

# Owner (Emotional) Mind or Trainer (Logical) Mind:

## How a Slight Shift in Your Perception Can Improve Your Dog's Behavior



**By Lorraine May, M.A.**  
*Founder, Misha May Foundation*

**I**n this corner, representing the pure breeds and weighing in at under twenty pounds: a French bulldog, a Boston terrier and a Chihuahua. And in this corner, well actually behind this fence, representing the mutts and weighing in at well over twenty pounds: mixes of beagle, boxer and Lab. Let the “games” begin.

I must reluctantly admit that the mutts are mine. I’m embarrassed because, as an owner, I feel frustrated that I haven’t completely solved this new fence-fighting problem yet. During those moments at the fence, my otherwise well-behaved dogs are loud, intense and out of control. I don’t want them to get hurt, I don’t want my neighbors to be disturbed and I don’t want to feel helpless.

Soon I realized that I had two choices: to react or problem solve. I began to shift my perspective in order to problem solve. In Trainer Mind, I resolved to revisit the “come” and “leave it” cues with higher value treats. And, after identifying Valentino as the ringleader, my strategy included enhancing his “check-in-with-me” skills.

Trainer Mind and Owner Mind are available to each of us and are most beneficial when utilized within a suitable context. Owner Mind is great when my dogs are all behaving. But when I start feeling frustrated in reaction to a lapse in good manners, Trainer Mind helps

me devise a behavior modification plan. Under stress, Owner Mind often wants to blame, react or give up, but I can rely upon Trainer Mind to think things through and proactively teach.

Several Misha May Understanding Dogs Apprentices have identified Trainer Mind as an integral component in improving behavior from obedience and house training, to communicating with their dog and introducing unacquainted dogs. In preparing a shelter dog, who passed his Canine Good Citizen Test because of her training, Deb realized, “I could unemotionally put the needs of Turbo above my own needs.” Turbo required Deb’s undivided attention and expertise, and she was able to be there for him. Instead of being angry at puppy Murray’s accidents or punishing him, apprentice Desarae recognized that they needed a cue that both of them were aware of, so she taught him to ring a bell when he needed to go outside.

When Mary wants to communicate effectively with her dogs, she limits her verbalization to a concise “sit” or “down.” When the communication is to connect and express love, however, she rambles, “Oh, well hello there little one. What are you up to? Aren’t you just the cutest?”

Christine, an Understanding Dogs Apprentice and Misha May adopter, wanted her resident German Shepherd Ben and her new Husky Toby to be great friends. She could see that Ben was hesitant and worried, but that Toby repeatedly communicated that he was not a threat through slow-arc'd approaches, by avoiding eye contact and by offering play bows. In resisting her urge to bring them together prematurely and resolve the tension for herself, Christine allowed them to ease into what is now a solid friendship. She celebrates that Toby accommodates tripod Ben’s less agile play abilities and even gallantly holds the back door open for Ben when he can’t make it through quickly enough.

Misha May fosters Janette and Jenny, as well as adopters Barb and Judy, have all carefully and logically thought things through as they dealt with dogs who were fearful and aggressive, startled easily and sometimes bit in stressful circumstances. Employing patience, consistency and

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### Owner Mind vs. Trainer Mind

**Owner Mind** offers an emotional response best suited for deepening the bond, strengthening the relationship and making quality of life choices.

**Trainer Mind** offers a logical response to calmly and objectively observe, assess, plan and modify behavior.

*Photos (left to right): Toby and Ben, Teddy and Tank*



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management, each allowed the dog to blossom and heal without pressure to interact with, or tolerate intolerable situations.

Sam, who worried non-stop, now courageously inserts himself into playtime with the resident dogs and finds some touch reassuring rather than threatening. Tank, who previously attacked dogs and lunged at humans, now lives with other canines and accepts human company as fairly routine because the calm rhythm of his life holds no surprises. He doesn't go on walks, which only traumatize him and solidify his worrisome behavior, but lounges and plays at home where he feels confident and secure.

Teddy, who was found wandering with a collar embedded in his neck, often feels trapped and threatened. His behavior is predictably aggressive toward strangers and predictably loving toward friends. He is given all of the time he needs to warm up to someone from behind the safety of his gate. It might take a few greetings with treats or it might take much longer, but coercion or even prompting would be counterproductive and disrespectful after what he has been through.

A last minute Hurricane Katrina rescue, Louis was added to an already full Misha May rescue van because he was really not doing well. Louis suffered from severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition resulting from facing a life-threatening danger. From PTSD, Louis was psychologically fragile despite his large size and commanding demeanor. Judy learned that when he froze like a statue, a bite could soon follow. Without taking his aggression personally, and allowing for missteps in their plan, Judy and husband Jim provided a benign yet loving respite where Louis could expect consistent care. Judy beams as she shares, "Now I would be shocked if he even acted like he would bite us."

Misha May adopter Cheri, and client Sherri, transformed reactive dogs into accepting dogs by clarifying and communicating the behaviors they

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wanted. Instead of reprimanding and creating negative associations, they waited for and precisely rewarded the desired behaviors. Cheri practiced consistently with Heidi to transform her tentative relationship with a perceived hostile world into one of trust. When Cheri merrily chirps "it's a dog" or "it's a friend," Heidi believes this to be an accurate and reliable reflection of a friendly world. Sherri taught a menacing Tucker and several freaked-out cats that they could live together peacefully. Through her efforts of praise and treats to a calm leashed Tucker, she helped them become a bonded family.

I give full credit for this "Minds" concept to Buddy, whose distressed whining and pacing demanded that I shift my perspective from frustrated foster mom to foster mom with a plan. In Owner Mind, I focused on his attention-getting restlessness, but when I switched to Trainer Mind, I could see there was a solution. Not only did Buddy stop whining and pacing during meal preparation and go to bed on my cue, but he began to initiate going to bed prior to the cue when he saw me getting the dog bowls out of the cabinet. I was jubilant and he was relaxed. Owner Mind helped me love Buddy enough to want to use Trainer Mind to bring peace to our situation.

*Lorraine May founded the Misha May Foundation animal rescue in 2001 in memory of her dog Misha who had passed away from cancer. She has extensive experience in dealing with extreme separation anxiety issues in dogs. For more information, please visit her website [www.mishamayfoundation.org](http://www.mishamayfoundation.org).*

Owner Mind (Emotional)	shifts to...	Trainer Mind (Logical)
Emotional reaction of frustration, embarrassment or helplessness	➔	Logical observations, assessment and planning
Erroneous assessment based on human behavior	➔	Acknowledgement of normal canine behavior
Opts for a hasty quick fix for their own relief	➔	Invests in well-thought-out long-term solutions
Misguided focus on undesirable behavior	➔	Consistent focus on creating the desired behavior
Reliance on assumptions, non-professional advice and outdated theories	➔	Consults reliable resources and confers with knowledgeable professionals
Becomes complacent once behavior lessens or improves	➔	Maintains adequate level of management/training
Ignores warning signs hoping behavior will go away on its own	➔	Realizes behaviors typically worsen and require immediate attention
Holds unrealistic expectations for their dog	➔	Acquaints themselves with dog's personality, breed characteristics and history
Lacks confidence and/or commitment when facing behavior challenges	➔	Garners resources and is determined to face the challenges