

**Have you watched the “Dog Whisperer” and been impressed by the behaviors given by the dogs in such a short time? Find out why real dog trainers are not fooled by his showmanship. In dog training circles the DW is the butt of jokes, not someone revered.**

From Andrew Luescher, DVM, Veterinary Behaviorist  
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"I reviewed the four preview-videotapes kindly submitted to me by National Geographic. I very much appreciate having gotten the opportunity to see these tapes before the program goes on the air. I will be happy to review any programs that deal with domestic animal behavior and training. I believe this is a responsibility of our profession.

I have been involved in continuing education for dog trainers for over 10 years, first through the "How Dogs Learn" program at the University of Guelph (Ontario Veterinary College) and then through the DOGS! Course at Purdue University. I therefore know very well where dog training stands today, and I must tell you that Millan's techniques are outdated and unacceptable not only to the veterinary community, but also to dog trainers. The first question regarding the above mentioned tapes I have is this: The show repeatedly cautions the viewers not to attempt these techniques at home. What then is the purpose of this show? I think we have to be realistic: people will try these techniques at home, much to the detriment of their pets.

Millan's techniques are almost exclusively based on two techniques: Flooding and positive punishment. In flooding, an animal is exposed to a fear (or aggression) evoking stimulus and prevented from leaving the situation, until it stops reacting. To take a human example: arachnophobia would be treated by locking a person into a closet, releasing hundreds of spiders into that closet, and keeping the door shut until the person stops reacting. The person might be cured by that, but also might be severely disturbed and would have gone through an excessive amount of stress. Flooding has therefore always been considered a risky and cruel method of treatment.

Positive punishment refers to applying an aversive stimulus or correction as a consequence of a behavior. There are many concerns about punishment aside from its unpleasantness. Punishment is entirely inappropriate for most types of aggression and for any behavior that involves anxiety. Punishment can suppress most behavior but does not resolve the underlying problem, i.e., the fear or anxiety. Even in cases where correctly applied punishment might be considered appropriate, many conditions have to be met that most dog owners can't meet: The punishment has to be applied every time the behavior is displayed, within ½ second of the behavior, and at the correct intensity."

"Most of the theoretical explanations that Millan gives regarding causes of the behavior problems are wrong. Not one of these dogs had any issue with dominance. Not one of these dogs wanted to control their owners. What he was right about was that calmness and consistency are extremely important, but they don't make the presented methods appropriate or justifiable."

"The last episode (compulsive disorder) is particularly unsettling because compulsive disorder is related to an imbalance in neurotransmitter levels or receptors, and is therefore unequivocally a medical condition. Would it be appropriate to treat obsessive compulsive disorder in people with punishment? Or have a layperson go around treating such patients?"

"My colleagues and I and innumerable leaders in the dog training community have worked now for decades to eliminate such cruel, ineffective (in terms of true cure) and inappropriate techniques. "

## **Cesar's Way: The Natural, Everyday Guide to Understanding & Correcting Common Dog Problems**

By Cesar Millan, with Melissa Jo Peltier  
Harmony Books, 320 pp., 2006; \$24.95



Reviewed by [Pat Miller](#) for [The Bark](#)

Almost every dog-training book has something to offer the discerning reader, and Cesar's Way is no exception. The book's strength is as an autobiography of National Geographic's TV dog-trainer star, Cesar Millan. If you're curious about how Millan got where he is today, this book will tell you. If you're looking for significant help training your dog, however, look elsewhere.

Many in the behavioral science community view the tenets-and consequences- of Cesar's "way" with trepidation. In an interview published in the New York Times in February of this year, [Dr. Nicolas Dodman](#), director of the Animal Behavior Clinic at Tufts University 's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, observed, "My College thinks it is a travesty. We've written to National Geographic Channel and told them they have put dog training back 20 years."

