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HOW TO NOT FU*K UP YOUR DOG

A self-help book for dog owners



THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU IF . . .

You love your dog, but you're frustrated.

You've tried all the advice and it's not quite working.

You sense there's something deeper going on.

This book is about helping you build awareness around the invisible stuff; your stress, your energy, your nervous system and making it visible and manageable. It's about giving you tools to become the grounded, attuned human your dog deserves.

Instead of becoming the problem, this book guides you towards becoming the solution.

"Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself" - Rumi

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INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, I've been helping dog owners understand something most dog trainers don't say out loud: the problem isn't your dog.

Before you throw this book across the room, hear me out. The majority of the problems I encounter stem from a dysregulation of either the owners or the dog's nervous system. Dogs respond to the world around them, especially to the humans they live with. And more often than not, it's our own lack of self-awareness that gets in the way of finding a solution.

So, how do you not fu*k up your dog?

The answer is way simpler than you'd think. It's not about treats or training tools. It's about energy. Yours, theirs, and how the two of you regulate together. When you understand how to work with that energy, instead of against it, everything starts to shift in a positive direction.

When I first got into dog training, I did what most people do: I soaked up all the “expert” advice. I learned a lot, some of it brilliant, some of it . . . not. Pretty quickly, I started noticing things that didn't sit right. Particularly the way dogs behaviour was being labelled and controlled, it felt off. So I stopped blindly following the rules. I started watching, listening, and actually paying attention to what was happening in front of me.

I studied dogs. Not just in training contexts, but in life, in parks, in homes, in groups, in one-on-one moments. I looked at how they interacted with each other, how they responded to different people and got curious as to how my own energy affected them. And what I found out wasn't some complex behavioural equation. It was something raw and deeply intuitive: Dogs respond to energy.

Early in my career, I started working with a string of clients who had reactive dogs. Barking, lunging, pulling on lead when they saw other dogs. Almost every case came with a story, a scare, an attack, a moment the owner couldn't forget. "Ever since that day," they'd say, "my dog hasn't been the same."

I'd meet them at a park and observe. And what I started noticing wasn't just the dog's behaviour, it was the human's. I could feel their fear as another dog approached. I saw the tension in their shoulders, the bracing in their breath, the way they anticipated disaster before anything even happened. And I began to wonder: Who's actually reacting here, the dog, or the person?

So I started asking: "Would you mind if I took your dog for a short walk?" They'd hand me the leash. I'd walk away. And nine times out of ten, the barking, the lunging, the panic? Gone. The dog was relaxed. Curious. Sociable. The problem behaviour disappeared the moment the owner stepped out of the energy exchange.

That was the moment everything changed for me. The dog wasn't stuck in the trauma. The human was. The dog had moved on, the owner hadn't and the dog was simply responding to that stuck energy in real time.

I stopped asking, "Is this behaviour good or bad?" and started asking, "Is this energy right for this moment?". Because let's be honest, high energy isn't bad. It's exciting and joyful, in the right context. But when that same energy shows up in a situation that calls for calm or focus, it can become chaotic or even dangerous. When you stop reacting to the behaviour and start tuning in to the energy, your responses get sharper, kinder, and way more compassionate. That shift doesn't just make life easier for you, it makes your dog's life better. It gives them space to be themselves, and it helps you meet them where they are, not where some outdated training book says they should be.

In this book, I'm going to show you what I've learned, not just from science and psychology, but from real dogs, in real-life situations. I've worked with hundreds of dogs and their people. I've seen the ripple effects of modern family life, lockdowns, anxiety, overstimulation, burnout and emotional disconnection and how all of that lands squarely on our dogs' shoulders.

Every dog owner I've worked with loves their dog. No one sets out to screw things up. But when we don't know any better, we repeat the same outdated patterns. We follow bad advice. We misread what our dogs are trying to tell us. And slowly, our compassion starts to fade, not because we don't care, but because we've been taught to look in all the wrong places for solutions. This isn't spiritual fluff, this is nervous system science.

In the chapters ahead, we'll unpack what your dog really needs, what co-regulation looks like in practice, and how your own state sets the tone, not just for training, but for the entire relationship. This book will reframe the problems you encounter with your dog, show you what your dog sees and give you the tools to become the calm, grounded, attuned human they've been waiting for.

You don't need to be the problem, instead you can choose to become the answer.

GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT

Before we can talk about training, behaviour, or anything more advanced, we need to start with the most important foundation: meeting your dog's core needs.

Just like us, to thrive, dogs need to feel safe, both physically and emotionally. They also need to feel connected to us, their environment and ideally, to other dogs too. Without safety and connection, it's impossible for any sentient being (human or dog) to fully achieve self actualisation.

For dogs, this idea of self actualisation means living a life where they can express their natural behaviours, feel secure, and be mentally and physically fulfilled. It's about helping them reach their potential, whatever that may look like for your individual dog.

A healthy dog needs the right balance of sleep, food, exercise, stimulation, and social contact. That balance will look different depending on the dog's breed, age, and personality, and will change throughout their life.

Dogs benefit from positive experiences with other dogs. They are social creatures, and just like us, they can form strong friendships. These relationships, when safe and appropriate, can have a huge impact on their emotional, mental, and even physical wellbeing.

I want this book to be as widely useful as possible, so I'll be avoiding breed-specific advice. But I also won't pretend all dogs are the same. They're not. Different breeds were developed for different jobs, and those instincts don't disappear just because we've invited them into our house. A terrier isn't going to have the same needs as a retriever, or a collie, or a guard breed. As a dog owner, it's your responsibility to learn what your specific dog needs, and that starts with understanding what they were bred to do.

A lot of the long-term problems I see in my work could have been avoided if the owner had chosen a dog that suited their lifestyle. That's not a judgement, it's just the reality. I work in London, with pet dogs, living in busy urban environments. These are often labradors, spaniels, terriers, poodles, all dogs with strong instincts and a need for stimulation and structure. There are breeds I wouldn't personally take on because I know I couldn't meet their needs. That's not failure, that's just being honest.

Too many dogs end up in shelters, or suffer neglect, simply because someone didn't pause long enough to ask the right questions before bringing them home. In an ideal world, no breeder would hand over a dog to someone who isn't suitable. But we don't live in that world. We live in a commercial one, where dogs are often sold like products, with little thought to whether the match is right.

So yes, food, exercise, enrichment, sleep and breed traits all matter. But ultimately the success you have with your dog starts off with you making a well informed decision.

MORE THAN WORDS: THE LANGUAGE OF ENERGY

Dogs have a way of tuning into their instincts that many of us humans have long forgotten. They rely on these instincts to read a situation and decide how to respond. If they haven't already built a mental map of the world through early positive experiences, which in dog training we call socialisation, they can become overwhelmed pretty quickly.

In today's fast-paced, noisy world, most of us have lost touch with our instincts. We've had to learn to filter out or ignore so much information to keep our minds from feeling totally overloaded.

Dogs don't just bark or wag their tails to communicate, they speak with energy. This energy flows through subtle shifts in their body language, their intentions, emotions, and their very presence. It's a wordless language, one based purely on feeling and instinct.

Dogs pick up on the emotional and energetic states of the people and animals around them. That's why having a dog can feel like having a sixth sense. They invite us back to a more instinctual way of being, helping us reconnect with something long forgotten inside ourselves.

What is the most powerful energy in your dog's life? It's you! If you're feeling upset, scared, or worried, your dog will sense it and display a physical reaction. Our emotions create powerful energy waves that dogs mirror almost instinctively, unless we've specifically trained them to respond differently.

So what's the ideal dog energy? Confidence. At its core, confidence means a well-socialised dog, one that's been gently and positively exposed to all kinds of people, places, and experiences early on (ideally in their first five months of life). This early socialisation helps your dog develop healthy homeostasis, which is a fancy way of saying that their body can keep itself calm and balanced, no matter what's happening around them.

Confident dogs tend to stay cool and collected, even in new or challenging situations. Other dogs and people pick up on that calm energy and feel safe around them.

On the flip side, fearful dogs tend to send out fear energy, which other dogs can smell from a mile away. This creates a negative feedback loop, where fear breeds more fear. High-energy, happy dogs might get corrected by others but are rarely attacked. But fearful dogs? They're at greater risk of being bitten or attacked because the approaching dog senses their anxiety and reacts defensively.

We humans are often disconnected from the subtle signals our gut gives us. Dogs, though, live through their instincts and they respond to changes in energy and environments instinctively. For example, dogs can sense changes in weather through shifts in atmospheric pressure, sounds, smells, and movements. They have a supercharged gut instinct that picks up on things we don't even notice.

