



TRAINING AND BEHAVIOUR SKILLS

Positive or reward-based training methods

KEY CONCEPTS

THE “JOLLY ROUTINE”, “THE INTERPRETIVE FACTOR” AND “LEARN TO EARN” (William E. Campbell)

William E. Campbell – a misunderstood pioneer.

I studied Bill Campbell's books intensively when I started out as a professional dog trainer, and I contacted him in 1993 when Wendy Nicholson and I were going to the US. He put on a seminar for us, along with a few other local people. We were later invited to stay at his home, and I had the privilege of talking to him. Or to put it more accurately, I “sat at his feet” and listened in awe as he talked. It is quite an experience to listen to someone who has a very deep understanding of his subject.

1. Bill was not especially into Operant Conditioning. Of course he was aware of it, but he saw it taking a secondary role. His foundation body of knowledge was Pavlov.
2. He was ahead of time in the dog world for emphasising the importance of Classical Conditioning.
3. Specifically, this relates to the emotions that a dog has in association with various social scenarios.
4. The emotions, of course, had to be socially appropriate, which might, for example, mean being calm, happy and relaxed when a friend calls at the house.
5. He tried to ensure that the emotions flowed from the handler to the dog, not the other way around. We all know of situations where it goes the other way. For example, a dog is reactive to strangers. The handler learns to be tense and anxious whenever a stranger approaches on a walk, so they rein the dog in and communicate their anxiety. This gets communicated to the dog. In effect, the dog is thinking “if you're worried, I must really have something to worry about.” The result is that the dog's anxiety and defensive aggression in this situation is made worse.
6. He had three major concepts. One was “the Jolly Routine”, “the Interpretive Factor” and leadership (“Learn to Earn”).

7. The “Jolly Routine” is an every day language way of describing Classical Conditioning. Here’s an unfamiliar but non-threatening person, so “everybody get happy, whistle a happy tune, have a laugh, tra la la, nice person.”
8. The “Interpretive Factor” means that it is the role of the dog owner, especially as their dog goes through adolescence, to interpret the world to the dog. Adolescent dogs tend to over-react. Their territorial instincts are awakening, but they lack the experience and wisdom to sort the wheat from the chaff. We actually know better than our adolescent dogs what is threatening and what is not. That person with a walking stick is not an axe murderer, they just have a disability. “Hello, how are you going? Have a nice day, tra la la.” I find that many people are under-controlling, or at least, give their dog too little feedback. Every time your dog barks or alerts to a sight, sound or stimulus in the environment, you should notice and react. Interpret the event to your dog. “I am not interested, so come over here and settle down.” “I am interested, but this is a non-threatening event.” “I am interested and this person is an unwelcome caller, so our attitude will be to be a bit stand-offish. However, no need to over-react.” And so on.
9. So when Bill was cautioning against taking the wrong tone in a social situation, what he meant was not “don’t reinforce fear by soothing your dog”. What he meant was “don’t communicate your anxiety to the dog by taking a very sooky tone of voice. Try to be upbeat and happy, to communicate a friendly, relaxed emotion to your dog.”
10. Finally, the term “leadership” is now being canned. I think this is throwing the baby out with the bathwater. William E. Campbell pioneered non-punishment approaches to remedying behaviour problems. Many of his clients burdened their dogs with over-the-top affection, and gave them no boundaries, no simple routines of responding to commands and so on. The dog would then exhibit problem behaviour, such as destructive chewing when the owner was out. The owner would then go into a rage and physically punish the dog, then be full of remorse and comfort the dog, and so on. The poor dog was on an emotional rollercoaster. One of the reasons for establishing leadership by social means (quite simply, ask your dog to sit before giving attention or some other benefit) was to try to get the relationship on an even keel. The owner took the initiative, the dog responded. The owner could then communicate the appropriate emotions and behaviour to the dog, who would be responsive. Extremes of overwhelming emotions and punishment could be eliminated from the relationship. Bill was adamant that his concept “Learn to Earn” was not Operant Conditioning, in the sense of ask your dog to sit and rewards happen. It was teaching the dog the nature of the relationship. The interpretation of appropriate emotions (and therefore appropriate behaviour) flows from the owner to the dog.