

Outlook

Trip Or Kick?

We have a “people-management” homily we sometimes tell at Glenair that I think dovetails perfectly with this special *QwikConnect* salute to Military Working Dogs and their handlers. At its heart, the story is about building trust, but more importantly, why trust is such an important element in all successful relationships.

Let’s imagine you bring home a new puppy. You of course want the dog to become a contributing member of your household (“add value” as we say in business) so you treat the dog kindly, providing it with food, shelter, and regular attention. As the dog grows, you train the animal in the do’s and don’ts of the household, and reward good behavior with positive reinforcement. Over time, both you and Fido come to trust each other without reservation, and ultimately, to delight in each other’s loyal company.

Now imagine instead, you bring your new puppy home and your plan for “getting the most out of your pet” is to beat the animal with a rolled-up newspaper anytime its behavior disappoints you. Or to punish that “bad dog” by withholding its food or kicking it outside at night to suffer in the rain and cold. You try shouting, shouting louder, and finally just give up because this particular breed of dog is obviously just too stubborn or stupid to get it.

Now of course this story is not just about dogs, because it turns out behaving in a manner designed to instill trust is also the most important thing people do to build and maintain good human relationships. A successful dog owner earns an animal’s trust by living up to his part of the bargain, by giving his pet a warm and nurturing home. Earning and keeping the trust of an employee, a customer, a vendor, a partner, a spouse, a child—whoever—is no different. It’s all about embracing your end of the deal, your responsibilities, and making good on that deal, that promise, consistently and fairly.

Are people really no different than dogs? I didn’t say that. But the way we respond to positive-reinforcement and fair play is surely similar. The handlers who dedicate their military careers (thank you for your service!) to working with and training MWDs know this better than anyone. I am told they are specifically trained to never doubt their dog’s abilities when working the animal, as any doubt—any breakdown in trust—can negatively impact the dog’s performance. “Emotions travel up and down the leash” is the expression they use to explain the unique bond of trust they share with their dogs.

I am also told a dog can tell the difference between an accidental trip and an intentional kick. I think the truth of the matter is that dogs, like people, have little difficulty reading each others’ intentions, both those they have learned to trust, as well as those they don’t.

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