

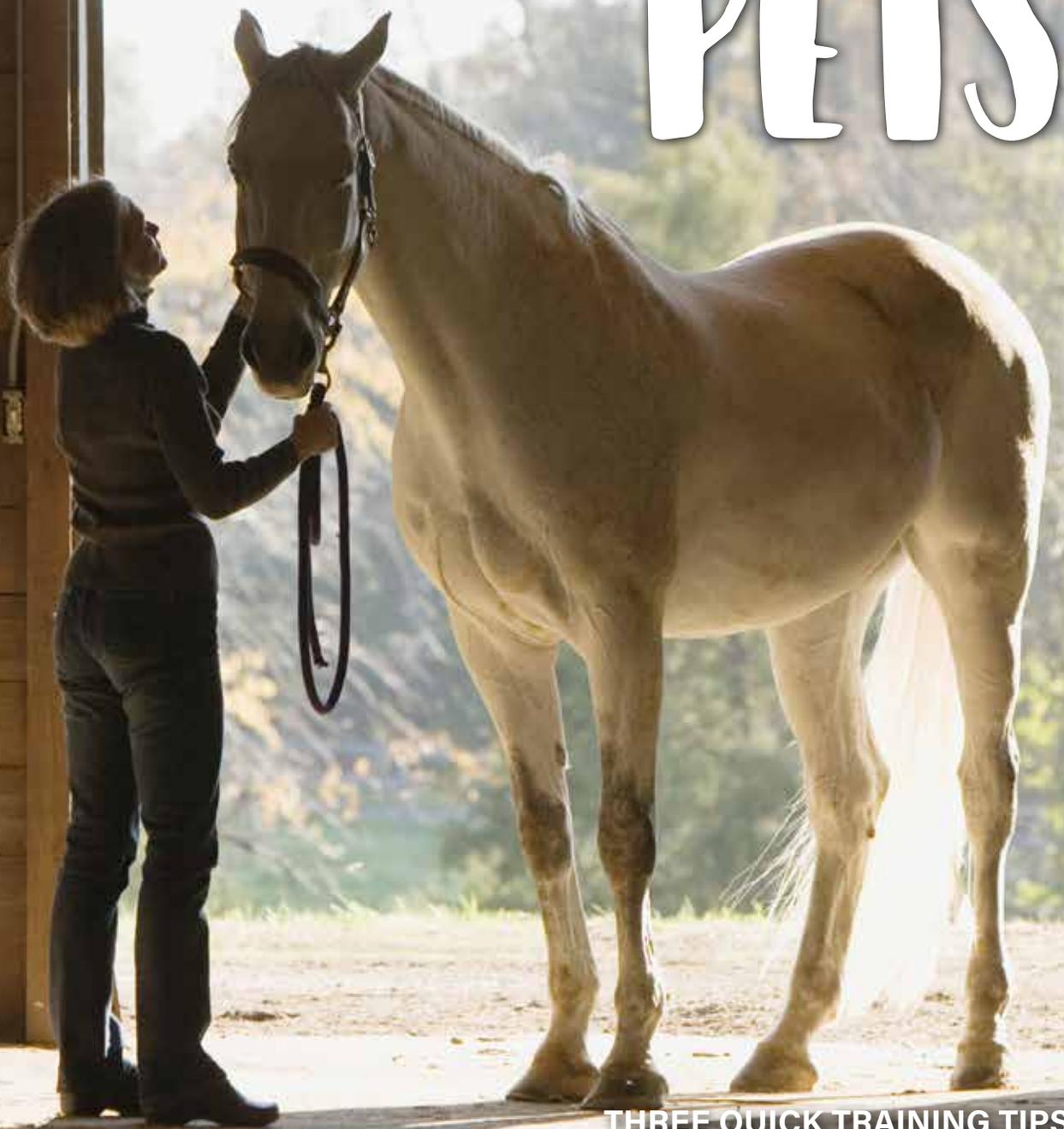
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