

A Note from the Author on Clicker Training

Clicker training. Some people think of it as a subset of dog training. Indeed the name first arose among dog trainers who were experimenting with clickers and talking to each other on the Internet. Today, however, “clicker training” refers more generally to a rapidly growing training technology with a wide range of applications.

The technology works for all animals, including people. As with any technology, it’s based on an underlying science: the study of behavioral phenomena first identified by scientist B. F. Skinner, who coined the terms for key procedures such as “operant conditioning,” “positive reinforcement,” and “shaping.”

I first learned about these powerful tools back in the sixties, when I was one of the early science-based dolphin trainers. I became fascinated, not by the dolphins but by the methodology we were using. Since then I’ve devoted most of my time to growing and spreading this technology. I have seen firsthand how these tools give us a new awareness of what human and animal learners are thinking and feeling, and of how aware and capable both animals and humans can be.

I’ve written this book to share some of my own great experiences with this technology. I use these stories to show why this technology works, and how powerful, beneficial, and universal it can be. And how easy! Just get started. Read, watch the online videos at www.reachintheanimalmind.com, grab a clicker, and get going. This technology gives all of us new ways to share our understanding and truly commune with the other living beings in our lives, including one another.

A word of warning: if you are an experienced dog trainer who picked up this book looking for step-by-step instructions for clicker training a dog—well, you may feel like the lady who wrote to me to complain that the book has too many words.

In that case, go directly to page 243 and start with the section called

“Do It Yourself.” Follow the instructions for “Teach Your Cat to High-five” or “Teach Your Dog to Hand-target.” (You’ll also find exercises for training humans. Try those, too.) By the way, I do recommend starting with the cat, even if you have to borrow one; cats are wonderful trainers of humans.

Maybe the results will startle you enough to make you want to go back and read about the wolf on page 2, the children and their surfing ponies on page 59, the devilish Dalmatians or the friendly rhino or the wordless yet stylish autistic teenager or the creative polar bear or the neuroscientists who finally, generously, explained to me why this kind of mutual experience is so much *fun*.

The clicker trainers say to me, “Everyone should be doing this everywhere, always!” I know what they mean. Hey, we’re changing the world, here. Our animals think it’s about time. So come and see!