

## **Daily Doga Inspirations for you and your dog**

**Awareness, Balance, Relationship. Education, Well-Being, Maureen Ross, MA**

In ACT Training Classes, events and book-signings, people often ask “What is the difference between positive reinforcement training and [Awareness Centered Training – ACT?](#)” the title and concept of the book - that BTW is chock full (318 pages).

Good question, given all the training programs available today. After a long conversation with a dear friend, behaviorist and trainer, we both agreed that training classes have changed a lot in the last 10 years (trends). Times when we would fill a group class with 17 eager dog parents and puppies is now 4-6 with anxious people wanting to “get in” their training sessions so their dog can be trained, NOW! The rest they’ll do “on their own or online.” What the fig? That concept I’ve never quite figured out either with live children or dogs!

[Awareness Centered Training – ACT](#) is not just about training but a whole approach to a happy, healthy and confident dog - and dog parent. I have had dogs since childhood, so obviously my training has taken many paths and crossroads. Gratefully, I have found my unique niche believing that pet therapy dogs are trained very well, from the get-go, when people have the knowledge and information. Puppies / dogs who attend ACT will have all inclusive training with Socialization and Manners (SAM), desensitization to a variety of sights, sounds, smells, people and equipment, AND gentle positive training. It makes sense because dogs live in the real world with us right? And, we know for sure that dogs learn a faster than we thought. By 1-year they are about 15 (considering nature, nurture and environment).

Positive simply means that we are not using physical force to get, especially puppies, to respond with behaviors that 99% of the time they do naturally (sit, down, stand, roll over, eat, relax, play, kiss, jump, dig, bark and chew). Whether small, medium, large or giant (we have three of these sizes living with us) dogs will do at least some or all of these behaviors quite naturally and in full-force through adolescence (8 months to about 3 years). Beginning early, as with a human child, being aware of our dog’s abilities, gives us an opportunity to teach the way many want to anyway, QUICKLY and with RESULTS. There is a way and dog’s enjoy it – ACT.

**ACT is not just about our dogs.** It’s about US! How do we view ourselves? How does our dog view us as a leader with empathy and communication skills? ACT is about integrating training into daily living and learning with our dogs (eat, play, teach and be AWARE).

Sensory overload is being diagnosed for humans *frequently*. It is now a common malady for our dogs that pick up on, and try, to process our stress in their own way. What to do?

Read [Awareness Centered Training](#) not just for your dog but yourself. Every day, we need to unplug and breathe. Dogs do this naturally. Remember SCAN and SWITCH? If not, visit [Daily Doga Inspirations](#).

**Life has competing demands.** To maintain balance in our lives takes practice. Scan your body. Be aware of your dog's body language and response to you. Is it reactive or proactive?

I've found myself juggling many things and I bet you do too (work, school, family management). Pull back and ask, "Is it worth it?" Perspective is one of the most important things. And, a dog's perspective is different than ours. They live in the moment. Being AWARE of this while doing something, as natural and necessary as feeding your dog twice a day is vital to this brief and nurturing connection (see [Doggy Diner](#)).

I had a mentor share with me that in order to be balanced and successful; you need to be inside a situation and outside of a situation at the same time. I call this "awareness" by "scanning" what's going on around you. You need to be empathetic on the inside and sensible on the outside, seeing the situation for what it's worth in the moment.

When you are overwhelmed or stressed out, STOP, lie down, sit comfortably OR take your dog for a "no expectation" relaxing walk. SCAN and BREATHE DEEPLY NOSE-TO-NAVEL. Explore your body from the tip of your head to toes. In yoga, teachers may finish a session by having us tense up each part of our body and release. Sounds contradictory as we are trying to relax. It is the release of the tension that enables our body (muscles, joints, nerves) to relax. It is the same with our dogs. Watch them wake up, bow, stretch and yawn. They do these behaviors for a reason (see [Body Language at Dog Talk](#)).

The questions I ask and suggest you do are, "Do I feel calm? Do I feel centered? Am I aware of how I feel? Am I aware of what my dog is doing, feeling? And, mostly, do I feel content and balanced?"

Do this for five minutes every day, or spend days or weeks being stressed out. It is a choice. Sounds like an Oprah-isms but ending the day, at bedtime, grateful for the positive things works. Be aware of what you and your dog are doing and your life has no other direction to go but one of positive awareness.

*Enjoy the Journey!*