



## **The Dominance Theory**

By Norma Jeanne Laurette & Greg Ceci

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Imagine trying to dominate a wolf – sounds like a sure fire way to get eaten.

The concept of dominance was spawned from the notion that wolves challenge one another for rank. However, due to extensive research by world-renowned wolf expert and scientist Dr. David Mech this theory has been discredited. The most respected canine behaviour experts in the world believe this theory to be misguided with no scientific basis.

According to Coppinger dogs became isolated from their wild ancestors long ago resulting in a new species classification, the *Canis Familiaris* or domestic dog. In addition, humans have fundamentally changed dogs emotionally through thousands of years of co-evolution as we impose our ever-increasing stressful lives on them. Through less than perfect breeding practices, this stress, fear and anxiety has been passed on to the offspring.

Unfortunately, many dog owners and trainers use the dominance theory to explain unwanted canine behaviour as well as justify the use of unpleasant techniques with the objective of intimidating the dog into subservience.

These dominance techniques teach avoidance but do nothing to address the root cause of the problem and don't teach the dog what you want it to do. It's much like a doctor treating a brain tumor with painkillers – it's a tenuous band-aid that merely masks the issue.

Dominance-based training employs reprimands, intimidation and punishment to gain respect as a leader. However, by definition, respect cannot be demanded – it must be earned and requires trust.

*“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.”* - Dwight D. Eisenhower -



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Because dog training essentially teaches dogs to understand cues and signals, the dog's ability to learn is crucial to success. Science has proven that intimidation, force and pain increase stress, fear and anxiety, all of which inhibit one's ability to think, learn, problem-solve and retain information. Therefore, dominance is clearly counter-productive to learning.

Like humans, some dogs are more assertive than others. Dogs that are assertive try harder to control resources. Dogs that are submissive easily relinquish the resource or don't attempt to control it in the first place. Assertive dogs are more challenging to train, but it has nothing to do with dominance and everything to do with resource control.

Since it's all about resources, it stands to reason that if you control what the dog values, you control the dog by following two simple rules:

1. Ignore all demands – if you don't follow, your dog can't lead.
2. Ensure your dog earns everything it values by requiring it to offer the behaviour you want first.

Unwanted canine behaviours are normal and can be explained by basic cause and effect. Dogs will do whatever works to get what they want. Challenges are not about dominance but the survival instinct to control valued resources.

It's not a bad dog that ignores your recall – it's a normal dog and it's not a good dog that comes when called – it's a trained dog.