

DOGS ARE BORN PREDICTING. STARTING WITH WHERE TO FIND THE MILK BAR,
ALL THE WAY THROUGH TO WHEN IT'S TIME FOR THEIR WALK

DITCH THE ROUTINE



 **Absolute Dogs**®

Tom Mitchell & Lauren Langman

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Dogs are born predicting. Starting with where to find the milk bar, all the way through to when it's time for their walk, when you leave for work and when you're coming home.

Scarily the prediction of excitement, the anticipation, can be as good as the event itself. Think about looking forward to a big event, the preparation, the anticipation, the planning.

How often are you way overtired or stressed when the event happens – you've already burnt out before the anticipated event arrives. So, prediction is not always a good thing, whether it is prediction of a good or a bad thing, it is exhausting, over arousing and magnifying.





ROUTINE, WHAT ROUTINE?

Our dogs pair actions, things or features with a potentially fearful or exciting event.

Imagine being surrounded by task lists and continuous reminders of what you have to do next, or a reminder that tells you something scary is about to happen or that something really awesomely exciting is about to arrive. Never quite knowing but anticipating. That continuous state of high alert, of expectation and of readiness is exhausting.

In our dogs, this anticipation can lead to pacing, barking, whining and reactivity to apparently unthreatening things. Those buckets are full and it won't take much for all that arousal and anxiety to spill over in an undesirable way.

Imagine being able to take away the stress of anticipation from your dog

Imagine being able to take away the stress of anticipation from your dog, so that they can just experience the pleasure of a car journey or a walk when those things happen; so that they can experience calmness and relaxation and are fresh and energised when you need them to be at their best.

START WITH FOOD

Do you still feed your dog from a bowl?
At regular times of day?

Do you get the feeling of eyes burning into you before the designated mealtime arrives? Drool? Noise? Excitement? What about when the clocks change, when you're on holiday, when you're out for the day or you just want a lie in?

Imagine the freedom of not having designated mealtimes; of not being bound by the expectation of meal times. Ditching the food bowl has to be the best way to start ditching the routine.

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We have a separate e-book all about ditching the food bowl and the huge benefits that that can bring – increasing flexibility and ditching the routine is just one benefit of ditching the food bowl, but an important one. Without the anticipation of a scheduled meal time, you are removing some of the pressure and stress from your dog's life.

Simple Changes = A Big Impact

Messing with prediction chains

Are there simple activities in your life that get a reaction from your dog? Think about when you pick up your car keys, put your coat on, pick up the dog lead and open the door.

What is your dog's reaction? Does he get excited, does he start to dance around your legs, bark, rush about? Is it hard to get the lead attached and are you all of a tangle as you step out of the door? Is your dog really in the best frame of mind to start a pleasant walk with a loose lead and calmness in the face of even more stimulation?

If you start the walk in a state of excitement, any triggers that you meet when you are out are more likely to create a reaction. A cat, a squirrel, a passing vehicle: your dog is so much more likely to listen to you if his

arousal levels have not been elevated by the essential but predictable actions that always lead to a walk. Each of those simple activities, individually or in the particular order that you always do them, predict the excitement of an outing for your dog. That's because you only do those things in advance of that longed for walk.

What can you change? You need to pick your keys up and put your shoes on, wear a coat and put on a lead before going out. How do you get ready for a walk if you don't do those things?

Simple changes here can make a big difference. Work out the beginning stages of your prediction chain. And change them. Or do them individually at different times or as part of a different activity.

Stand up and put down the paper → pick up your keys → put shoes on → put coat on → pick up lead → put on lead → open door → BOOM! Walk time! EXCITING!!!

Changes to:

Stand up and put down the paper → go to the kitchen and make a cup of tea

Or

Put the lead on → go into the garden for 5 minutes → go back into the house → play a calm game

Or

Pick up the keys → move them to a different hook → ask for a middle

Or

Put your coat on → play some boundary games etc...

The possibilities are endless. Mix it up; be creative. The key is to work out the routine, the beginning and stages of the prediction chain and simply do it differently and change it all up. Mess with the prediction chain, don't be a slave to the routine and make each of the prediction elements a non-event in itself, or even better, a cue for calmness.



Telling The Time

How can dogs tell the time?

How do they know then it is time to eat or time to walk? Is the very beginning of a prediction chain simply a time of day? Do you always walk at 6am or serve a meal at 3pm? Change it up.

We understand that this can be hard when you have to get the children to school or catch a bus, meet with someone, get to a class or be at work by a certain time. But as far as possible, in whatever way you can, change the time for these daily activities as much as is possible. Ditching the food bowl will really help with this. And think about not walking. Try doing some exercises in the house or games in the garden instead, try the triple F fitness programme and Ditch The Bowl. You'll see the benefits, and FAST.