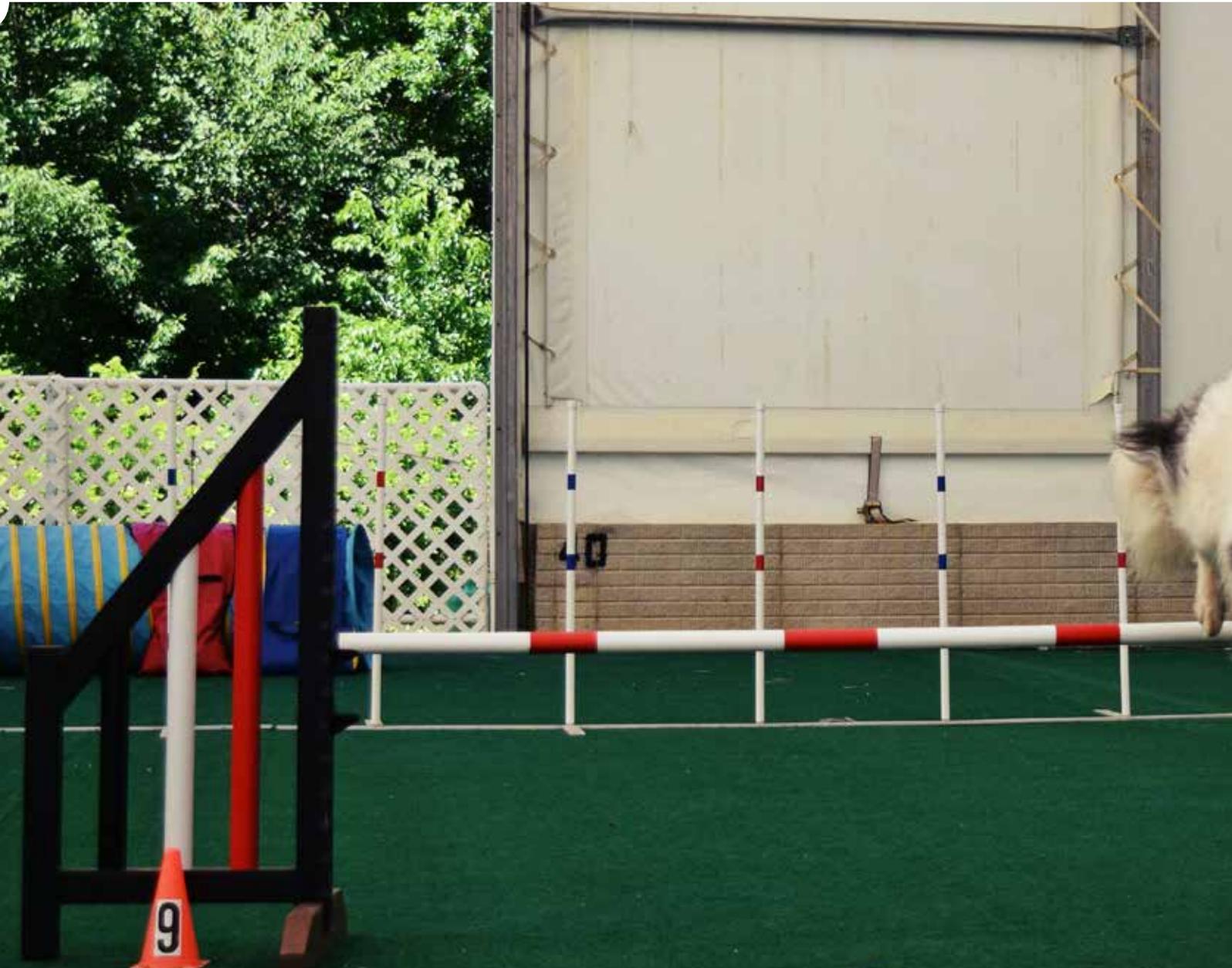
PETS



