



# Listen Up for a Better Pup

*Tony Knight talks about the Dog Listener technique*

Jan Fennell has revolutionised the way many people now think about their dogs. She's written a series of bestsellers such as 'The Dog Listener' and 'Friends For Life'; her techniques have earned her a worldwide reputation as a pioneer in understanding our canine companions. Her son and business partner, Tony Knight, also promotes the Dog Listener techniques. Tony lives in the North of England with his wife, son and two Springer Spaniels.

Originally trained as a lab technician, Tony started working with his mother in 1999 and explains his switch in career, "Everything changed for me when Mum, who had already had some recognition for her amazing success with her technique, was featured in a national newspaper. She became inundated with requests for help from all over the UK, and she felt she couldn't cope with all of the travelling and demand for her advice. I could see that her method was something very special, and that these people needed help. So I suggested that she train me so I could see them, thus spreading Mum's word, giving much needed help and giving me an extra bit of pocket money."

"I also figured that I could do these jobs at weekends until the requests stopped. I hadn't figured on the number of requests increasing, so I then took holiday time off work.

When my entitlement ran out, I was left with a decision to make. That was nearly seven years ago and I haven't looked back. In fact, we originally agreed that I would do all the long distance calls, something that Mum regretted when we had an enquiry from Bangkok!"

Tony was recently here in Australia promoting his Mother's new book release, 'The Seven Ages Of Your Dog' which looks at their lifespan. From Puppy through to Protégé on to Pensioner, it covers what you can expect in their development. It's a comprehensive guide to a dog's life and covers health, nutrition, training and behaviour. We were lucky enough to track Tony down and find out more about the Dog Listeners techniques and tools to understanding dogs.

Tell us about the concept your mother Jan Fennell pioneered-Amichien Dog Listeners?

The technique devised by my mother is simple in that instead of forcing a dog to do our bidding, we use communication in their language to show them we make the decisions. Her work is based on the theories of Monty Roberts, also known as the Horse Whisperer, who can work miracles with problem horses. Mum took his idea and translated it for dogs, discovering that dogs need leadership, otherwise they take on the responsibility. Something dogs cannot cope with in a world they essentially do not understand. By mimicking the behaviour of an Alpha wolf at crucial times in the dog's life, she showed that common problems such as lead pulling, recall (or lack of it!), jumping up and aggression could be eliminated. The term Amichien was something I created—simply the French word for friend and dog—to show that if you understand another language, you can communicate effectively.

We hear so much about dog behaviour and behavioural problems, do you think that dogs in a modern age are having an increasing number of problems or are we more focussed in recognising behaviour problems?

If a dog is in a world it does not understand, the only thing that helps it get along is its instinct, something it gets directly from its wolf ancestry. This often clashes with our human take on the world, yet the irony is that we also think like wolves all the time without realising it. If you feel uncomfortable when a stranger stares at you, that's your instinct telling you that's a predatory stare. Little wonder why some dogs don't like to be looked at by stranger either! As we start to appreciate the wolf in us, we can see how dogs interpret their surroundings and the stress they are inadvertently put under by their human pack members.

We get a lot of questions directed to our DogLogic behaviouralist, Trudi Thorpe, covering a variety of dog problems. Often, people have waited ages before seeking advice. Do you think it's important to act on a behaviour problem quickly?

If a dog believes itself to be Alpha, it can develop that role over time. This explains why some dogs seem to get worse. Also, many people don't recognise the signs that the dog is in charge, or perhaps they even like the behaviour. For instance a Jack Russell greeting you at the door by jumping at you is adorable, but owners would not like the exact same behaviour in a St. Bernard. Perception is a curious thing. By the time owners finally notice a problem, the dog is settled in the role of leader. The good news is that this can be easily changed by the owner showing the leadership traits in the dog's language.

So often we hear from people who have rescued a dog and even as a puppy they attribute bad behaviour to some trauma they've received, often citing that they think the dog was abused. However even a pup with the best of starts can develop undesirable

habits or poor behaviour. Can you tell us anything about this?

The interesting—and sometimes tragic—thing about rescue dogs is that their extreme behaviour is down to them trying extra hard to do the right thing, albeit take on the role of Alpha if nobody else does. Given that they may have had a bad experience in the past, when they find themselves somewhere they are well treated, they will put all their effort into being a useful member of this wonderful pack they find themselves in. Often the owners cannot cope, and the poor dog goes back to the shelter, only for the cycle to be repeated. If a rescue dog is shown that the owners are the decision makers, it can relax and become the dream pet the owners want. The important thing to remember here, is that it is the personality of the dog that dictates how it behaves.