Relationship building happens when you spend time training and engaging with your dog rather than just rushing a normal walk because it is a thing to be ticked off the 'to do' list.

You can create a calmer and more responsive dog and a more engaging and interesting you. This will allow you to be your best self! And maybe even help with deskillling a dog who could previously seemingly tell the time.

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Route Map Or Mystery Tour?

When we go on a walk - you know, that walk, at the same time every day when we turn the same way, let our dogs off lead in the same place, call our dog back at the end of the same path and return past the same houses to complete the same circuit - have you ever wondered how our dog knows just when THAT house is coming up, the one with the barking dog, or why they suddenly go up on their toes at a particular spot, you know, where you often meet the 2 yappy terriers? Is it perhaps because they are predicting? Anticipating the whole scenario.

Your dog has that whole route mapped out in their mind. They know where the best smells are and where the squirrels are most

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likely to dart. Where the cats hide under the cars and where the children play. They are anticipating that whole experience from the moment you put down your paper and stand up from your chair. All that anticipation, all that expectation, all that PREDICTION does not result in a calm and trouble free pup. It creates an overexcited, over anxious and stressed out pup.

What can you do? Well, hopefully, you've already started to reduce the levels of prediction by breaking down and messing around with the prediction chain. Now change the walk. Don't always go on the same route. Don't always go for the same amount of time and, simply, don't always go.





To Sleep & So To Dream

If your dog always sleeps in the same spot with the same blanket after the same night time routine, what happens when you go away, with or without them?

Are they quick to settle or do they sleep that little bit more restlessly? Do they pace and whine before settling? Do they fidget during the night, or get you up earlier than usual?

Teaching your dog to relax anywhere is as easy as teaching your dog to relax anywhere!

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But you have to actually facilitate that learning, not just expect it to happen when you need it.

So have dog beds or crates in different rooms in your house. Play boundary games and crate games in the kitchen, bedroom, dining room, shed and garage.

Reward calmness anywhere, regularly. Include the car which is also great for making the car a non-event. You get the idea. You've got this.

Calmness In The Car

Make the car a total non-event. Boring. Nothing to see here.

What's that coming over the hill? Is it a kennels or a banshee convention? Ah, no, it's a car, on its way to the beach or the field or the agility show. The dogs know, they just know, where you're going, that it's somewhere exciting and that they want to get there and they want to get there soon.

How do they know? Well they're predicting. Something in the behaviour chain has created an association and your dogs are predicting the exciting event. How's that relationship going? How do you feel about the event that's about to happen? Calm, relaxed, ready to deal with everything that arises! Or fed up, angry, irritated with your dog? Pretty much ready to yell at anyone who looks at you the wrong way? And how does your dog feel?

What can you change? What about if car journeys didn't always go to the same place? Sometimes you could get into the car and get straight out again. Or sit in the

driveway for a bit and read a book. Or drive around the block or down the road. Nipping to the shops? Load the dog for the ride. Get to the shops, leave them in the car while you do the shopping (if the conditions are appropriate) then come home.

Make the car a total non-event. Boring. Nothing to see here. Try driving to the crazy making destination and then drive away again without getting out. Or get out and do some figure eight walking or calm stillness work, then get back in and go home.

Yes, you love that walk, those views, that air but it doesn't have to be forever. Mix up car journeys, boring destinations with exciting ones (more boring than exciting). Gradually the car itself, the feel of the turns and the sounds of the engine at certain points will cease to be a predictor for excitement and arousal levels won't be stacking as soon as you load up the car wearing THOSE shoes.

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Life skills before training by rote

Always Training

Teaching life skills, not simply behaviours

You know the situation. You go to training classes and actively train your dog. He does a perfect recall, a sit, a down, and loose lead walking. He even leaves the sausage on the floor and comes to you. He gets his rewards and earns a certificate and you feel pretty proud, right?

And then, at home, when you're busy and your back is turned, that steak on the worktop gets swiped. You're left with your cheese on toast totally perplexed by the complete and utter turnaround in your perfectly trained pooch's behaviour.

Once again, your dog's ability to predict has come into play. You've taught your dog to leave the sausage on the floor in the hall when everyone is watching. If he leaves the sausage there, he gets praise and rewards.

But when he's at home, there's no praise and reward waiting for him when he exercises self-control. So, what's the point?

Simply, you can combat this dilemma by teaching life skills, not simply behaviours in response to commands in certain places. And you achieve that by making training a part of life. Being flexible about when and where 'training' happens, when and where rewards arrive and when and where you ask for certain behaviours means that training isn't just for when you're training. It's a way of life.