When dogs get triggered by something in their environment, they might show "unwanted" behaviours. It's natural for owners to want to correct or scold them but here's the catch: because the dog's nervous system is already on high alert, your negative energy actually confirms their fear or anxiety. Instead of escalating things, try giving your dog some space from the trigger until you see their body begin to relax.

If your dog isn't calming down or responding to simple commands, the first thing to do is "check yourself" before trying again. Sometimes, just your body language or tone can unintentionally make things worse.

When I say "check yourself", I mean: remember your dog mirrors your energy. If you're tense, worried, or uncomfortable, it's realistic to expect your dog feels the same.

Many owners have shared that if their dog indicates something is "off," they trust them and remove themselves from the situation. I remember the final day of a dog training assessment week. We had one last chance for a practice session before the exam. Over 50 trainers and their dogs were packed into a hall. The pressure was thick, and I could feel it rising. I decided I'd benefit more from some calm and fresh air, so I stepped outside.

And one by one, other trainers followed. Inside, many of the dogs had become agitated, whining, barking, pacing, unable to settle. The space had become a pressure cooker of stress and anxiety, and the dogs' instincts were to escape it.

TIP ONE: The breathing exercise

Try this simple trick: breath-in and fill-up your diaphragm, then exhale slowly and loudly. Do this a few times and watch how your dog reacts. As you breathe out, let your body relax too. Check you are not holding tension in your shoulders, neck, jaw. When we get scared or worried, we tend to hold our breath and that freaks our dogs out. A trainer I know says, "Yoga is free with dog training", remember to breathe!

I use this exercise to calm my dogs when they get overexcited, for example when I pull out the ball and they start lunging and barking. Instead of giving commands right away, I just breathe. Once they settle a bit, I ask for a sit, then reward that calm behaviour by throwing the ball.

If my dogs get overstimulated, whether by another excitable dog or a noisy group of children. I stop, breathe deeply, and wait for the energy to lower. Then I call them, bring out treats, and ask for a sit, ensuring that their backs are to the distraction in question. This does two things: it shifts their focus away from the trigger, and it activates their thinking brain instead of their emotional brain. Once calm and focused, we can move past the distraction. My calm energy is their cue to follow my lead.

Sometimes, your dog might be too worked up for breathing alone to help. If that happens, stay calm by "checking yourself" and simply put them back on lead and walk away.

TIP TWO: The 54321 Exercise

You may be familiar with this simple but extremely powerful mind/body hack. The 54321 exercise is an easy trick to help you get out of your head and back into the present moment. What you have to do, is notice 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste. It works like a reset button for your brain and body.

Dogs don't just read our body language or routines, they sync to our energy, often without us even realising it. This might seem extremely simple and obvious, but unless you truly know and understand this fact, you will be unable to harness the power this knowledge holds.

TIP THREE: If I'm really struggling to stay calm, I do something a bit silly: I sing a happy uplifting song. I call it "bringing out the big guns." It makes both me and my dogs less worried and more focused. It lightens the energy and moves it in a more positive direction. I use this in an 'oh shit' moment where a huge picnic or a group of horses comes into close proximity to my group of dogs.

Here's the big takeaway: You have the power and the choice to shift your own energy and by doing that, you can change your dog's energy too. When you stop looking at the behaviour and instead look at the energy being displayed, you are better informed to provide an alternative energy for your dog to mirror.

Quantum physics tells us everything in the universe is energy vibrating at different frequencies, including you and your dog. It's a complex science I won't pretend to fully understand, but I've experienced it firsthand in my work with dogs. It's a beautiful way to understand how our invisible connections shape our relationships.

You know those people who just have great energy? You feel good being around them. Then there are others who, even after a brief interaction, leave you feeling drained. That kind of energetic messaging bypasses logic and speaks directly to our intuition.

Try sharing with your dog the energy you'd like to receive. As Einstein said:

"Everything is energy and that's all there is to it. Match the frequency of the reality you want and you cannot help but get that reality."

CO-REGULATION: TRAINING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Whether we like it or not, our dogs are constantly co-regulating with us. Co-regulation is a natural process that happens between mammals. It's how we build healthy, cooperative social bonds; think of it as our “social engagement system”. Our nervous systems share safety signals back and forth to help both of you stay calm, connected, and ready to learn.

