



How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend: The Classic Manual for Dog Owners

Monks of New Skete

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For nearly a quarter century, How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend has been the standard against which all other dog-training books have been measured. This new, expanded edition, with a fresh new design and new photographs throughout, preserves the best features of the original classic while bringing the book fully up-to-date. The result: the ultimate training manual for a new generation of dog owners - and, of course, for their canine best friends.

The Monks of New Skete have achieved international renown as breeders of German shepherds and as outstanding trainers of dogs of all breeds. Their unique approach to canine training, developed and refined over three decades, is based on the philosophy that "understanding is the key to communication, compassion, and communion" with your dog. The importance of honest and effective communication with your dog is underscored throughout this guide, especially in the practical training exercises: a detailed, comprehensive, fully illustrated obedience course through which the monks lead you (and your dog) step-by-step. How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend covers virtually every aspect of living with and caring for your dog, including: Selecting a dog (what breed? male? female? puppy or older dog?) to fit your lifestyle Where to get - and where not to get - a dog Reading a pedigree Training your dog or puppy - when, where, and how The proper use of praise and discipline Feeding, grooming, and ensuring your dog's physical fitness Recognizing and correcting canine behavioral problems The particular challenges of raising a dog where you live - in the city, country, or suburb The proper techniques for complete care of your pet at every stage of his or her life In this new edition, How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend has been expanded to encompass the latest equipment (e.g., retractable leashes, "invisible" fences); new trends in training and care (doggy day care, professional dog walkers, etc.); and dozens of new anecdotes and case studies, drawn from the monks' own experience, that bring to life the essential training concepts.

In its scope, its clarity, and its authority, How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend remains unrivaled as a basic training guide for dog owners. Like no other book, this guide can help you understand and appreciate your dog's nature as well as his or her distinct personality - and in so doing, it can significantly enrich the life you share with your dog.

How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend: The Classic Manual for Dog Owners Details

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Ambrose Miles says

Oh, those monks are a clever bunch! I, however am throughly biased...I trained my dog the New Skete way. Perfect.

Douglas Dalrymple says

My family and I are raising a puppy this summer. It's great fun but no easy job. My parents had a copy of this book on the shelf when I was a kid, so I picked one up too. We're using some of the techniques recommended here and some from other guides. The fairly old-school methods described by the monks of New Skete often polarize opinion among today's dog owners. What I appreciate most about the book is that it offers sane answers to two very important questions: "Are dogs wolves?" and "Are dogs children?"

Are dogs wolves? The answer you receive to this question will depend on the person you ask. Dogs are alternately classified as *Canis lupus familiaris* or *Canis familiaris*. The former would essentially make dogs a variety of wolf, the latter would make them their own species. No one argues, however, with the fact that dogs were domesticated from gray wolves between 15,000 and 30,000 years ago, though the final break in the bloodlines was likely more recent than that, since wild wolves may have continued to interbreed with domesticated wolves for some time. Darwin famously discusses dog breeding to illustrate the power of sexual selection in the early chapters of *On the Origin of Species*, but is 15,000 years enough time to create an entirely new kind of animal? Various human populations bred separately from one another for much longer periods and yet we all agree in calling both Swedes and Australian Aborigines members of the same species. For all intents and purposes, therefore, the monks of New Skete are right: Dogs are wolves. Or else dogs are so very closely related to today's wolves that it would be foolish to suppose wolf behavior and social relations have little to tell us about our dogs.

