

control unleashed by leslie mcdevitt

The concept of control unleashed by Leslie McDevitt delves into the revolutionary methods she pioneered in dog training, shifting the paradigm from dominance-based approaches to positive reinforcement and relationship-focused techniques. McDevitt, a renowned author and trainer, champions a philosophy that empowers both the dog and the owner, fostering mutual understanding and a deeper bond. This article will explore the core tenets of her training methodology, examining how it fosters a sense of control and cooperation, the specific exercises and tools she advocates, and the profound impact it has on canine behavior and the human-animal relationship. We will uncover how McDevitt's "Control Unleashed" approach provides practical, effective solutions for common behavioral challenges, ultimately leading to a more harmonious and fulfilling life for dogs and their human companions.

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Understanding the Philosophy: Control Unleashed by Leslie McDevitt

Leslie McDevitt's groundbreaking work, often encapsulated by the term "Control Unleashed," represents a significant evolution in dog behavior modification and training. At its heart, the philosophy centers on the idea that true control is not achieved through force or intimidation, but rather through building a strong, trusting relationship with the dog. This approach emphasizes understanding the dog's perspective, recognizing their emotional state, and providing them with the tools and confidence to navigate the world effectively. Rather than suppressing unwanted behaviors through punitive measures, McDevitt's methods aim to redirect, teach, and ultimately empower dogs to make better choices.

Core Principles of McDevitt's Training

Several fundamental principles underpin Leslie McDevitt's "Control Unleashed" methodology, forming the bedrock of her effective training strategies. These principles are designed to foster a cooperative partnership between dog and owner, moving away from outdated notions of dominance and toward a more nuanced understanding of canine learning and motivation. The emphasis is consistently placed on building positive associations and empowering the dog to succeed.

Positive Reinforcement as the Foundation

One of the most crucial principles is the unwavering commitment to positive reinforcement. This means rewarding desired behaviors to increase their frequency, rather than punishing undesirable ones. McDevitt advocates for the use of high-value rewards, such as special treats, enthusiastic praise, or engaging play, to motivate the dog and make the learning process enjoyable. This positive approach strengthens the bond between dog and owner, making training a collaborative effort rather than a battle of wills.

Focus on Relationship Building

Beyond mere obedience, McDevitt's philosophy places immense importance on building a strong, trusting relationship. This involves understanding canine body language, recognizing their individual needs and personalities, and creating a safe and predictable environment. By prioritizing the relationship, owners can better anticipate their dog's needs, manage their environment, and respond effectively to challenges, thereby fostering a deeper connection and mutual respect.

Empowerment Through Choice

A key differentiator in McDevitt's approach is the concept of empowering the dog. This means teaching them how to manage their own emotional responses and make appropriate choices. Instead of simply demanding compliance, owners are taught to guide their dogs towards success, allowing them to learn how to cope with various stimuli and situations. This empowerment fosters confidence and reduces the likelihood of problem behaviors stemming from fear or frustration.

Management and Prevention

While training is central, McDevitt also stresses the importance of effective management and prevention. This involves understanding potential triggers for problem behaviors and proactively managing the dog's environment to prevent them from occurring. This might include using appropriate equipment, setting up safe spaces, or carefully controlling interactions with other dogs or people. By preventing the rehearsal of unwanted behaviors, owners create opportunities for the dog to learn and succeed.

The "Control Unleashed" Framework

The "Control Unleashed" framework, as developed by Leslie McDevitt, is not a rigid set of rules but rather a flexible and adaptable system for understanding and improving a dog's behavior and their owner's ability to manage them effectively. This framework is built upon a foundation of positive reinforcement, relationship building, and empowering the dog to make good choices. It provides a structured approach to addressing a wide range of behavioral issues, from mild reactivity to more complex anxieties.

Understanding Canine Cognition and Emotion

A significant aspect of the "Control Unleashed" framework involves a deep dive into how dogs think and feel. McDevitt emphasizes understanding canine cognition, recognizing that dogs are sentient beings with their own emotional landscapes. This means acknowledging that behaviors often stem from underlying emotional states like fear, anxiety, excitement, or frustration. By understanding the 'why' behind a behavior, owners can more effectively implement solutions that address the root cause rather than just the symptom.