The best way to understand co-regulation is to imagine a mother and her baby. Babies can't regulate their own emotions or nervous systems yet, so they rely on their mothers to provide safety cues. Being close, especially during breastfeeding, helps synchronise their nervous systems. The calm, nurturing energy from the mother literally transfers to the baby, helping them feel safe and secure. This connection is essential for survival.

But if a baby senses stress from their environment or, worse, is left without their mother's comforting presence, their nervous system reacts by becoming either hyper-alert or shutting down. The signals from their surroundings clearly say, “I'm not safe”.

It might surprise you, but the same kind of deep physiological connection happens between you and your dog. Dogs are incredibly sensitive to our emotions, body language, and energy. When you're calm and steady, your dog picks up on that and feels safe. When you're stressed or anxious, they feel it too and may become unsettled or reactive.

When we create a space where our dogs feel co-regulated, they show us happy, playful behaviours. This creates a positive feedback loop, a flow of calm energy, that helps us tune into our dog's needs more clearly and makes training and daily life much smoother.

TIP ONE: Sometimes, the Best Action Is No Action at All

If your dog is reacting to things like strong wind, loud noises, or other stressful changes you can't control, sometimes the best way to help is simply by being calm yourself. On a busy London Tube, for example, I don't touch or talk to my dog when the crowd gets overwhelming. Instead, I protect their space and focus on my own breathing. That calm energy is the best safety cue I can send.

You might have heard people joke about older women who talk to their dogs like they're babies. Well, science shows they were onto something! The calm, soothing sound of their voice helps regulate their dog's nervous system. And bonus: it also releases oxytocin (the "love hormone") for both dog and human.

One story that always sticks with me comes from Julian Clary's book *The Lick of Love: How Dogs Changed My Life*. Back in the 1980s, during a wild party phase, his usually inseparable dog, Fanny, refused to sleep in his bedroom. Instead, she chose the quieter sofa in the living room. Julian thought Fanny was "judging" his chaotic lifestyle but the deeper truth lies in how dogs naturally co-regulate with their humans.

Fanny's calm, tranquil energy was disrupted by Julian's chaotic energy. As a sensitive animal, she would have been absorbed this heightened energy, making it harder for her to relax enough to sleep (sleep is a dog's most vulnerable state). This story highlights that dogs don't reject us out of judgment; they respond deeply to the energy we project, showing just how essential calm, balanced energy and co-regulation are in dog training and relationships.

I also remember a friend telling me he loved his dogs more than his children. Which at the surface appears like a terrible thing to say. But when you look at that statement through the lens of co-regulation, it's easier to understand. He had struggled with emotional regulation for years, and his dogs helped him feel safe in ways his children, who were testing boundaries like young adults do, couldn't at the time. His dog's calm presence helped steady his nervous system when life felt overwhelming.

This is one reason dogs are so often used as support animals for people living with PTSD and other emotional challenges. Their natural ability to co-regulate with us can bring deep, tangible healing. It's also why losing a dog can cause such profound grief. People who don't have dogs often struggle to understand how losing a pet can feel even more painful than losing a human family member. But the truth is, many of us spend more time with our dogs than with most people in our lives. The bond becomes not just emotional but physiological, inseparable, and in many cases, interdependent. Our dogs give us a powerful sense of love, safety, and physical comfort. They are, without question, one of humanity's greatest gifts.

Understanding co-regulation changes how we see our dogs and ourselves. It's a reminder that training and connection start from inside us, from how we manage our own energy and emotions. When we get that right, everything else falls into place.

IN SYNC: UNDERSTANDING OUR NERVOUS SYSTEMS

You know that feeling when your dog suddenly reacts, maybe barking or lunging at a stranger, or just freezing on the pavement like their paws are glued down? It's easy to think at that moment: Why are they acting like this? What am I doing wrong? But the reality is, it's not just behaviour, it's biology.

Your dog has a nervous system that's constantly scanning the world, trying to confirm one question, 'Am I safe'? The thing to remember is that your nervous system is doing exactly the same. This is an automatic and unconscious mechanism designed to alert us of anything that may present a danger.

As we discussed in the previous chapter, you and your dog's nervous systems are talking to each other all the time. This connection is called co-regulation, and it's one of the most powerful tools in dog training.

When you stay calm, grounded, and present, your dog can feel it. They begin to take their cues from your body, not just your words. And when they're in distress, you don't have to fix it all at once, you can just help them ride out the storm by coming back into your body and remembering to breathe.