Are dogs children? I like to think that in a sober moment any dog lover would admit that our pets are not children, but we often treat them as if they were. I've been guilty of this myself, cradling my three-month-old schnauzer pup in my arms and calling her my "fur child." To a degree this is all very understandable, since puppies are adorable and elicit a defend-and-care-for response that's similar to the feeling inspired by human infants. There are risks in taking this too far, however. Trends and fashions come and go in dog training just as they do in child rearing, and in fact the former tend to mirror the latter in any given generation. When tough-love reigns in the rearing of children, tough-love reigns in the training of dogs. When helicopter parenting is the rule of the day for our kids, we tend to hover over our dogs too. And likewise, when all discipline is thrown out with children and positive reinforcement is the universal rule, the same is applied to our dogs. You would think that we should know how to raise children by now. You would think that we should know how to raise dogs. In both cases, seeing and loving them for *what they really are*, exercising both a great deal of patience and a moderate amount of discipline, simply makes sense to me. If that sounds like I, too, am recommending that we treat our dogs like children, the key is in the "what they really are" phrase, because the goal of one activity is to raise a human being, the other is to tame a wolf. Again, our monkish friends at New Skete get the answer right: Dogs are not children, and we do a disservice to them when we go too far in treating them like they are.

Justine says

I don't think ANY dog book is the end-all be-all, so no dog-training book would earn 5 stars from me. No doubt, the monks are not going to win over everyone with their methods. Positive reinforcement is the the in vogue way to train a dog right now, and they focus a lot on effective corrections. Prong collars and the shake down will probably make a lot of people weepy. Which is fine. Their methods aren't for everyone.

However, I think they have an amazing approach, which mimics my feelings on dog training to a T. While they cover the basics of teaching your dog obedience, the book is more about your day to day life with your dogs. I like how they want the dog with you and as part of your life, but without being mushy and spoiling them rotten. There are few people who can follow their daily regimen, but the idea behind it is wonderful. Too many people get their dogs, and either expect them to behave with virtually no exercise and little real human contact or do everything for their dogs and make them into spoiled rotten brats. I think the monks have a method similar to NILIF (nothing in life is free), and it creates a healthy balance between being a 24/7 mean alpha dog and being a pushover.

I did have to groan when I just saw the review that these guys are like Cesar! I like Cesar well enough, but come on! They've been breeding and training dogs probably before Cesar was born.

Fifi LaFleur says

Reading these books again as I have a puppy coming home tomorrow! I just love these books. Their philosophy on dogs and training totally appeals to me as a lover of large shepherd mixes.

Being Maurice Sendak approved gives it bonus points. He knows where the wild things are!

Jenifer Holland says

Full of good humor; insights into dog and human nature; and just general, all-around practical tips. This book was worth every page!

Lauren says

I've never been so confused from a dog training book in my life. "Hi, we are inspired by St. Francis" but then you discipline dogs by cuffing them under the chin, the "shakedown," and the alpha rollover. I don't believe for a minute that St. Francis would approve.

Here's what I like about the book: their concept of outdoor kenneling and making sure the dog has the right kind of setup, raising/training puppies, the "Round Robin Recall" exercise, and their suggestion of not training your dog to attack but instead fake it.

What I don't like - Road working your dog...you've got to be kidding me! Jog a dog on a bike, don't "Turner & Hooch" the dog out the car window. That is just absurd! A million things can go wrong and I can't believe they'd put that in a book to be attempted by desperate people looking to fix their dog's behavior issues (people like that will try anything without thinking through it.) The disciplining of course was blowing my mind. If you have to take it that far with your dog, then YOUR DOG DOESN'T LIKE YOU. It really is that simple. Teaching a puppy to not bark in the car does not consist of stopping the car and beating the crap out of it, rolling it, etc. If you have to do that, then you shouldn't own a dog. Teaching a dog to not jump by squeezing its paws, giving it a swift bump to the abdomen with your knee with surprise and drama = idiotic. And my personal favorite...older dogs that potty in the house means physical discipline may be in order. (Although, I'm wondering if they actually meant "healthy, adult dogs with attitudes" versus "geriatric dogs that are too old to hold it." Hopefully they didn't mean the latter.)

