



Trust in training and interactions with our dog (or other pets)

Trust forms an important part in training and behaviour. Many behaviour problems can result from a lack of trust. In fact, a lot of the time a dog reacts or behaves aggressively to another person or dog because they don't trust them or have learnt not to trust in certain situations. But it doesn't end there! If you want a confident, happy and outgoing dog then trust in training is critical.

It seems many trainers know and talk about the metaphor of the trust account coined by Dr Susan Friedman, but not many industry experts & pet owners know about it and its critical if you work or live with animals, especially dogs. (I say animals as the trust account can work with many species, especially our pets).

If you think of a bank account, we can make deposits and withdrawals. The more deposits we make the healthier our bank balance is. If you socialise and train your dog in a safe way you make deposits and this builds the dog's confidence and wellbeing. If you train your dog harshly or take them to environments which are scary or harmful to them then this is a withdrawal. And this is most apparent with puppies as we see the results very quickly – it's not uncommon for us to see puppies at their very first puppy class that already have a deficit in the trust account 😞

Deposits to your pet's trust account include anything that is reinforcing in a positive way to them. This can include praise, treats or playing with a toy, but it also includes choice and a level of control in their environment (access to food, water, shelter, comfort etc). It's also important that our reinforcers to our pet are consistent, well timed and strong.

Withdrawals to your pet's trust account are generally things that involve punishment, but may be more subtle than that. Reprimands and correction are the most common path to a bankrupt trust account (and relationship) but also forcing a puppy or dog into a situation they don't wish to be in, taking away choice or confusing them with outdated training methods. A common one we see in puppy class is the 'old school' training people use to take their puppies food away from them in an attempt to teach the pup the human is in control; not only does this confuse the pup, but they pretty quickly learn not to trust a human around food.

Now sometimes your pet has to go to the vet which may be scary or even painful but if you've already had positive experiences with the vet or if your dog is already resilient due to a healthy balance of positive experiences (deposits). Then the vet visit is less likely to impact them. And if your vet is proactive and minimises stress and discomfort (by working with you and your pet as an individual) then they have helped to build that healthy balance prior.



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The most important thing is to make sure you always make plenty more deposits than withdrawals. If you can build a big trust account with your dog, then withdrawals aren't so harmful in the long term. Problems occur in a major way when the trust account goes into deficit. This doesn't just happen to older dogs; it can very quickly happen to puppies so make sure you are well informed and work with someone qualified right from the start.

Article by Sarah of Clever Creatures. For more information or to request a topic go to www.clevercreatures.com.au