In the chapter on Energy we discussed ways in which to start building awareness around how our dogs and our own bodies can harness, transform and release energy charges stored in our body. In this chapter we delve deeper into how energy is created and how it can show up in behaviour.

The term "trauma-informed" is becoming more common in conversations around mental health and education, but it also has an important place in dog training.

Many of the sudden behavioural changes I get called about, such as barking, reactivity, separation anxiety, or aggressive or destructive displays, aren't signs of a "bad dog." Often, they're signs that a dog is stuck in a dysregulated state because something has scared or overwhelmed them.

When this happens, the first thing I recommend is simple but powerful: calm everything down. I usually ask owners to spend a few quiet days with their dog, avoiding new people, new places, or anything stimulating. The goal is to create a predictable, calm environment where your dog can decompress and reset their system back to safety.

Some dogs bounce back after a quiet afternoon. Others might need a week or two. But if you push them or worse, punish them for how they're behaving you're likely to make them feel even less safe, which only increases the unwanted behaviour.

If nothing improves after a few days of rest and calm, it's time to check in with your vet. Pain, illness, or internal discomfort are often the hidden causes of behavioural changes, and they need to be ruled out before any kind of training can be considered. Working with a dog who's in pain or already emotionally overwhelmed can do them a lot of harm.

Two Real-Life Stories

The Cockapoo on High Alert

A normally relaxed, two-year-old Cockapoo suddenly started barking at people on walks. He also became more reactive in the garden and seemed on edge at home. His owners were understandably frustrated and thought he needed more training. But I asked them to think back, had anything unusual happened recently? At first, they couldn't think of anything. I suggested they stop correcting him and instead focus on creating a calm, stable environment with no new experiences for a few days.

A week later, they reported a huge improvement and then remembered something important. A few days before the change in behaviour, a workman had unexpectedly come up from their basement wearing a mask. The dog hadn't known anyone else was in the house, and this sudden appearance startled him deeply. From the dog's perspective, his safe home had been breached, and his nervous system flipped into high alert and that fear carried over into other areas of his life, like walks and garden time.

The Whippet and the Unexpected Trauma

Another case involved a one-year-old Whippet who had a freak accident in the park, a branch pierced his shoulder, requiring emergency surgery. After returning home, his previously resolved separation anxiety suddenly came back. The owners were confused, why now?

I explained that even though the operation had helped him physically heal, his nervous system had gone through something scary and destabilising. I advised them to keep things calm and predictable at home, to be patient, and to show him extra kindness while he settled back into safety. Within a couple of weeks, the behaviour settled completely. He no longer cried or barked when left alone.

It's important to remember: even under anaesthetic, the body can register trauma. We know that children and even adults can develop PTSD after surgery, despite being unconscious during the procedure. Dogs are no different. Their bodies might not "remember" in the way we do, but their nervous systems still react.

We often forget that, like humans, dogs are a combination of their nature and their experiences. Two dogs can go through the same event and react in completely different ways. One might bounce back quickly, while the other spirals into long-lasting fear or reactivity.

Just like us, dogs also have a "stress bucket" they can only handle so much before they overflow. Sometimes it's a single, intense event. Other times, it's a buildup of small stresses. As a dog owner, your job isn't to prevent all stress (that's impossible), but to learn to recognise when your dog, or you, is reaching your threshold and to take a break. When the bucket starts to overflow, remember you can choose to look after yourself and your dog, by pausing and allowing your system to reset.

The Four Survival States: Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn

When a dog is in survival mode, their nervous system will often fall into one of four instinctive responses: fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. These responses aren't "bad" behaviours, they are survival strategies.

Fight

This is usually a last resort. True fights are rare and risky, and most dogs would rather avoid them. Many times, what looks like a fight is actually a noisy, bluffing display, what a trainer friend of mine jokingly calls "handbags at dawn." No real injuries, just a lot of noise and puffed-up energy.

Flight

The classic "run away" response. A dog gets spooked and bolts from the park or hides under the bed. It's the most common response in anxious dogs.

Freeze

I see this one most often. A dog freezes in place, hoping to go unnoticed, especially around other dogs. They may lower their body, tuck their tail, and try to become invisible. One trainer shared a heartbreaking story: her dog was so obedient that it may have contributed to an attack. He ran into a section of the park and encountered another dog. He froze. She called him several times, but he didn't move. When he finally did, the other dog attacked. Had he stayed frozen a little longer, the situation may have defused on its own. It's a powerful reminder that a frozen dog isn't ignoring you, they're scared.