Should you get this book to learn how to train your dog? ABSOLUTELY NOT. The only thing you can get out of this book is learning about bad dog behavior and how it develops. It does not show you how to cure it (and if you have a truly aggressive dog, be prepared to be made into mincemeat if you try any of their suggestions, because BUDDY, you'll have to sleep sometime and that's when your dog will pay you back.)

Sara says

I appreciated some of the things they said, especially in the beginning. But this book drove home the point that every dog training book must be read with a grain of salt and an open mind. I was honestly a bit horrified with the discipline chapter. Everyone has their own opinion on this, but I feel that those methods are old school and very out dated. We've moved beyond that, surely! I know I have. All in all, a book with some interesting viewpoints but not to be taken word for word.

Eugene Mah says

How to Be Your Dog's Best Friend by the Monks of New Skete was a book that one of the dog park people recommended to us. Thanks to the wife's aunt, we got a copy of it for Christmas, and dove right in. After getting through a few chapters, my first thought was "This is the book we should have read before getting Nala".

The Monks of New Skete have apparently been breeding German Shepherd Dogs for quite some time now and also run a boarding/training program for other dogs, so they have a good amount of experience with breeding, raising and training dogs and dog psychology/sociology. Much of this collected wisdom (along with plenty of anecdotes) is encapsulated very nicely in this book. The book offers a lot of good training tips and insights into the canine mind, which is something I think all dog owners would benefit from to help understand their dogs better. Apart from the training advice and techniques given in the book, I think the most valuable thing this book has to offer are the monks' insights into the canine mind, and how dogs think and behave. A lot of topics are covered in the book, so at 321 pages some of the coverage is necessarily a little cursory. A sizable reading list at the back provides pointers to other books that cover specific topics in more detail though.

For dog owners, this is one that's definitely worth adding to the bookshelf.

While a couple of physical punishment methods are provided, the monks qualify their use by saying:

- "physical discipline or correction is never an arbitrary training technique to be applied to each and every dog for all offenses"
- "In considering their use, you should follow the rule of always using the least amount of force necessary to change the behavior. Don't go overboard. Build on your corrections, making them progressively tougher until your dog responds appropriately. Above all, watch your dog: his response will tell you whether the correction is too soft or too stern."
- "physical discipline should be reserved for the heinous canine crimes mentioned earlier, not meted out for every episode of bad behavior"

The chapter on discipline ends with a section on making up with your dog afterwards, which is a very important thing to do.

James says

Good book but I mis-read the title.

I was just looking for a book that would teach me how to be one of my dog's good friends.

Christine says

I highly recommend this for new dog-owners, or anyone who is eager to reconsider mankind's history and relationship with dogs. Thoughtfully written, this book felt like a meditation and a prayer. While full of advice for dog training, I also greatly enjoyed the philosophical non-advice sections as well. I feel this book is great for those who are planning to become dog-owners, and want more than just practical preparation; this book offers an emotional and spiritual foundation too. Yes, I said "spiritual"-- the book is written by Monks after all! If this is too New Age-sounding for you, skip this book. I really appreciated that the Monks offer advice that considers what is good for the dog, not only what is good for the humans. Human-centeredness guides most aspects of my life, and I relished the opportunity to consider ways to expand my views as far as human-canine communication. Not a dry read by any means, and lovingly written by true dog lovers-- I highly recommend this book!

Neocortex says

Much more narrative than how-to. While I like the ideas and the sentiments, I'm not so keen on the personalized stories. For practical, "do this" advice, I prefer Brian Kilcommons. I used his Good Owners, Great Dogs to train my last dog (who was universally recognized as a beyond exceptional dog: when my husband and I began dating, we left half a pizza on the coffee table and went out to a movie. It was still there when we got home, absolutely untouched). I'll be consulting his new(er) book, My Smart Puppy (god, what a horrific, saccharine title) for our next dog.

Suzanne says

This is an superb training manual but very rigid and strict. I agree that a dog must know who its owner is and have a degree of fear and respect...but I am softer. I prefer a positive training approach. Reward the positive. Despite this philosophical difference I do think this is an excellent reference and one I would recommend.