Creating a Foundation of Trust

The framework prioritizes creating a foundation of trust and security. This is achieved through consistent, positive interactions, clear communication, and respecting the dog's boundaries. When a dog trusts their owner, they are more likely to look to them for guidance and feel safe in their presence. This trust is paramount in overcoming behavioral challenges, as it allows the dog to feel secure enough to learn and engage in new behaviors.

The Role of Structure and Predictability

Structure and predictability play a vital role in the "Control Unleashed" framework. Dogs thrive on routine and understanding what to expect from their environment and their people. By establishing predictable routines for feeding, walks, training sessions, and downtime, owners can reduce a dog's anxiety and improve their overall well-being. This predictability also helps dogs understand the expectations placed upon them, making it easier for them to comply.

Bridging the Communication Gap

The framework also focuses on bridging the communication gap between humans and dogs. This involves learning to read canine body language accurately and using clear, consistent signals during training. By understanding what their dog is communicating, owners can respond appropriately, avoiding misunderstandings that can lead to frustration for both parties. Effective communication is the cornerstone of a strong partnership.

Key Exercises and Techniques

Leslie McDevitt's "Control Unleashed" approach is rich with practical exercises and techniques designed to empower dogs and their owners. These methods focus on building a dog's confidence, impulse control, and ability to remain calm and focused in various situations. By engaging in these exercises, owners can actively shape their dog's behavior and strengthen their bond.

Pattern Games

Pattern games are a cornerstone of the "Control Unleashed" methodology. These are short, highly rewarding exercises that create predictable sequences of behaviors. The most well-known is the "101" pattern, which involves rewarding the dog for looking at the owner, then looking away, then back at the owner, and so on. These games are designed to teach the dog to engage with the owner, to offer behaviors, and to understand what is expected of them in a positive and reinforcing way. They help dogs learn to manage their own excitement and focus on their handler, especially in distracting environments.

Desensitization and Counter-Conditioning

McDevitt's approach heavily utilizes desensitization and counter-conditioning to help dogs overcome fears, anxieties, and reactivity. Desensitization involves gradually exposing a dog to a trigger at a low intensity where they do not react negatively. Counter-conditioning then pairs this low-intensity trigger with something highly positive, such as delicious treats or a favorite toy. Over time, the dog learns to associate the trigger with positive experiences, changing their emotional response from fear or anxiety to anticipation or indifference. This process is carefully controlled and progresses at the dog's pace.

Impulse Control Exercises

Developing impulse control is vital for a well-behaved dog, and McDevitt offers various exercises to cultivate this. These might include teaching the dog to wait for their food bowl, to remain in a "stay" position until released, or to resist the urge to chase a thrown toy until given permission. These exercises teach the dog to inhibit their natural urges and to think before acting, which is crucial for preventing behaviors like jumping on people, counter-surfing, or bolting out of doors.

Building Confidence

Many behavioral issues, particularly fear-based ones, stem from a lack of confidence. McDevitt's techniques aim to systematically build a dog's confidence in themselves and their ability to handle various situations. This can involve introducing new environments and experiences in a controlled, positive manner, teaching them new skills, and celebrating their successes. Gradually exposing dogs to novel objects, sounds, and environments, while ensuring positive experiences, helps them become more resilient and less fearful.

Tools and Equipment Advocated

Leslie McDevitt's "Control Unleashed" philosophy emphasizes using tools and equipment that support positive training and enhance the dog's comfort and safety. The selection of equipment is always made with the dog's well-being and the owner's ability to manage the dog effectively in mind. The focus is on tools that facilitate clear communication and prevent unintended harm or stress.