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Being flexible about when and where 'training' happens

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Recall Means High Alert

When you are out and about on a walk, do you always recall your dog in the same place and immediately pop him on a lead? Or do you only recall him when there is something in the environment that he might react to?

If either of those is the case, what are you actually teaching your dog? To predict? Either, you only call when the fun is going to end or when there is something to fear. Before you know it, your lovely consistent recall response has disappeared – along with your dog.

And the way to avoid this? Ditch the routine of course. Don't always recall in the same place, recall and then release back to play or sniff some more. Don't always recall when there is something to worry about. Recall more frequently, but not regularly. And keep the rewards flexible too, so that your dog never knows what he is going to get when he returns to you. It could be kibble, it could be chicken or maybe a crazy game of tug or chase.

Mix it up, ditch the routine and you will keep his interest in coming back to you.

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So Excited To See You Home

Is your dog super happy to see you come home?
That's nice, right?

Part of the joy of having a dog is the sheer pleasure they show at our mere presence. But what if that pleasure, that excitement, regularly precedes a level of behaviour that is not ok.

For you or your dog. What if there's biting, grabbing, jumping up or humping? What if the zoomies could lead to injury for a young, old or convalescing dog? What if the walk that regularly follows your arrival home leads to barking, lunging, chasing madness and a lack of attention to you?

Ditch the routine of your arrival home. Change the time. Get home earlier or later. Come in the door and leave again. Pull onto the driveway and just sit there for a while, or

pop home, pick up your dog and go for one of those boring drives. Come in, make a cup of tea, and phone a friend!

It's all totally possible - be creative. When you make these changes, you are reducing the length of the prediction chain and so reducing the negative impacts of anticipation.

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Conversation Starters

We love love love conversation starters for so many things but they really help with other elements of ditching the routine.

Conversation starters are behaviours that your dog loves or feels super confident in and has practiced time after time.

Behaviours he can do almost instinctively without any conscious thought. Behaviours that he is comfortable with and willing to offer, even in the face of distraction.

These will be things that you have asked for at home...a lot. When you're out and about on one of your routine ditching trips in the car, you bring your dog out and ask them to do their particular conversation starter.

You may have one or two up your sleeve. Perhaps: middle - wraps - BOUNDARY - catch magic hand - hand touch - scatter - Chin Target - feet on 2 up, you name it, here are just a few of our favourites! - middle on the move.

Practice your conversation starter at the supermarket, in the motorway services, in the vet car park, in the vet waiting room, at the beach instead of a crazy run, outside the pub, in the woods or in your local shopping mall! Choose your conversation starters wisely though. If your ultimate aim is to make journeys or walks calm affairs, don't use a super arousing activity every time you get out of the car, or at least, sandwich an arousing activity between calming activities.

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Vet Visit Dilemma

How about the necessary vet visits?

These are a necessary part of your dogs life and inevitably there is going to be something unpleasant to pair their vet visit with. In the normal course of events, your dog only goes to the vet when they feel unwell. There's the trip in the car, the smell of the air, the wait in a room with other animals who are stressed, anxious, over aroused and reacting. So how do those visits go for your dog? How does he react in the actual examination room? Happy? Relaxed? Calm? Probably not. How long has their anticipation of the negative aspects of that visit been building? Where was the beginning of the pre vet prediction chain?

Can you make those vet visits easier for you and your dog? Guess what! You can ditch the vet routine too.

Visit the vets often when treatment is not needed. Make it one of your ditch the routine destinations and don't forget those conversation starters. Associate visiting that environment with good things. Break down the potential for an escalation of anxiety by

breaking down the prediction chain. And when a necessary visit is needed, use the positive associations that you have built up in that environment to ensure that any prediction of anxiety is minimised as much as possible.

Avoid allowing a pattern to develop that predicts the final, unavoidable, potentially unpleasant examination. Wait in the car, use conversation starters in the car park, go in a different door. Avoid a routine approach right up to that last moment when allowing the vet to examine your dog. At that point, use your dogs natural ability to predict and incorporate an element of routine. A thing that at the last moment indicates that something unpleasant might happen. In most cases this could be the vet examination couch, but could be a particular towel or sheet on the floor, kept for that sole purpose and only ever revealed immediately before the bad event. This way you minimise, as far as possible, the negative pairings associated with an unpleasant vet visit and really limit the escalation of anxiety and the filling of the bucket.

Ditch the routine is going to give you
a new way of thinking.

A new lifestyle...an exciting way to start
your day, each and every day!

DOG TRAINING STRUGGLE?

THERE'S A **GAME** FOR THAT



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