Understanding The Emotional Basis Of Behavior

Yes, humans and canines are different species, but current research provides fascinating, irrefutable evidence that what we share with our dogs is greater than how we vary. As behaviorist and zoologist Dr. Patricia McConnell tells us in this remarkable new book about emotions in dogs and in people, more and more scientists accept the premise that dogs have rich emotional lives, exhibiting a wide range of feelings including fear, anger, surprise, sadness, and love.

In For the Love of a Dog, McConnell suggests that one of the reasons we love dogs so much is that they express emotions in ways similar to humans. After all, who can communicate joy better than a puppy? But not all emotional expressions are obvious, and McConnell teaches both beginning dog owners and experienced dog lovers how to read the more subtle expressions hidden behind fuzzy faces and floppy ears.

For those of us who deeply cherish our dogs but are sometimes baffled by their behavior, For the Love of a Dog will come as a revelation—a treasure trove of useful facts, informed speculation, and intriguing accounts of man’s best friend at his worst and at his very best. Readers will discover how fear, anger, and happiness underlie the lives of both people and dogs and, most important, how understanding emotion in both species can improve the relationship between them. Thus McConnell introduces us to the possibility of a richer, more rewarding relationship with our dogs.
While we may never be absolutely certain what our dogs are feeling, with the help of this riveting book we can understand more than we ever thought possible. Those who consider their dogs part of the family will find For the Love of a Dog engaging, enlightening, and utterly engrossing.

My Personal Review:
Patricia McConnell has written a wonderful book filled with engaging stories and much practical advice for dog owners. She incorporates the latest research findings on the workings of the dogs mind in presenting her own cases from her behavior counseling service. Her discussion of counterconditioning covers an extremely valuable concept that is not stressed (or even utilized) enough by other behaviorists and trainers. This technique is invaluable and of nearly limitless potential in alleviating many emotional distresses and disorders in dogs.

Especially pleasing to see is that in her discussion of counterconditioning and other techniques the author diverges from the decades-old approach of addressing behavior problems (a term that should be killed off and unceremoniously buried - its not the animals problem any more than if your husband had a habit of talking too loudly to your liking would you tell your friends that he had a behavior problem) by focusing on simply eliminating the behavior. This mechanistic behaviorism approach may be effective in eliminating the behavior but frequently does nothing to relieve the dogs underlying emotional distress that is causing the behavior. For example, if a dog is suffering from loneliness because he is tied up alone in a backyard and barks endlessly for human attention and companionship there are plenty of ways to eliminate the barking. But there is only one correct one: alleviate the emotional pain of loneliness. McConnell understands this and focuses on this underlying emotional distress when working with the dogs to change unwanted behavior. In light of the advances in neuroscience, comparative psychology, and brain imaging, this places McConnell on the leading edge of the changes underway in how unwanted behavior in dogs should be addressed. The primary focus in treating behavior problems is to help the dog rather than the owner. McConnell gets this. Most dog behaviorists and trainers dont.

I strongly recommend this book for all dog owners who want their dogs to get the best emotional care and support in all behavior-related matters.

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