

Currently, the world of animal training enthusiasts is divided into two sectors, academics and layman. Upon reading the common literature available to the layman, one finds that information to be misleading, misinformed, and full of misconceptions. This especially applies to the layman’s understanding of the scientific literature and terminology. It is not uncommon to find foundation terms, such as positive punishment, to be incorrectly defined. On the other hand, the academic world has little respect for the ability of the layman to apply behavior-modification techniques producing profound behavioral changes in animals. The academic world refutes layman’s information as being unscientific, anecdotal information with little relevance. Thus, upon reading the book Carrots and Sticks, Principles of Animal Training, I was beyond ecstatic to read a comprehensive undertaking that bridges the world of academia and layman. This book has been long overdue! The book discusses the foundation of behavioral modification that has been deduced from scientific studies of animals. The terminology is accurately defined but in such a way as to be understood by the layman. Each topic is expanded by use of actual case studies, once again bridging the gap between academics and layman.

The book Carrots and Sticks, Principles of Animal Training is divided into two sections. The first section of the book, entitled “General Principles,” covers theory and principles of behavior modification. The second section, entitled “Case Histories,” provides case histories that illustrate the application of behavior-modification techniques. The design is such that each section can stand-alone although they do complement each other well.

The section on theory and principles is an inclusive description of the different types of behavior-modification techniques that have been observed and studied by ethologists and comparative psychologists. The “General Principles” section contains four chapters covering the following topics: instincts and their modifications, learning theory and positive reinforcement, fear, punishment, and avoidance training and animal intelligence. Within each chapter the authors present the subject matter, discuss studies and outcomes, and refer the reader to actual case studies. The case studies present the application of the theory presented by the authors. This section of the book is easy to read, has excellent coverage of the topic and appropriately uses terminology. The information is presented in a user-friendly fashion that is beneficial to the student of animal behavior as well as to the layperson interested in training animals.

The “Case Histories” section includes a wide range of animals and behavior-modification techniques. Some of the animals and techniques presented in the case studies are pulled from scientific laboratory experiments. Many of the animals and techniques are representative of the nonacademic, real-life interactions between humans and animals. This refreshing approach acknowledges the relevance of case studies along with scientific experimentation in the understanding of behavioral modification.

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Advance Access publication June 8, 2009
doi:10.1093/icb/icp016