

INTRODUCTION

The dogs always have this air of frenzied, unfocused desperation about them. Each dog stuck in a tiny cell made of concrete and chain link. No blankets, no toys, no hope of an end to the mind-numbing dullness that is life in the pound.

I'm standing in front of a kennel, observing its inhabitants. There's a lab mix and a shaggy shepherd-looking beast. Young. Both about a year old.

They are going *crazy*.

They are jumping and barking and literally bouncing off the walls and they are looking at me with this frantic, unmistakable expression. *Get me out*, they're telling me. *Get me out get me out getmeoutgetmeout*.

Talk about out of control dogs, huh?

I unlock the gate, bracing against it so the dogs don't escape. "When was the last time you guys got to use your brains?" I ask them. And that's the thing with many of these shelter dogs. They have gone days or weeks or their entire lives without ever being required to think. And why would they? No one ever asks them to. Instead, they get jerked, pushed and dragged around, and moved from one backyard or crate or kennel to another. As a result, they

have no self-control. Their strategy for getting what they want is to push, jump, pull and generally be as obnoxious as possible.

"Yeah, well. Not today, guys." We're gonna work on a little impulse control. In a move that I have spent the last seven years perfecting, I've gotten the door open, semi-gracefully rushed through and closed it behind me before the dogs can react. If they're surprised at having a guest, they quickly recover and start jumping up and slobbering all over my arms.

What these two want right now is **a)** my attention, and **b)** to get out of the freakin' kennel. I'm going to teach them exactly how to get those things. I fold my arms and turn my back on them, ignoring their jumping as much as possible. The shepherd backs off a little, probably accidentally. For a fraction of a second, all four of her feet are touching the ground.

"Good dog!" I immediately turn around and reach over to pet her. She jumps up. I turn around and ignore her. Again, all four paws hit the floor. I reach down to pet her. She jumps again. Repeat. Out of the corner of my eye, I'm watching her for any signs of comprehension. Does she get what I'm trying to explain to her?

After a while, her body language loses that frantic, mindless edge. It becomes more quizzical. This is

something that happens with all the dogs I do this training with, and it is always awesome to see. It's the moment when their brains kick in. They start to realize that *their* behavior influences *my* behavior. "Could it be," they start to wonder, "that I actually have some control over what is happening here?"

The shepherd deliberately takes a step back. "Good girl!" I tell her and ruffle her coat affectionately. She wags her tail and doesn't jump. Meanwhile, the lab continues jumping. He's a bit slower to catch on, but eventually he also realizes that the only way to get me to interact with him is to keep "four on the floor." I tell them both what *brilliant* puppies they are. After only a little more drama, I get them leashed up and ready for a walk.

In a kennel building where 60+ dogs are barking and howling and losing their minds, these two pups are calm, collected, and patiently waiting for me to open the door.

This is a scene I have repeated 100 or so times at the shelter, with a few variations. There were those two crazy four-month-old puppies who learned that if they stopped biting and climbing on me, they would get cookies! I got to the point where I could hold treats in my open palm, right under their noses. They would just sit and wait for me to give the OK – not bad for twenty minutes of work.

Or just last week, when I taught a lovely big blue pit bull with zero impulse control to stop pulling on her leash. I watched her go from mindless pulling machine to thinking dog as she realized that we would actually get where we were going faster if she didn't try to pull my arm off.

I am not dominating these dogs. There is no physical punishment or coercion. And except in the case of those two crazy puppies, I don't use a lot of food. Many shelter dogs are not food-motivated anyway; they're too stressed out to eat.

What I am doing is giving them some self-control. They learn to think for themselves. They learn how to listen, focus, and not freak out in distracting situations.

This is what *Give a Dog a Brain* is all about. And if it works for these crazy hyper psycho shelter dogs, it will work for your crazy hyper psycho dog.

The Give Your Dog a Brain Principle

This is pretty much the theme for the rest of the book, so pay attention to this bit. We're going to teach your dog the following concept:

“Doing what my *owner* wants gets me what I want. My owner wants calm behavior; therefore, calm behavior gets me what I want.”

Wow, you're thinking. That sounds like quite a complicated concept for a dog to learn. I know a few people whose logic skills are not quite strong enough to grasp that. How am I supposed to teach this to my dog, who is currently lying on the floor chewing on her feet?

Well, not with so many words. We're going to *show* Princess how this works. We're going to use a number of training exercises to instill the concept of self-control in her mind. There are exercises like Eye Contact and Hand Touch, which help you and Princess learn how to act as a team. For dogs who are new to the whole training game, these will start to show her that her behavior actually influences what goes on around her. For the shelter dogs

I work with -dogs who have never in their whole lives had a say in their fate- this is quite the revelation.

There is a series of impulse control exercises, surprisingly fun and simple training games that send a very clear message to your dog: *being calm is much more rewarding than spazzing out.*

Then there are exercises that teach your dog to listen to you, even when there are a million other things she'd rather be doing. Exercises like “Friend with Food” and “Check it Out.” These are for the dogs who never listen. Dogs who blow you off in distracting environments. If you've ever heard yourself say, “Princess obeys just fine at home. As soon as we leave the house she starts ignoring me!” then this is for you.

There are other factors involved, of course. We'll talk about basics like exercise and mental stimulation; diet; and how your relationship with your dog affects her behavior. But for the most part, this is the theme to keep in mind. In fact, you may want to write down the Give Your Dog a Brain Principle and stick it on your fridge or something. It'll help to keep you focused.

How this thing works

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This course is divided into five lessons, based on the structure of an actual, in-person dog training class. Each lesson introduces a few new concepts and new exercises. Each exercise gets its own video, to show you exactly how it's all done. If this were an actual class, I would introduce one lesson each week. You're not limited to this, however; feel free to proceed at a pace that works for you and your dog. Just make sure you complete the lessons in order – each one builds on the previous one, and if you try to work on lesson 5: Loose Leash Walking, before Lesson 1: Basic Manners & Relationship Building, you'll end up going nowhere fast.

Before we get to the lessons, there is a section that covers “foundation” stuff. These are things that you can implement right away to start seeing changes in Fido's behavior, before you even work on a single training lesson.

So. Ready to begin improving your dog's behavior? Ready to finally have the dog you always wanted, not one who drives you nuts? Let's go.