Harnesses and Leashes

When it comes to harnesses, McDevitt often advocates for front-clip harnesses. These harnesses attach the leash to the dog's chest, which helps to redirect pulling by turning the dog back towards the owner. This is a humane way to manage pulling without causing pain or discomfort. Standard flat collars are also used, but often in conjunction with harnesses for ID tags. She generally advises against choke chains, prong collars, or shock collars, as these can inflict pain, cause fear, and damage the dog-owner relationship.

Treat Pouches and High-Value Rewards

Effective use of positive reinforcement requires readily accessible and highly motivating rewards. McDevitt strongly recommends the use of treat pouches worn by the handler. These allow for quick and easy delivery of rewards, keeping training sessions flowing and maintaining the dog's engagement. The quality of rewards is also paramount, with a preference for high-value treats that the dog finds particularly irresistible, such as small pieces of cheese, cooked chicken, or specialized training treats.

Clickers and Markers

Clickers or verbal markers (like "yes" or "good") are essential tools in McDevitt's training system. These markers serve to precisely communicate to the dog the exact moment they performed the desired behavior. By marking the behavior, followed immediately by a reward, the dog learns to associate the marker with the positive outcome. This clear and consistent communication is vital for shaping behaviors accurately and efficiently.

Mat Training and Elevated Surfaces

Mat training, where a dog is taught to go to a specific mat or bed and relax, is another valuable tool. This teaches impulse control and provides the dog with a designated safe space. McDevitt may also incorporate the use of elevated surfaces for certain exercises, which can help some dogs focus better and feel more secure, especially in busy or distracting environments.

Addressing Common Behavioral Challenges

Leslie McDevitt's "Control Unleashed" methods provide effective solutions for a wide spectrum of common canine behavioral challenges. Her approach focuses on understanding the underlying emotional and cognitive reasons for these behaviors and implementing strategies that build the dog's confidence and self-control.

Leash Reactivity

Leash reactivity, often manifested as barking, lunging, or growling at other dogs, people, or objects while on leash, is a frequent concern. McDevitt's strategies involve carefully managing the distance from the trigger, using desensitization and counter-conditioning to change the dog's emotional response, and teaching alternative behaviors like "look at that" (where the dog looks at the trigger and then back at the owner for a reward). The goal is to help the dog feel less threatened and more in control, so they can pass by triggers calmly.

Fear and Anxiety

Dogs experiencing fear and anxiety often exhibit behaviors such as avoidance, trembling, hiding, or even aggression when feeling cornered. The "Control Unleashed" framework addresses this by creating a safe and predictable environment, avoiding overwhelming situations, and employing positive reinforcement to build the dog's confidence. Gradually exposing them to their fears at a manageable level while pairing the experience with high-value rewards helps to reframe their perception.

Barking and Destructive Behavior

Excessive barking and destructive chewing can be symptoms of boredom, unmet needs, or separation

anxiety. McDevitt's approach would focus on identifying the root cause. This might involve increasing physical and mental exercise, providing appropriate outlets for chewing, teaching impulse control, and addressing any underlying anxiety. Pattern games and focus exercises can also help redirect a dog's attention from nuisance behaviors.

Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is a distressing condition where dogs exhibit panic when left alone. McDevitt's methods for separation anxiety typically involve very gradual departures, teaching the dog to be comfortable and relaxed when alone for short periods, and associating alone time with positive experiences. This often requires meticulous management of the dog's environment and routine to build up their tolerance slowly and prevent them from experiencing panic.

The Role of the Human in "Control Unleashed"

In Leslie McDevitt's "Control Unleashed" philosophy, the human's role is not merely that of a disciplinarian but as a facilitator, a partner, and a compassionate guide for their canine companion. The owner's behavior, understanding, and emotional state are as crucial to the success of the training as the dog's receptiveness. This approach fundamentally redefines the human-dog dynamic.

Becoming a Predictable and Trustworthy Partner

A key aspect of the human's role is to become a consistent and trustworthy presence for their dog. This means being reliable in training, in providing for the dog's needs, and in managing their environment. When owners are predictable, their dogs learn what to expect, which reduces anxiety and builds a strong sense of security. Trust is earned through consistent, positive interactions and by always having the dog's best interests at heart.