Millan provides little in terms of concrete training information, offering instead broad generalizations about projecting "calm-assertive energy"-a Millan catch phrase-and instilling "calm, submissive energy" in your dog. For example, in Chapter 8, he offers "Simple Tips for Living Happily with Your Dog." His "Rules of the House" include:

"Wake up on your terms, not his.condition him to get quietly off the bed if he wakes before you do."

"Don't allow possessiveness over toys and food!"

"Don't allow out-of-control barking."

Good advice, perhaps, but, nowhere in the book does he explain how to accomplish these things, other than by using calm-assertive energy.

Millan is nothing if not confident. He admits to his "politically incorrect" reliance on old-fashioned dominance theory, stating, "To dogs, there are only two positions in a relationship: leader and follower. Dominant and submissive. It's either black or white." He even has the hubris to bemoan the unwillingness of authorities to allow him to rehabilitate Hera, one of the two notorious Presa Canario dogs who killed Diane Whipple in the hallway of her San Francisco apartment building.

In Millan's world, every behavior problem is addressed in terms of dominance and submission. He even uses the alpha roll as part of his "dominance ritual"; this technique-forcibly rolling a dog on his side or back and holding him there-is considered by many to be a dangerous practice based on faulty interpretation of wolf behavior. It long ago fell into disfavor with trainers whose methods are based on the science of behavior and learning.

Where Millan talks about "energy," science-based trainers talk about behavior, and generally agree that status in social groups is fluid and contextual, not black or white. Truly effective and long-term success in behavior modification requires a far more studied and complex approach than simply asserting dominance.

Interpretation of dog body language diverges just as widely. Millan refers in his book to Kane, a Great Dane who appeared on his TV show who was afraid of slick linoleum floors. Millan claims that with less than 30 minutes of his calm, assertive influence, Kane was striding confidently down the slick hallway. Every trainer I know who has watched that segment notes the dog's post-Millan, obvious and ongoing [stress signals](#): head and tail lowered, hugging the wall, panting.

Millan touts the benefits of exercise in modifying dog behavior, a concept I heartily endorse. However, his book starts with a description of the four-hour exercise session he engages in with his pack of dogs every morning in the Santa Monica Mountains of Southern California, followed by afternoons spent rollerblading with those same dogs, 10 at a time, on the streets around his training center.

One of the tenets of a successful training program is that it gives the dog owner tools he or she can apply. How many dog owners can spend six hours a day exercising their dogs? How many can project "calm-assertive energy"? The danger of Cesar's Way is that it assures owners that quick fixes and easy answers lie in the hands of a smiling man with the elusive calm-assertive energy.

In fact, answers are better found in the beautiful complexity of life, where solutions are often not quick and easy, but are solidly built on a sturdy foundation and an understanding of how behavior really works.

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**Quote from Paul's website:**

**Q:** You indicate on your website that you are not affiliated with the National Geographic program, "The Dog Whisperer" which features Cesar Millan. I've never seen him use inappropriate or violent techniques with animals so why are you distancing yourself from him?

**A:** "The methods demonstrated by Mr. Millan include the use of choke collars, jerking, hitting, pinning to the ground, etc. He has stated that any method is okay to use as long as it works. He uses physical punishment and "flooding" in order to suppress a dog's behavior. Physical punishment involves applying a physical aversive to reduce the probability of the behavior continuing. "Flooding" refers to physically forcing a dog into an overwhelming situation he or she is afraid of until the dog "shuts down" or the behavior is suppressed.

Using negative methods with fearful or aggressive dogs is dangerous (as demonstrated on the program) and unnecessary. Most importantly, these methods are not the most effective in modifying problematic behaviors. And they are certainly not very easy on the dogs. Behavioral science has shown that suppressing behavior, especially through physical force or the threat of force, does nothing to bring confidence to a fearful dog or calm an aggressive dog, it only suppresses that behavior (out of fear) in that particular situation.