Would you say that part of the hurdle of even basic training is not the dog but the human—learning how to communicate to the dog?

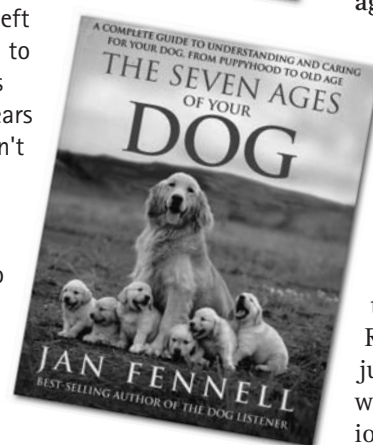
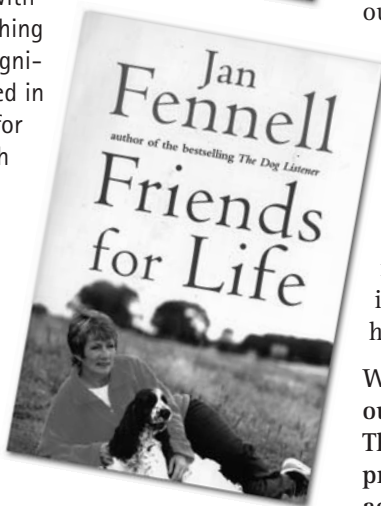
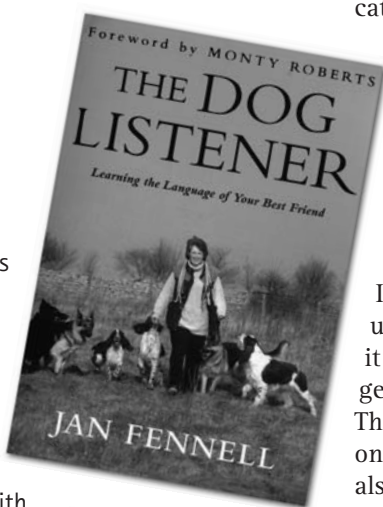
I do not describe myself as a dog trainer—after all, the technique I teach to humans has been understood by dogs for millions of years! Any dog will ask its pack where it fits in, therefore it is imperative that the owner has the ability to reassure the dog. I remember helping a couple with a hyperactive German Shepherd, who through desperation had a dog 'trainer' take the dog away for two weeks, only to return it to them with a video of him 'walking the dog to heel'. Of course, it only took a week or so for their dog to revert back to its previous behaviour (only now fitter than before and therefore more hyperactive). The owners had been given nothing to do, so when their dog asked "Where do I fit in this pack now?" they had no answers and no tools to adequately deal with the dog's behaviour.

What's the most common problem or hurdle you have to overcome in your training?

By far the most common problem is nervous aggression. Whether on the lead or in the house, the key is to take the role of protector and decision maker from the dog, and we achieve this through communication, so have no need for any gadgets or gizmos commonly used by desperate owners and unscrupulous trainers.

Early on in Jan's first book 'The Dog Listener' she tells the story of how Purdey, a rescue dog, unintentionally sent you through a pane glass door and you were only a little nipper. So many times that early trauma can imprint and manifest in fear towards dogs. Did your mum work hard at making sure that didn't happen to you?

I'm lucky enough not to remember the incident (although in a certain light I can see the scar on my face—very dash-ing!). However, both people and dogs can be affected by trauma, so the key is for them to be with somebody they can trust who can show them the right way to manage the situation. I have been falsely accused of not being afraid of dogs. I am not stupid with dogs, which means that understanding the way they think allows me to minimise risk. Any



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dog can bite (they all have teeth); the key is to give them no reason to do it.

In the new book 'The Seven Ages of Your Dog' Jan goes into great detail about what to expect during these stages. From 0 to 28 months Jan believes that a dog goes through five stages - that's quite a lot...

If we look at the development of dogs in conjunction with humans, we see the similarities. Between 0-14 years, a child goes through an incredible amount of physical change. Teenagers typically start to challenge their position in their pack. At the other end of the spectrum, old age brings complications and inevitably death. Dogs have the same issues, albeit in a shorter time period.

For instance, we have found that old dogs can be the victims of attacks by younger pack members. In the wild of course they would not have survived that long anyway, and both the old and young are aware of this. As humans, we have altered the way dogs survive, yet their language and rules have not changed. We have to manage these issues. Once again, the Amichien Bonding technique does not remove the ability of the dog to ask these important questions, but we can give them the right answers to avoid such problems.