Fawn

The least talked-about, but perhaps the most heartbreaking. Fawning is a survival response where a dog tries to appease someone they're afraid of. We often see this misinterpreted as guilt, those videos online of dogs "smiling" with a cowered head after they've been "naughty." In reality, that's not guilt. That's fear. These dogs are trying to signal submission to avoid punishment.

Fawning is common in dogs who don't feel safe around humans. It may look polite on the outside, but it's a sign of deep internal distress. As a loving dog owner, this is the last thing you want your dog to feel around you.

Learning about the nervous system, both yours and your dog's really can shift how you understand behaviour. Instead of asking, "What's wrong with my dog?" you start asking, "What has my dog been through?" and "what do they need from me".

A helpful analogy: imagine a group of children who've all experienced something frightening. One cries. One lashes out. One goes silent. Their behaviours are different, but they all need the same thing: safety and compassion. Dogs are the same. The response might vary, but the need is the same.

TIP ONE: When you understand how a dog's nervous system interplays with dog training, it makes you cautious about conducting hands-on training. This is the part of my understanding that has caused me to jokingly describe myself as a failed dog trainer. 50% of the calls I receive require the same advice. Have a calm and compassionate RESET period. The length of time will depend on a dog's past experience and temperament and also what's caused the disruption.

TIP TWO: Once you have ruled out a stress response or pain. Go back to the beginning. Pretend as if you never taught your dog the skill and go back to stage one and start again.

TIP THREE: Consider Medical Support When Needed
Understanding the autonomic nervous system also explains why anti-anxiety medications are becoming more common for pets. For example, dogs who experience extreme fear during fireworks may benefit hugely from short-term medication. These medications can block the body's automatic fear response, allowing the dog to rest.

Over time, this creates a new association: fireworks = calm, not panic. In some cases, a brief course of medication can be enough to disrupt the fear loop and create more positive patterns.

One unintended downside of traditional training is that it can raise a client's expectations. When unwanted behaviour continues, frustration grows.

If we skip the reset period or miss a possible medical cause, we risk adding pressure to an already overwhelmed dog. In those moments, training might not just fail, it could make things worse.

This chapter holds the most important message in the book. If all you take away is how your dog's nervous system drives behaviour, then writing this was worth it. When your dog feels safe and understood, everything gets easier. And when you show yourself that same compassion, you and your dog can handle anything life throws at you.

WHAT YOU BELIEVE, YOUR DOG RECEIVES

This chapter dives into another area that is rarely explored in dog training. How your beliefs directly influence your ability to communicate and train effectively. Whether conscious or unconscious, your beliefs influence your nervous system, your energy, your posture, your tone of voice and, ultimately, your outcomes.

EXAMPLE ONE: A client's mindset can set them up to fail before they've even started. A common one I hear is: "My dog is stupid." This one is hard for me to hear, not just because I disagree, but because it's so limiting. I believe dogs are incredibly intelligent. In fact, I often see them as more intelligent than many of the humans I know.

But let's pause and imagine what kind of energy that belief communicates. "My dog is stupid." What does your body do when you say that? What tone do you take? Where do your shoulders go? What is your dog picking up on? It's certainly not mutual respect, cooperation, or curiosity, which are essential for clear communication. Instead, you're likely projecting frustration, disappointment, or worse, indifference.

This disconnect becomes obvious when we work on something like recall. I'll ask a client to call their dog and I can immediately see in their body language and tone that they don't believe their dog will return. Sometimes it makes me laugh out loud, not to mock them, but because the energy is so misaligned with what they're asking.

I'll say, "Okay, let's try that again but this time, convince me that you believe your dog is coming back." Shoulders back. Head up. Voice light and sing-song. Already, the dog is tuning in differently. Communication isn't just about commands. It's about the nervous system, the intention behind the words, and the unspoken energy behind the intention.

EXAMPLE TWO: The language we use in our heads and out loud matters deeply. Take, for example, the phrase: “My dog is defiant.” What if, instead, we reframed it to something more compassionate? “My dog is struggling to process what I’ve asked.” “Are they uncomfortable, or confused?”

When you start from the assumption that your dog is being ‘defiant,’ your response will likely come from a place of irritation or frustration. That energy, in turn, reinforces the very behaviour you’re trying to shift.