Observing and Understanding Canine Body Language

Owners are trained to become keen observers of their dog's body language. Recognizing subtle cues like tail position, ear set, lip licking, or yawning can provide invaluable insight into a dog's emotional state. This understanding allows owners to intervene before a situation escalates, to provide comfort when needed, or to adjust their training approach. It fosters a more empathetic and responsive relationship.

Managing the Environment and Expectations

The human is responsible for managing the dog's environment to set them up for success. This includes proactively preventing situations where the dog is likely to fail or become overly stressed. It also involves setting realistic expectations for the dog's behavior based on their age, breed, training history, and individual personality. Rather than pushing a dog beyond their current capabilities, owners learn to incrementally build their skills and confidence.

Patience and Persistence

Perhaps the most critical human trait in the "Control Unleashed" approach is patience. Behavioral change takes time, and setbacks are often part of the process. Owners are encouraged to remain patient, celebrate small victories, and avoid becoming discouraged. Persistence, coupled with a positive and understanding attitude, is essential for achieving lasting behavioral improvements and fostering a deep, enduring bond with their dog.

Benefits of the "Control Unleashed" Approach

Adopting Leslie McDevitt's "Control Unleashed" approach yields a multitude of benefits for both dogs and their owners, fostering a more harmonious and fulfilling relationship built on mutual respect and understanding. The positive and proactive nature of these methods leads to significant improvements in a dog's behavior and overall well-being.

Improved Behavior and Reduced Problematic Actions

One of the most immediate and noticeable benefits is the significant improvement in a dog's behavior. By addressing the underlying causes of issues like reactivity, anxiety, and impulsivity, the methods lead to a reduction in unwanted behaviors such as excessive barking, lunging, destructiveness, and fear-based aggression. Dogs learn to cope with triggers more effectively and make better choices.

Enhanced Dog-Owner Bond and Communication

The emphasis on positive reinforcement, trust, and understanding canine communication naturally strengthens the bond between dog and owner. As owners learn to better interpret their dog's signals and respond appropriately, and as dogs learn to trust their owners for guidance and support, a deeper level of communication and connection is established. This leads to a more enjoyable and collaborative partnership.

Increased Confidence and Emotional Resilience in Dogs

Through exercises designed to build confidence and teach coping mechanisms, dogs become more resilient and less prone to fear-based reactions. They learn that they can trust themselves and their owners to navigate challenging situations, leading to a more confident and secure demeanor. This emotional resilience is crucial for a dog's overall quality of life.

Greater Owner Satisfaction and Reduced Stress

For owners, the success of the "Control Unleashed" methods translates to reduced stress and greater satisfaction in their relationship with their dog. Knowing how to effectively manage their dog's behavior, understanding their dog's needs, and experiencing positive progress can transform the

owner's experience from one of frustration to one of joy and fulfillment. This makes dog ownership a more rewarding endeavor.

The philosophy of control unleashed by Leslie McDevitt offers a powerful and compassionate framework for understanding and improving canine behavior. By prioritizing positive reinforcement, building strong relationships, and empowering both dog and owner, this approach provides practical solutions for a wide range of behavioral challenges. The emphasis on understanding canine cognition, using appropriate tools, and fostering effective communication creates a pathway to a more harmonious and fulfilling life for dogs and their human companions, ultimately demonstrating that true control is found not in dominance, but in connection and cooperation.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the core principles of Leslie McDevitt's 'Control Unleashed' for dog training?

Control Unleashed focuses on building a strong foundation of communication and trust between dog and handler. Key principles include teaching the dog to focus on the handler amidst distractions, developing impulse control, and fostering a positive emotional state, all achieved through positive reinforcement methods and clear, consistent cues.

How does 'Control Unleashed' address common behavioral issues like reactivity or anxiety in dogs?

Control Unleashed provides specific exercises and protocols to manage and improve reactivity and anxiety. It emphasizes desensitization, counter-conditioning, and teaching alternative behaviors that the dog can perform instead of the problematic ones. The goal is to empower the dog to make better choices and feel more confident in various situations.