Samuel says

Read this book if you want your dog to be afraid of you and ruin any possible relationship you'd have with him.

Jon says

This review became lengthier than I anticipated, but if I can dissuade one person from using the techniques prescribed in this book, it will have been worth it.

I would like to preface my review with a comment on my own experience. A few years ago, I taught myself nonviolent training methods studying the works of Paul Owens and Karen Pryor, among others. The books were recommended by the shelter where I planned to adopt a dog.

I started studying long before I even planned to get the dog, and felt more prepared as a result. Once I understood the essence of the nonviolent approach, I was convinced that this was the way. Thus, when we brought home an extremely unruly Border Collie that had been found running loose deep in the mountains, I had a good idea of how to start. She came home as skittish and wild-eyed as could be imagined, and popped around on the end of the leash like a pinball. Yet by carefully following the methods and principles, I trained her to be an extraordinarily well-behaved dog who happens to love everyone she meets.

I never once jerked on the leash, let alone hit her or punish her by doing anything more than ignoring her. I did, however, learn a new level of patience I didn't know I had--I tend to be a hothead.

As a result, I found this book shocking and extraordinarily outdated in its approach. The monks dismiss nonviolent training in their chapter 'Discipline: The Taboo Topic'. They state that while "it is understandable that most owners would prefer to use no force whatsoever...", it is fair to ask whether such an approach is reasonably possible and in harmony with the natural dynamics of pack existence. In a wolf pack..." (p. 65-66). And thereby begins the fallacious analogy that dogs function basically as wolves, and the human as the pack leader that is responsible for dealing out punishment.

Sadly, this comparison has been found to be completely misguided by every sort of legitimate study. 'De-Bunking the "Alpha Dog" Theory' in The Whole Dog Journal gives an excellent overview of the bad science it is all based on, so I don't intend to go into it here.

Nonetheless, the Monks can't give it up. That is understandable, as it is the only conceivable justification for using their techniques--without it, they would be simply inhumane.

Their fundamental opposition to the core of positive reinforcement based training is expressed when they claim that the dog must understand that "not paying attention to you in a given situation will have serious, unpleasant consequences" (p.66). This approach is more familiarly known as 'spare the rod, spoil the child(dog)'.

They also provide an absurd linguistic rationale for discipline, pointing out how the word itself is indirectly related to a Latin term for 'to learn', which "implies that good discipline flows from good teaching and good leadership" (p.67). The Monks should know that an observation of a curiosity of the genetic relationship of an English word to its Latin root is hardly a justification for any philosophy, let alone one that goes on to describe how you should hit your dog.

However, despite their weak foray into the field of language, the Monks are fully aware of the power of words. They know that it must be stressful for a potential dog-owner to read how they need to regularly 'pop the leash' (which has a choke collar on the end of it). As a result, jerking the leash becomes "a correction", which sounds much more professional and antiseptic. Of course, this should only be "mildly unpleasant", so it must be OK.

"How hard do you hit the dog?" the Monks ask us (p.75). "A good general rule is that if you did not get a response, a yelp or other sign, after the first hit, it wasn't hard enough." The words speak for themselves, but they continue and emphasize how a "sharp smack under the chin followed by a quick string of obedience commands lets him know just how displeased you are with this behavior." This, to me, displays a fundamental misconception of how 'obedience commands' work. Taught correctly, the 'obedience commands' provide a positive experience for the dog--they want to perform them because they know that good things happen. Thus, showing your displeasure by getting the animal to successfully do what you have taught her to do seems, frankly, too bizarre to comprehend. Should you continue to castigate the dog while she obeys?

To be continued...

Katie Boyer says

I have never owned a dog but am doing some reading to prepare to get one soon. I like their overall approach and attitude. I can definitely see myself referencing this during dog training later too.
