



Interview Grisha Stewart

1. What is a reactive dog and what is BAT?

I actually don't use the term "reactive dog" any more because it's a label for the dog. Labels make us think we can't change it, that it's not just behavior open to learning. So instead, I say "a dog with reactivity issues." Reactivity is really "over-reactivity" meaning that the dog's behavioral reactions are bigger than they should be, in the direction of fear, frustration, or aggression. That means barking, lunging, running away, in a bigger way than would be expected for a well-socialized dog.

BAT is a technique that helps dogs get the skills and confidence that they need in order to not have these over-reactions. It's a really natural way of learning, by setting up situations where the dog can be relaxed enough to pay attention to the social situation. Given a chance to have good, calm experiences, they can learn to have good social skills. BAT is about meeting the needs of the animal while also keeping everybody (including the caretaker) safe and confident.

2. In your book, you say that there are 3 emotions leading to reactivity : fear, anger and frustration. Is there a difference in the way you work on it?

In the older version of BAT, there was a much bigger difference. Now, it almost doesn't matter which of those three is leading to the reactivity, in terms of how we work through it. In all cases, the dog's reactions start to mellow when they have a chance to interact with the trigger in a safe way, with the human gradually letting the dog get closer if s/he wants to. The one main difference is that I'm more okay with the dog being in 'working mode' when frustration is the source of the reactivity, because then you are just changing one positive motivator for another.

3. In your experience, have you noticed that some breeds are more reactive than others?

There's a lot of variation within breeds. Genetics only plays a small role, in terms of what is possible. It's the environment that switches that potential on. That said, the herding breeds can be more sensitive to movement, for example. They notice a lot more and also a lot of people tend to over-train them. So I think that may be why we see a lot of reactivity in them. Bully breeds can tend to have more issues with other dogs than, say, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, but they are also often really steady when it comes to people or scary noises. So there are a lot of factors.

4. What kind of improvement did you bring to BAT between version 1.0 and 2.0?

I gave the dog more freedom in BAT 2.0, and took out some of the pieces that I found were hindering learning. People like to actively train their dogs, and I'm totally guilty of that. So while BAT 1.0 was already a step in the right direction away from intrusion (compared to clicker training, for example), it's now even better. So with BAT 1.0, we marked cut-off signals and called the dog away from the trigger. Now we save that for times when we need to do it, but are generally trying to sit up situations in which the reinforcers are all "naturally occurring reinforcers" meaning that they aren't given by the trainer. Then when the dog does a cut-off signal, he can pay more attention to the natural consequence, instead of us getting all excited and distracting him. Knowing

that his behavior has an effect is very empowering, and it builds confidence. It makes an animal more socially skilled when he can see the effect of his social behavior.

5. As an ordinary dog owner, can I use BAT alone with my dog or should I call a trainer for help?

I would recommend working with a professional trainer, at least at the start. A trainer will be able to look for body language that you might have missed and also come up with a holistic plan. BAT is often not the whole training plan. Sometimes you need to change diet, or do an anti-stress protocol, or train certain skills first. So it's good to get a trainer on board. A Certified BAT Instructor (CBATI) would be even better, because those are trainers who have demonstrated their skill with BAT.

6. There will be a BAT instructor course in France in September 2015. What are the key points of his course?

The course is a 5-day hands-on chance to get really solid training skills. People should already have some understanding of how to do BAT already. We usually require that students attend a 2-day seminar, watch the Empowered Animals BAT 2.0 series, or attend BAT 101 on Animal Building Blocks Academy. A lot of the BAT resources are in English, so I know that for French speakers, it can be hard to get a solid foundation of BAT before the course. We have a 1-day course in Switzerland the weekend before the course, and it will be translated into French. The intro to BAT seminar at the Dog Event and reading the BAT handouts in French is the minimum requirement.

2.0 Series: <http://animalbuildingblocks.com/feature-film-buy-6/>

BAT 101 course: <http://animalbuildingblocks.com/bat101/>

Handouts: <http://empoweredanimals.com/more/handouts/>

In the course, we will alternate between active lectures and hands-on work with clients. We do an intense practice session to make sure the attendees all know how to do the leash skills, because those are really critical for BAT. We slowly build up the training with the clients, starting without the dog and building up to a session with the dog. The full participants conduct the training and the auditors are there to assist and observe. It's a really intense learning experience. People always walk away with better skills at training and reading dogs.

7. Is there some hope to have a French version of your book or DVD BAT 2.0 series one day?

That's a great question. The Ahimsa Dog Training Manual is being translated into French right now. I think it would be great to have the BAT book or the DVD series in French. If you know someone who could make a file of subtitles, I could definitely put that up on the streaming version of the DVDs. That would really help the students of the instructor's course.

