’s grooming “career” so late is probably going to make grooming more difficult, and it’s going to take longer, and we may need two people to help hold the dog, and therefore the grooming will **be more expensive**. I then add an amount to the quoted grooming price that is directly proportional to how unsettling the dog’s behavior is. Sometimes it’s as much as double the regular price.

Usually the extra fee and some gentle counseling about how the dog’s reaction may make the grooming dangerous to the dog as well as the groomer, convinces the owner to take the dog to a vet for grooming. (A very resistant dog *can injure itself* struggling against restraint.) Sometimes the *owner’s* inability to put a muzzle on the dog will demonstrate to the owner why *we* wouldn’t be unable to handle the dog.

We also have the benefit at my salon of being able to offer the “self serve” option for the “bath” dogs such as rottweilers, akitas or pit bulls that show anti social behavior. Having a tub available for the public to use to bathe their own dog is a management tool as well as a profit center. Because at this point, with one of those kinds of dogs; a dog which is scaring me a bit, we will often *promote* the self serve option as a money saver for the owner: We’ll say something like: “Your dog doesn’t take a lot of expertise, it’s just time consuming, so if *you* are willing to spend the time instead of paying us to do it, you can save a lot of money.” (For example, for an Akita, the *savings* at our shop using the self-serve versus full service for a **well behaved dog** is \$80.)

Additional helpful equipment:

Grate and rubber mat in tub, so small dogs can be restrained in the bottom of the tub – That’s pretty self explanatory. How many of you don’t have a grate in the bottom of your tub now? You will not believe what a huge time saver this can be. Especially since you don’t have the dog standing in water and suds, but being able to restrain toy dog in the bottom of the tub is a big help, and much safer on their delicate throats, because if they try to jump, the pressure is on the back or side of their necks, not the front.