What are some popular exercises or games associated with the 'Control Unleashed' training philosophy?

Popular exercises include 'Look at That' (LAT) for teaching dogs to disengage from triggers, 'Premack Principle' (using a desired behavior to earn a less desired one), 'Release' cues for controlled breaks, and various confidence-building games that encourage problem-solving and handler focus. The '9 Ways to Leave It' exercise is also a staple.

Is 'Control Unleashed' suitable for all types of dogs and handlers?

Yes, 'Control Unleashed' is highly adaptable and can be beneficial for a wide range of dogs, from puppies to seniors, and for handlers of all experience levels. The foundational principles are universally applicable, though specific exercises may be modified based on the dog's age, breed, temperament, and individual learning style.

What makes 'Control Unleashed' different from other positive reinforcement training methods?

'Control Unleashed' distinguishes itself by its specific focus on environmental control and emotional regulation for the dog. While rooted in positive reinforcement, it places a strong emphasis on teaching the dog how to manage their arousal levels and remain focused on the handler even when faced with significant distractions, effectively 'unleashing' their controlled behavior.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to "Control Unleashed" by Leslie McDevitt, presented as requested:

1. *Insightful Observations*

This book delves into the subtle cues and body language dogs exhibit when they are experiencing stress or uncertainty, often hidden beneath their outward behavior. It provides readers with a framework for understanding their dog's internal state, fostering a deeper connection and allowing for proactive management of their emotional well-being. The author emphasizes that true control stems from understanding, not just from commands.

2. *Bridging the Gap*

This title explores the process of building a stronger relationship between human and canine companions by addressing common communication breakdowns. It offers practical strategies for owners to better interpret their dog's needs and for dogs to understand human expectations in a positive and rewarding way. The core idea is to create a seamless flow of understanding that reduces frustration and enhances cooperation.

3. *Emotional Foundations*

This work focuses on the crucial role of a dog's emotional state in their ability to learn and respond effectively. It outlines how to create a secure and predictable environment that supports a dog's emotional resilience, making them more receptive to training and everyday life. The book highlights that addressing emotional needs is a prerequisite for successful behavior modification.

4. *The Calm Canine Connection*

This book provides readers with techniques to cultivate a calm and focused mindset in their dogs, particularly in the face of distractions or overstimulation. It offers a toolkit of exercises designed to build impulse control and teach dogs to regulate their own emotional responses. The emphasis is on empowering dogs with the skills to navigate the world with confidence and composure.

5. *Empowering Through Choice*

This title examines how granting dogs appropriate choices within structured environments can foster greater cooperation and reduce the reliance on constant external control. It introduces concepts of "choice-based" training that build intrinsic motivation and a stronger desire to work with their handler. The book argues that allowing for some autonomy can paradoxically lead to more reliable behavior.

6. *Navigating Nervousness*

This guide is dedicated to helping owners understand and manage anxiety and fear-based behaviors in their dogs. It offers a comprehensive approach that combines environmental management, desensitization, and counter-conditioning techniques. The ultimate goal is to equip owners with the knowledge to create a safe space for their fearful dogs and help them build coping mechanisms.

7. Synergistic Partnership

This book explores the concept of a truly collaborative partnership between dog and handler, where both individuals are actively engaged and mutually respectful. It moves beyond traditional dominance-based training to focus on shared goals and a positive, reciprocal relationship. The author emphasizes that the most effective "control" is a willing partnership built on trust.

8. Mindful Manipulation (of environment)

This title focuses on strategically designing a dog's environment to prevent unwanted behaviors and encourage desired ones, without resorting to forceful correction. It outlines how to set up situations for success by managing triggers and providing opportunities for positive reinforcement. The approach is about proactive management and creating a supportive landscape for learning.

9. The Confident Companion

This book aims to help owners build their dog's confidence through positive reinforcement and skill-building exercises. It addresses common confidence issues, such as timidity or lack of self-assurance, and provides practical methods to foster a more self-possessed and willing attitude. The ultimate aim is to create a dog that feels secure and capable in various situations.

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