Sometimes a dog isn’t misbehaving, they’re just unmotivated, unsure, or distracted. And your energy, your posture, your facial expression, your tone can either help them feel safe and understood, or push them further into avoidance or shutdown. When a dog pauses or hesitates after I give a cue, I don’t double down. I check myself first. I lift the energy, smile, and try again. Nine times out of ten, they respond. The shift isn’t just in what I say, it’s in what I’m believing in that moment.

I’ve seen this over and over in obedience classes, owners tense, feeling under pressure, and dogs completely focused on their owner’s anxious state instead of the actual cue being given. A client calls their dog, the dog freezes. It’s not defiance. It’s nervous system overwhelm.

EXAMPLE THREE: Here’s a powerful example of how beliefs change outcomes. In one experiment, a group of trainers was split into two groups. Group A was told their dogs had no prior training. Group B was told their dogs were ‘gold standard’ trained. In reality, the dogs were randomly assigned and had no meaningful difference in training.

What happened? Group A struggled. Their dogs “wouldn’t listen.” The tasks felt hard. Group B excelled. The dogs picked up cues easily. Progression felt smooth. The difference? Belief. Energy. Expectation. This stuff isn’t fluff, it’s foundational.

TIP ONE: If you’ve ever heard of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), you’ll know it’s about aligning language, intention, and energy. Before you begin training, try this simple exercise: Play out the ideal outcome in your mind like a movie. Turn up the brightness. Add colour. Feel the warmth of your dog responding to your cues. See the joy of connection.

This primes your brain and nervous system to lead with clarity and calmness, instead of frustration and fear. You're showing your subconscious what's possible.

I've come to believe that, for some owners, a few sessions of hypnosis might be more effective than a few sessions of traditional dog training. That might sound strange, but let me explain. When a person's internal dialogue is filled with fear, doubt, or frustration, their dog feels that. Every cue, every walk, every moment is laced with subtle signals that say: "I'm not sure," or worse, "I don't trust you."

Hypnosis allows us to work directly with the subconscious to rewrite the inner script that's playing on a loop. If we can shift the owner's internal state to one of confidence, the dog's behaviour often changes without having to do much else.

Imagine entering the park feeling relaxed, grounded, and open. Your dog senses this. Their nervous system syncs with yours. Suddenly, that "lead reactivity" is no longer the issue it once was.

This chapter isn't about positive thinking for the sake of it, it's about getting honest about the invisible forces that shape your training outcomes. It's a reminder that you can change your beliefs. You can shift your energy. And when you do, your dog will shift too.

THE PERSONALITIES BEHIND THE PAWS

Before I started working with dogs full-time, I was like most dog owners, I had my favourite breeds. I thought I knew what I liked and which dogs I “got along” with best. But after six months of spending every day with all kinds of dogs in group settings, those preferences faded away almost completely.

Breed knowledge is still incredibly important, it helps us understand a dog’s natural drives and needs. But when you’re watching a group of dogs interact, it’s their temperament that really tells the story and just like people, every dog has their own quirks, odd habits, and charming ways of being.

Introducing the “Doggeangramm”

Over the years, I started noticing personality types that many dogs seem to fall into. So, just for fun, I began loosely categorising them. I call it the Doggeangramm (a playful nod to the human enneagram), and while it’s not scientific, it’s surprisingly accurate.

Here are the seven types I’ve observed:

- The Peacemaker – Doesn’t like rough play or conflict; often steps in to calm things down.
- The Clown – Always up for a game, ready to make everyone laugh.
- The Thinker/Watcher – Observes from a distance, curious but cautious.
- The Healer – Shows concern for unwell or injured dogs, often lying close or gently checking in.
- The Bouncer – Takes it upon themselves to enforce “rules” and decides who gets to join the group.
- The Prefect – Loves getting things right and being praised; often tries to impress.
- The Helper – Jumps in to assist other dogs with whatever they’re doing.

While breed and size play a role, smaller dogs often lean towards being Helpers or Prefects, and bigger dogs tend to take on Peacemaker or Bouncer roles. It's not a strict rule. Physicality matters in group dynamics, especially when stepping into a conflict. It takes confidence (and sometimes muscle!) to be the one who smooths things over.

Like the human enneagram, a well-rounded dog will show traits from several types. In tight-knit groups, dogs tend to settle into "family roles" over time, and their personalities become more defined. Some dogs are hard to pin down, they shift roles depending on the group but others fit so clearly into one type it's uncanny.