Most of the physical-force methods demonstrated on this program are in contrast to the positive behavior modification programs used by professional trainers around the world, including the leading veterinary schools of behavior at University of Pennsylvania, Tufts University, Cornell, University of California at Davis, and many others. They have found negative training to be unsafe, unnecessary and ineffective in the long run. Thirty years ago I used most of the negative methods shown on the National Geographic program and became skilled in both positive and negative training. In the past 15 years, along with other professionals and the leading animal behavioral scientists at the institutions referenced above, I have abandoned negative training, finding it to be less effective and certainly not as kind as positive training. I believe positive training is easier and more effective with even the most aggressive or fearful dog, as well as being less stressful for the human.

I recommend that you interview trainers and find out the methods he or she uses before hiring him or her. I further recommend getting referrals and watching the trainer in action. Only then can you can make an informed decision and choose for yourself the methods you will ultimately use."

**Source:** [http://www.dogwhispererdvd.com/faq-national\\_geographic\\_dog\\_whisperer.html](http://www.dogwhispererdvd.com/faq-national_geographic_dog_whisperer.html)

## What about the Dog Whisperer?

Students often "compliment" us by saying, "wow, you're just like the Dog Whisperer." While we know they intend the comment in the spirit of giving us the best of praise, we cringe on the inside as we thank them for their appreciation of our talents as teachers and trainers.



**Trust and respect go hand in hand.**

photo of Lucy courtesy of Marty Beck

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***"Humane leadership allows the dog's capacity to think and feel to be used for learning rather than defense and avoidance." - Dee Ganley***

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It is important for people to understand the impact, both short and long term, of what they do to their dogs in the name of "training" and "behavior modification."

**Outdated Dominance Theory ... vs. Leadership Model**

### **In a nutshell:**

Although Cesar does appear to be an effective alpha method trainer, if you watch his show you see him constantly fighting with dogs, intimidating them and getting bitten repeatedly, and advising people not to use his method without the expert assistance of a professional. The dogs have the answer. Watch their faces. The terrified dog being forced to walk across the slippery floor isn't getting over her fear, she is simply more frightened of his "calm, assertive energy" and relentless punishment than she is of the floor.



## So, why all the hoopla?

### **Millan is absolutely right.**

Our family dogs desperately need leadership, exercise, attention and to be a valued member of our family "pack" - not bored and alone with a bare few minutes of our companionship each day. We can't expect our dogs to be perfectly behaved by treating them like "children in fur coats" or by spoiling and over-loving them with no structure or respect for their true canine nature. Thank you, Mr. Millan, for sharing this message in each episode and for being a catalyst for discussion on dog training methodology and the need for building a healthy relationship with our canine friends.

Steve Dale, certified dog and cat behavior consultant who writes a twice weekly syndicated newspaper column states, "Nobody disagrees with Millan when he says that dogs don't get enough exercise; in fact, behaviorists have been saying this for decades. And nobody disagrees with Millan when he says that dogs need to understand their place in the family -- again, leadership skills have been preached by behaviorists for a long, long time." Dale goes on to express his reservations, "But you don't have to dominate your dog to be leader -- which is exactly what Millan preaches. And that's why reputable trainers and behaviorists are horrified that Millan's outdated and overbearing methods have attracted such a following." So the issue is "dominance" vs. leadership. Confusing compliance with submission.

### **"Cesar's Way" is not new.**

The "dominance theory" was made popular in the 70's and early 80's. It supports the expectation that a dog should obey because the human is the master - the alpha. If the dog doesn't, we can say the dog is being purposely disrespectful or vying for pack leadership. The dog is "dominant" and must be made to be "submissive." Within this model, punitive action would be "justified" to reassert the human as leader. The Monks of New Skete published "How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend" in '78 - another book with an amazing amount of great information for pet owners, if you discount the parts describing the execution of the "[alpha roll](#)" where the dog is lifted and propelled onto its back and forcibly pinned there until it 'submits' - stops struggling. Inexperienced pet owners are often bitten trying to master this maneuver. Over the years, the Monks have revisited their recommendations and revised their text.