The Dog Listener is currently screening on ABC, Tuesdays at 6.30pm, and is also available on DVD for \$29.95 from ABC shops, centres and online.

#### THE SEVEN AGES OF DOGS

##### Puppy: 0-8 weeks

Equivalent to that of a human baby to two-and-a-half year old. This is the time that puppy questions who they are, what's around them and the relationship with the dogs and humans around them.

##### Pioneer: 8-12 weeks

This is an intense period of growth for a dog and likely to be around a four-year-old human. Its needs are simple and importantly it needs safety and security. This is the time it encounters lots of new noises, smells and probably a new home.

##### Playboy: 3-9 months

A crucial time of development for a dog where it will do most of its physical growing. Puberty will arrive and socialisation and basic training will be necessary. Short, controlled walks will occur where the dog will again question whether it is safe in your company.

##### Protégé: 9-18 months

This time is the equivalent of adolescence-like a human this is the developmental age between 12 and 20 years. It is a time where a dog will enjoy increased freedom while on walks. It is also a time where serious behavioural problems can occur.

##### Pretender: 18-28 months

This is the time where in the wild a dog starts to challenge the leadership of the pack-the same with a domestic dog. Physically it will have reached maturity and mentally it will be attuned to its surroundings and again this is a time where behavioural problems can manifest.

##### Protector: 28 months to around 7 years

Fully developed, a dog is in its prime and generally has settled into its position in the pack.

##### Pensioner: Around 7 years and beyond

Energy levels can drop and physical problems associated with ageing can occur as the dog is not as robust in its twilight years as in its youth.

# Sit Happens

Tips & Techniques for Training Your Pet



Trudi Thorpe - dogLOGIC

Trudi Thorpe runs a dog behaviour and training company dogLOGIC based in Sydney. As Trudi says "DOGS DOGS DOGS...A childhood obsession that I never grew out of." She devises and implements individual behavioural strategies and obedience techniques based on 18 years of studying dog problems and problem dogs.

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Ask Trudi a question regarding behaviour by emailing behaviour@urbananimal.net

My 15 month old mystery cross, Clementine, plays really well with dogs of all shapes, breeds, ages and sizes. For the most part she's a trouble free dog and is really well behaved. However, something that has recently developed is that she plays with sticks and should another dog want to play tug or take away her stick she can become quite snappy. Nothing bad has happened like a full blown fight but I'm concerned that it could escalate into something worse-either on her part or her actions cause another dog to really take offence and attack her. How can I stop this behaviour before it could turn nasty?

At 15 months old, your dog is at an age and stage of her development where she has developed enough confidence and acquired enough experience to enable her to start asserting herself and exerting some authority over other dogs. Also included in this stage is not only an increased awareness of the importance of possessions, but also an increased understanding of the influence that possessions have over social status.

Addressing this type of behaviour in the early stages is a must because of the self rewarding factor - each time she succeeds, her confidence grows and it encourages her to do it again - even if that means a snap to get her point across - and this is where the real problems start because the stick is only hers until another dog decides to exert their authority with a counter challenge.

In the case of her sticks, Clementine is displaying a roll-on behaviour. It works like this: she has learnt over time that the longer she can maintain possession of a stick (that other dogs want once they spy it) the more valuable it becomes - and so the higher her status is elevated, the more confident she becomes, the more determined she is to keep it, and the more she will assert herself. Because this is a learned behaviour, keep in mind that it may take some time to rectify.

The best way to go about dealing with this is to ensure that no matter what she is doing, or where she is - YOU own the game!

The best place to start is at home. Dogs use play to learn position, social skills and other basic fundamentals, so whenever you play a game with her make sure that you win every time. This means that your games must be controlled by you! To begin, collect up all her toys and only give access to individual toys when you're playing with her (so she has no other option for play). Incorporate sticks into this play and never let her get away with possession of any item. Ensure that she will always surrender anything she has in her possession (including sticks) to you happily. By owning the game and consistently playing by your rules Clementine learns that she owns nothing and you own everything.

Once you feel she understands the lesson at home, pick a time when the park is quiet and apply exactly the same principles. Once you're confident she understands that you own the game (even in the park) then you can slowly begin to allow her to play with other dogs. Be vigilant, and remember, if YOU own the stick, she has no claim to it and therefore no right or reason to become possessive.

As an aside, it's worth remembering that playing with sticks can cause very serious injury to the dog if they are caught in the dog's throat or eyes, so whenever you go to the park take a ball or rubber throw toy and try to dissuade her from sticks altogether.

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