



The History of Dog Training

No-one knows exactly when the wolf came in from the cold and cautiously approached the fire.

No-one knows when he started scavenging for scraps around the settlements of men. When did man first start feeding him? When did they first hunt together? When did the wolf, trembling and snarling, first allow the hand of the human to rest on his head, to stroke him, to tug gently at his ears? When did he start to welcome these caresses?

Estimates vary from 7,000 to 14,000 years ago and possibly much longer. Archaeologists Davis and Valla, working in Israel in 1978, uncovered the poignant skeletal remains, dated at 12,000 years ago, of a human being buried holding the skeleton of a small dog. Perhaps the dog truly became domesticated when fear turned to comfort, comfort turned to pleasure, and pleasure turned at last to love.

From these ancient beginnings sprang a cross-species relationship of trust, affection and commitment that is unequalled anywhere else in nature. Companion, guard and comforter, the dog is truly man's best friend.

Over the centuries, the domestic dog, with man as the main selector, has evolved into a great variety of breeds, some of which date from antiquity while others are more modern. The distinctions between breeds originated with the discovery that some dogs were better at certain tasks than others. Some dogs herd, some dogs track, some dogs hunt with their owners, some dogs are guards and protectors - and some dogs are just for fun!

And with the evolution of the various breeds of dogs and their specialized capabilities came the evolution of training methods. Dog training has been going on for almost as long as the dog has existed, but we'll look specifically at the last century or so.

One of the best and worst developments in the dog world came with the discovery that the dog is in fact a genetically modified wolf. Yes, your Poodle is a wolf under the fluff! This discovery has taught us a great deal about the nature of the dog and how he interacts socially, but has also had huge disadvantages for the dog because findings in lupine behavior have been extrapolated unchanged and unquestioned to the canine world.

Perhaps the most pernicious of these notions has been the one that humans need to behave under all circumstances like a dominant, or 'Alpha', wolf toward his dog, and that doing this will miraculously solve all behavioral and training problems. This notion is faulty for a couple of reasons. In the first place, wolf pack theory has been badly misunderstood by most trainers, and in the second place, the social behavior of the dog is now understood to be a fragmented and incomplete version of wolf social behavior, with many differences, so that applying the 'principles' of wolf social behavior directly to the dog is simply not appropriate.

Nevertheless, entire training philosophies have been developed based on the idea of dominance, and on the very dubious idea that your dog perceives you as another dog, and unfortunately, most of these methods rely on severe physical punishment to get their ideas across.

As an organized activity, dog training traces its origins back as early as the 1700's. Informal dog competitions and shows gave rise to kennel clubs, and organized dog trials and competitions. In the 20th Century, dog training became more organized when military and law enforcement agencies began using canines in their programs. This was particularly evident in World War I, II, and the Korean War, when dogs were trained to serve alongside soldiers, and perform specialized tasks and missions. Unfortunately, much of their learning regimens often involved the use of harsh training techniques.

But things are getting better...



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