### **Calm and assertive.**

Cesar Millan demonstrates this virtue - an effective trait we should all strive to achieve. How many of us are able to remain neutral and unemotional when our dog is fighting back or has pushed us to the limits of our patience? There is a fine line between "assertive" and aggressive. Cesar may get it, but too few viewers understand the difference. Even fewer can muster the mystical "energy" of the charismatic Millan.

Not all pet owners are created equal. In the wrong hands, the drive to be dominant is a slippery slope that can result in mistreatment - if not abuse. It gives justification and perhaps alleviates guilt in using physical punishment to keep disobedient dogs in line. Under the "us against them" premise, a frustrated pet owner might lose his temper and rationalize that "the dog deserved it" - so it's "okay" to get physical with your dog for the sake of making it be obedient. This step backward in training perspective causes current day trainers to take issue. The family dog does not lie awake at night plotting to take over the family.

### **"Do not try this at home."**

Mr. Millan himself ends up bleeding in more than one episode. Is it because the dog was "that bad" or because the dog was pushed beyond its limits? Should a novice pet owner attempt to correct a dog that is "that bad"? Could he recognize when his dog is approaching its threshold and about to bite? Ethical considerations aside, we would have to agree that it is inadvisable for

an inexperienced owner to attempt these methods without the hands-on coaching of an experienced trainer.

Most troubling, children often copy how the adults in the family handle the dog. Children who mimic the techniques will be more likely to be bitten. At what cost to the family's relationship with the dog? American College of Veterinary Behaviorists president Dr. Debra Horwitz states, "We have serious concerns. For one thing, many of the techniques shown on television are very difficult for owners to accomplish and may result in injury to them or their dogs and neither are they the more updated training techniques that are now used."

### **Training evolves.**

The Monks have re-released "How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend" with 40% new material and the following notation: "The Monks of New Skete advocate the philosophy that "understanding is the key to communication, and compassion with your dog; whether it is a new puppy or an old companion." And from "The Art of Raising a Puppy": "We have learned that our monastic environment offers us a unique perspective. Here we are forced to re-examine our attitudes about everything, including dogs. We are constantly challenged to become more open to the language dogs use to communicate with us." This season, Millan looks into the camera and tells viewers there are other training methods out there.

Thank heavens we are beyond the once-common practice of rubbing puppies' noses in feces or tying dead chickens around their necks in the name of training. No one passes on the horrifying advice of a best selling book published in the 70's by a Disney movie trainer which advocated "filling a hole with water and submerging the dog's head" to discourage digging. Humane societies are still called to investigate cruelty cases regarding brutal training methods promoted in once-popular training manuals, but thankfully less frequently than in years past.

Our perspective of what constitutes kind and fair treatment continues to evolve as our understanding of canine behavior grows. "Calm, assertive energy" doesn't necessitate force or intimidation. You can be a kind, benevolent leader without physical domination.

### **Leadership vs. Dominance.**

Dr. Sophia Yin, who teaches at the University of California School of Veterinary Medicine – Davis, and is a member of the American Society of Veterinary Behavior says, "Yes, owners should be calm and assertive and it's true to help dogs, we need to be in charge. But dominance and leadership are two different things. Dominance is defined as the use of force to gain priority access of the things you want, so animals compete for food, toys and favorite resting areas by fighting. Leadership is the ability to convince others to do things they normally wouldn't do otherwise. A person can be a leader by bullying, or by providing incentives and rewards; in other words convincing followers you're working for the same goals. Would you rather follow a leader like Castro or Ghandi? It's no different for dogs."

From the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: "We share a common vision of a better world for companion animals. ... a humane community in which all animals are treated with kindness and respect." Diamonds in the Ruff is devoted to promoting a a human-animal bond that is rich and rewarding for both ends of the leash, where public and pet safety and the animal's physical and mental well-being are a priority.

***"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress  
can be judged by the way its animals are treated."  
--Ghandi, In Philosophy***