

Animals challenge human beings to find another way to communicate. The possibilities of exploration and innovation are always present in work with animals. As a TTEAM practitioner, I have worked primarily with horses during the past seven years. Now as small animals are coming into my practice, I am learning the truth of these statements again.

Most people who use the TTEAM™ approach come to it to find a better way of dealing with animals. In my 27 years of experience with horses before TTEAM™, I looked for different and softer approaches to training. Most horse people used terms like, "Make the horse do it." "The horse is being resistant, difficult, disobedient, willful, lazy, mean, etc." Few saw the horse as a living being with physical, mental and emotional needs. There was even less awareness of the human physical, mental and emotional responses to this approach.

The first time I saw Linda Tellington-Jones work, my heart sang in response. Here was someone who said, "Listen to the horse. Read his responses and understand them. Find ways of developing his awareness, self-confidence, adaptability and willingness to work with people." So now, for example, when I see a horse snapping at a human during saddling, I don't see him as a mean or difficult animal. My body doesn't tense, nor does my breathing stop in reprimand. Rather, I reassure the animal and try to find out why he is behaving in this way. Often, the horse is responding to the pain of a poorly fitting saddle being strapped into place.

For the past seven years, my approach to horses has softened. I look for causes, search for alternative ways and remain calm and thoughtful. Now I come to the world of dogs and the process begins again.

Current ideas in dog training revolve around the concepts of domination - submission and positive reinforcement. The ideas that the human must dominate the dog, and that a disobedient dog is dominating the human, are an assault on human and animal emotions. It is very easy to buy into this approach, but it reduces options for understanding and lateral thinking.

When a dog won't sit, a handler working on this premise feels affronted and confronted. The mind freezes and a form of aggressive behavior usually results. The handler tugs the leash fiercely. He may force the animal's hind end down. The human voice always gets sharper and louder.

More subtle changes occur to both human and animal. The breath stops, then becomes shallow and rapid. The pulse rate increases. There is a release of adrenaline into the cells and the body tenses. Even after the dog sits, both human and

animal feel tension in their bodies, sometimes for up to twelve hours. The aggressive response to this simple situation is a massive assault on the physical-emotional-mental structures of both human and animal.

More important though, is the assault that has occurred to the spiritual aspects of both human and animal. The heart is closed. The heart-to-heart connection that animals bring as a gift to humans is severed. There is a pain deeper than the physical-emotional level - a sense of being bereft, alone, isolated. Too many humans have done this for too long. We are very good at rationalizing what is not a rational-mental situation.

Even those who use "positive reinforcement" are, to a large extent, trapped in the domination-submission theory. Often food or praise is used in a mechanistic way. The operative question is, "How can I make the animal do what I want?" Asking different questions can eliminate the aspect of failure and lead to greater communication. "How do I feel about this? How does the animal feel about this? Is there another way to develop cooperation between us?"

The gift that TTEAM™ brings to the world of animal training is that of connection. We connect to the animal physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Touch builds awareness, trust and confidence. Inner calm enhances that trust and mutual awareness. A mind free to look for reasons and to find other ways of working increases communication. The honoring of self and animal supports the spiritual connection.

So how do we deal with a dog who won't sit? First, we recognize there are an infinite number of ways. We choose ways that support the animal's self-confidence and physical calmness. We don't get stuck on one approach. If something doesn't work, we try something else. We chunk the process down. We use our human abilities to explore and create new ways of communicating through understanding.

To chunk this down, we must first have the animal's attention. The use of a quiet, supporting voice and stroking with the hand or wand connects human and animal. Taking the dog into a structure like the labyrinth helps the animal to focus. Understanding the change in balance that occurs in sitting enables the handler to find ways of helping the dog to sit. The most important factor in training becomes easier to achieve. The mind can send a brilliantly clear mental image of the movement when the body and emotions are calm. Finally, sharing the success with the dog through words, looks, touches and an inner glow instills delight in cooperation in the animal.