This really shows just how naturally co-operative dogs are, and how beautifully they adapt to one another to keep the group balanced. It's not just instinct, it's teamwork. Dogs have an incredible ability to tune into the needs of those around them. They seem to understand that a group functions best when everyone has a role, and they quietly shift into those roles without being asked. There's something almost intuitive about the way they manage their own social structures. One dog might step in to break up rough play, while another distracts a nervous pup with a gentle nudge or a play-bow. It's not chaos, it's community.

All dogs bring something valuable to the table. They protect the vulnerable, gently challenge the over-confident, and encourage the unsure. In group settings, I've seen big dogs slow themselves down to play safely with a tiny newcomer, or high-energy pups ease off around an older dog who just wants to sunbathe in peace. These little adjustments aren't taught, they're offered. It's empathy in action.

And honestly, I think we humans could learn a thing or two from that. Dogs accept each other with so much more grace than we often manage. They don't dwell on differences or hold grudges over yesterday's scuffle. They're remarkably forgiving and endlessly adaptable, always moving towards harmony. That kind of quiet cooperation is what makes them such extraordinary companions, not just to us, but to each other.

I once worked with a trainer who described dogs as being either “optimists” or “pessimists.” It’s a simple lens, but it really stuck with me. Just like people, some dogs walk into the world with curiosity and joy, while others are more cautious, always scanning for potential threats.

Of course, we have to be careful not to humanise dogs too much. Anthropomorphism can lead to misunderstandings. But I do think it’s okay, even helpful, to notice that temperament and worldview vary wildly from dog to dog. Just like humans, they’re born with certain tendencies that shape how they respond to life.

I’ll never forget chatting with a man about his wonderfully well-behaved Jack Russell. I complimented him on what a great job he’d done training his dog. He smiled and said something I didn’t expect: “Funny thing is, our last Jack Russell was really naughty. He caused chaos wherever we went. This one is lovely, but sometimes . . . I miss the mischief.”

That moment stuck with me. It’s such a beautiful reminder that what one person sees as “bad behaviour,” another sees as personality.

CONCLUSION

Here's the truth: It's not about being the perfect dog owner.

Even knowing what I know, I still get it wrong sometimes. Just like parenting, it's not about doing everything flawlessly, it is about being good enough. You're human. Your dog is, well . . . a dog. Neither of you are going to get it right 100% of the time and that's perfectly okay.

What really matters is that you get it right more often than not. That your shared experiences are steady, safe, and supportive, instead of chaotic or confusing. That your dog learns, deep in their nervous system, that they can trust you and that you're their safe place.

Because real training, the kind that lasts, isn't about control. It's about connection.

It's about creating a relationship where your dog follows your lead, not because they have to, but because they want to. Because your energy encourages it and feels safe.

And this is where co-regulation becomes the secret to success. It's the beautiful dance between two nervous systems that have learnt to safely attune to one another. When you're calm, grounded, and consistent, your dog picks up on that. In moments of excitement, stress, or fear, they'll look to you, not just for direction, but for reassurance. And, that kind of trust isn't built through commands. It's built through presence.

The core foundation needs of food, exercise, sleep, enrichment, and an understanding of breed traits are all vital. But successful and positive outcomes with your dog, start with you. With how you show up. With the energy you bring into the room, long before you say a single word.

So let me say it one more time: **“Check yourself before you check your dog.”**

I hope this book and the stories within it stay with you. I hope they've made you pause, reflect, and see things a little differently, not just about your dog, but about yourself too. Because at the heart of it all, this is an invitation:

To recognise that you can slow down.

To become more aware.

And you can choose to take a breath and return to your body.

The science of nervous system regulation is becoming more understood and accepted. We're finally starting to move away from chronic stress, disconnection, and trauma (things our modern world has normalised) and into healthier, more regulated states of being. My hope is that this shift doesn't just benefit us, but extends to our canine companions too.

It feels like we are at a turning point. That human consciousness is shifting and people are beginning to see both themselves and their dogs with fresh eyes. I hope this change becomes part of something bigger; a return to relationships built on cooperation instead of control and compassion instead of dominance. Not just for dogs, but for all of us. Because when we choose connection over compliance, we create powerful spaces where healing, trust, and joy can exist, for both species.

This is how change begins: with awareness, with presence, with love.

WHAT'S NEXT?

If you're interested in continuing the journey with me, find out how by visiting:

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