THREE QUICK TRAINING TIPS
LESSONS FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH
THE ROAD TO SUCCESS IS PAVED IN PAW PRINTS

Three Quick Training Tips

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHY NIKKI RHOADES





Dr. Linda Randall, the owner and veterinarian at Cloverleaf Animal Hospital, has acquired years of experience and knowledge working with animals. She has overwhelmingly observed that, for every pet owner, one thing remains true: either you are training your pet, or your pet is training you.

“Behavior is statistically the number one reason why people give up an otherwise healthy animal,” she says.

Randall and Jessica Taylor, a veterinary technician at Cloverleaf Animal Hospital, work with people and their animal companions through various types of training, covering everything from party tricks to agility course training.

“For people and pets alike, behavior is explained through economics,” says Taylor.

The economics of behavior are very simple. If a behavior results in a rewarding outcome, you are going to do it. If it results in a negative outcome, over time you will stop doing it. The challenge of training involves identifying what is valuable to your pet, and sticking to a routine of positivity and reinforcement.

This dynamic duo of behavioral experts offered three quick tips to make training a pleasant experience for you and your pet.

1. SET THEM UP FOR SUCCESS.

Randall: The more they are right, the better they are going to learn. If they think they are always going to be wrong, why should they even try? That’s called “learned helplessness,” and it afflicts people and animals. If you were to go into a math class and get every question wrong, you’d suddenly think you are bad at math. But if the teacher sets you up with something you can do and slowly moves forward once they are certain you are

ready—and, of course, reinforces you along the way—then you are open to learning even when the going gets tough.

2. REINFORCE WHAT YOU WANT, IGNORE WHAT YOU DON'T WANT.

Taylor: Reinforce good behavior. If your pet does what you want, give them something they want. If they do something that you do not like, do not give them any attention or reinforcement. For example, let’s say that your dog is jumping on you when you first get home. You should ignore them or turn and walk away. If they come up to you and sit down, you should respond with positive reinforcement. Your pet may not always be looking for a treat—they may just be looking for attention from you. Or, for an example with people, let’s consider the class clown. He likes to be goofy in exchange for attention. It does not matter to him if it is negative attention, so long as he is noticed. If you were to ignore the class clown when he’s being goofy and give him attention when he’s sitting quietly and doing his work, all of a sudden there will be a shift in behavior. Find what is valuable to your pet, and offer that in exchange for good behavior.

3. MANAGE, MANAGE, MANAGE!

Randall: Rather than get frustrated and yell at your pet, think to yourself, “I can’t train my dog in the next five minutes to not jump on the counter top to steal food. Instead, what can I do to solve this problem?” The answer is find a way to manage it. In this case, you will instruct your family to not leave food on the counter. Then, consider what you want to do in the future to address this issue. Do you want to just keep managing it? That’s fine, if it is doable and you are okay with managing the situation. If you want to teach your dog, you might need some assistance and advice, but that’s another option.

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Linda Randall and Jessica Taylor have worked with a variety of pets at Cloverleaf Animal Hospital, which Randall opened in 1991.

DR. RANDALL TELLS ALL

Training is not just for dogs. In fact, Linda Randall has worked with a wide variety of critters and their owners to create and preserve the human-animal bond—a part of her job that she holds in very high esteem.

"I think a lot of people go into the veterinary field for the animals, but you need a passion for people, too. Veterinary medicine requires you to be passionate enough to work with both." She says that aspiring trainers often forget that to work with animals, they must actually work with pet owners who are working with their pets. The task of training requires patience and positive reinforcement, which is best understood by people that have undergone any type of previous training. Previous training may encompass any kind of disciplined learning, from learning a sport to learning to play an instrument. Personal experience combined with knowledge and technique produces the best trainers.

However, animal trainers cannot do everything on their own. It is up to the owner and their pet to create a bond of trust. One of the more memorable bonds Randall encountered existed between a guinea pig and a trucker.

"Many truckers take their dogs on the road with them, but this man took his guinea pig. During his time traveling, he had taught his guinea pig to do 10 or 15 really difficult tricks. To see the bond between these two was amazing, and it proves that training works for different kinds of animals.

"You can also apply this concept to your your home life, your kids, your spouse, or your coworkers. When people realize they can move in a clear direction with positivity the whole way, they get really excited about life in general. I think a lot of people watch TV and see a lot of rather aversive, negative punishment incorporated in training, but we avoid that completely. We believe the most successful relationships are positive and full of trust."

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