

Book Review

The Art Of Raising A Puppy
by The Monks of New Skete

It is clear the Monks of New Skete sincerely mean well, however their lack of knowledge and training skills is evident in their books. The Monks of New Skete share the same goal as other trainers, in that they want to see dogs that are well-behaved and included into their family's lives.

Many years ago I read the 1991 book "The Art Of Raising A Puppy" from the Monks of New Skete and at that time thought it was a great book. I recently purchased the "Completely Revised And Updated" version of "The Art Of Raising A Puppy" in hopes that I would find a new and improved version of the 1991 book. Sadly that is not the case. Since reading the first book I have become a professional trainer and I continued to learn from exceptional individuals and now I could never recommend their books or their training.

A few of the glaring problems with the books are:

They state rightly that it is normal and "to expect some whining this first night" from your new puppy when you go to bed. They recommend you "reach down and quiet him without a fuss....Do this calmly, soothing him at first. If the whining persists, a gentle scruff shake along with a low 'No, go to sleep' may be necessary." What! A scruff shake and a verbal correction for a puppy spending the first night away from his mother and littermates? And this is supposed to be coming from their new best friend?

For housetraining the procedure in the book regarding covering the whole floor in newspaper will create more challenges than necessary in housetraining your puppy.

The 2011 "Completely Revised And Updated" edition on page 64 is another example of what you want to avoid when feeding puppies and the way not to handle these situations. A better course of action would be for the Monks to structure things so as to prevent unnecessary possessiveness and aggression in the puppies during this extremely sensitive time, when the effects of these experiences are permanent. The concern with The Monks of New Skete book continues in the chapter "Discipline and Common Puppy Problems". The advice on forcefully dealing with the five-month-old male German shepherd that growls at guests is another huge issue. Sadly, following their guidance can actually make the problem much worse.

The book goes on to recommend training collars "Once your puppy has been on a flat-buckle collar or a martingale collar for one to two months". There is no reason for this. "Training collars" are completely unnecessary for a puppy or an adult dog. They recommend a "snap-around nylon training collar" (basically a nylon choke collar) and a modified prong collar. (plastic prong collar). On page 250 (2011 edition) they state they have begun introducing remote collars (shock collars) in their adult training program. Unfortunately due to a lack of

knowledge and training skills the Monks have resorted to “training tools”. In reality none of these “tools” are needed to train a dog, even a challenging dog to an advanced level.

The other glaring issue in the book is the over emphasis on dominance and alpha. The Monks approach is to show the dog who is boss and act harshly “when necessary”. Dogs, like humans, would much rather follow a leader than a boss. The Monks could learn “How to Be Your Dog’s Best Friend” from knowledgeable trainers like Suzanne Clothier and John Rogerson, to name just two. Dominance is exercising the most influence or control in the context of a relationship between individuals. You don’t need to establish an authoritarian relationship to be considered the dominant one in the relationship; you need to be a leader. Styles of leadership are not limited to just two choices; permissive or harsh. Leadership doesn't require you to turn into a food container and act like a PEZ dispenser, nor do you need a “behavior science” degree. What is required is that you understand dogs and the art of dog training. Then simply act like a leader not an adversary and the dogs will look like partners not prisoners. If you get your part right the dogs will be well-behaved, under control and more often cooperating rather than submitting.

Many dogs with training or behavior problems that are mistaken for “dominant” are just lacking self-control and discipline, and were never taught manners nor properly trained. What many people have mistaken for “dominance” was an independent, confident, assertive dog that would not be referred to as biddable. There are dogs with strong personalities that require a committed leader to maintain control, but the Monks training tools and harsh methods are unnecessary. Even the more challenging dogs can be trained without the harsh treatment and all the “training collar” tools.

A far superior book on every level is “The Dog Vinci Code” by John Rogerson. John Rogerson is a world renowned dog trainer and behaviorist who has been training dogs for over 40-years. For a better approach to the housetraining and feeding issues noted above read “The Dog Vinci Code - Chapter 4 “Early Behavioural Development”. With regards to the advice in the “Discipline and Common Puppy Problems” on forcefully dealing with the five-month-old male German shepherd that growls at guests, start with chapter 42, page 247 “Understanding Aggression” and then move to chapter 44, page 260 “Fear and Aggression” for a better approach to dealing with such behavior. For more insight on dealing with a dog that growls, read page 215 in “Bones Would Rain From The Sky” by Suzanne Clothier.

If you are still curious and are open to increasing your knowledge about living with and training dogs, get anything written by Suzanne Clothier. Read her book “Bones Would Rain From The Sky” chapter 17 if you want to understand how and when to apply compulsion or coercion if/when persuasion has reached its limits. Suzanne Clothier has been working with animals professionally since 1977, with a deep background of experience that includes obedience, agility, puppy testing, breeding, Search and Rescue, conformation, instructing, kennel management and canine midwifery. Suzanne is also a German Shepherd breeder and her 8

generations of Shepherds have been successful in obedience, agility, SAR, tracking, herding and therapy work.

It's my sincere hope that the Monks of New Skete will come to a new way of seeing and seek out some of the exceptional trainers whose methods result in well-trained dogs, and whose approach is based on building a strong relationship and being your dog's best friend. I'm certain the dogs would appreciate it.