CHANGING YOUR DOG’S EMOTIONAL RESPONSE… CHANGES YOUR DOG’S BEHAVIOR

I would rather have cookies in my jacket pockets than a chain around my dog’s neck.
— Pat Miller, The Power of Positive Dog Training

THE OPEN BAR TECHNIQUE:
ALSO KNOWN AS COUNTERCONDITIONING

This method teaches that wonderful, amazing things only happen in the presence of the stimuli the dog finds scary. And the wonderful stuff happens regardless of how the dog behaves.

Jean Donaldson, talks about the "Open Bar" technique in her book, Dogs are from Neptune. The graphics below present the concept in a brief nutshell. You can read more about this technique in the book, available here:

The Open Bar technique is also known as counterconditioning without desensitization—that wonderful, amazing things only happen in the presence of the stimuli the dog finds scary. And the wonderful stuff happens regardless of how the dog behaves.

Because dogs are very good at making associations, this technique allows us to address any underlying negative emotions and begin to change them, turning things like dogs, bicycles, strollers, delivery men with dollies full of boxes into predictors of Good Things for Dogs.

We build the strongest new *positive* association possible by making sure the bar is open 100% of the time the dog is exposed to the scary stimuli.

Handout: Creating a Positive Conditioned Emotional Response to Unfamiliar Dogs
Of utmost importance is that the bar close as soon as the Scary Thing leaves. This makes the association very clear to the dog- it's only the scary thing that makes the extra good things happen. By doing this, we are able to start to change the reaction from "ARGH! Dog! Go away, go away!" to "YAY! Dog! Dogs make Good Stuff happen for me!"

From there, we're able to drive the point home: Dogs (bicycles, strollers, men with dollies full of boxes) make good things happen, and not any other thing that may be happening in the environment.

Because we need to make a good- no, a GREAT impression, the bar consists of things the dog gets in no other circumstance. This is not the time for kibble or soft treats, it's time to break out the big guns. Chicken, cheese, steak and so on. Remember that the dog is not dining on these foods all day, every day and so we needn't be concerned about calories. We can adjust meals if there is concern, but cutting corners here will run counter to our mission- which is to strengthen the classical conditioning association and turn scary things into wonderful things.

**COUNTER CONDITIONING IS OFTEN PAIRED WITH SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION**

- BLOG ARTICLE: [Open Bar-Closed Bar Counter Conditioning and Desensitization](#)
- VIDEO: [Wildflower Counter Conditioning and Desensitization (CC &D) Protocol](#)
- [Desensitization Article](#)