

# Creature feature

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SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The desire for a well-trained dog is a lot like the desire to lose weight — you want to do it, but you'd prefer that it be easy and quick. Alas, the reality is that both require a plan, dedication, patience and time. That doesn't mean, however, that we can't be intrigued when someone presents us with a different way of approaching the challenge before us.

The "natural dog training" method is definitely different, seeming especially so now after all the hoopla about Cesar Millan's pack leader/dominance method of training. Maine trainer Neil Sattin's approach uses established reward-based techniques, but in ways that may seem contrary to conventional knowledge.

Whatever, it's intriguing, although the word "natural"

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See *CREATURE* on

Page 3E

in the title may be off-putting to some. So, you may ask, just what is natural?

Sattin says that natural dog training, established in the 1980s by Kevin Behan, "taps into the dog's core social drive" and his "natural hunting instinct." It also helps a dog owner understand how his dog "feels" the world. Natural training is the opposite of dominance training in that instead of being an "alpha" or dominant pack leader, the dog owner puts himself in the position of "prey" or becomes the "moose," Sattin says. That's not as silly as it sounds.

What Sattin means by being prey is to make yourself attractive and nonthreatening to your dog. Make your-

self the center of the dog's attention, as prey would be, so the dog will focus on you and look to you for clues on how to behave.

Sattin details his philosophy and method on the two-DVD set, *Natural Dog Training: The Fundamentals*. He says that often a dog's inappropriate behavior is simply the product of the dog not knowing how to constructively release its pent-up energy. Through natural dog training, you learn how to help your dog relax and channel its energy into the behaviors you want.

The training involves using food to motivate and "push" your dog, playing tug-of-war and using a 50-foot-long leash. The leash is important, Sattin says, because it gives the dog freedom of movement but allows you a measure of control. Usually, the leash is just dragging along the ground behind the dog.

Playing tug-of-war and, as Sattin advises, letting the dog win every time, is counter to the advice in most dog-training books. But Sattin demonstrates how to do it safely so that it's fun for the owner and dog, plus satisfies the dog's hunter/predator instinct.

"Pushing" is a method that's hard to grasp by reading about it, but becomes clear when watching Sattin demonstrate it on his DVDs. He shows that you attract the dog to you with food in one hand, then let the dog eat the food while talking to him and encouraging him. You back away from the dog while feeding him, encouraging him to follow. You touch and massage his neck with your free hand. Then you begin adding a push with the

nonfood hand. You continue to move backward during the whole process while pushing the dog and simultaneously encouraging him to follow.

Sattin demonstrates pushing with a variety of midsize and large dogs in the video and the process appears to relax them. He's a calm instructor who does a good job of explaining the reasons for what he's doing, plus pointing out what actions to avoid.

The first DVD covers the basics of the natural dog-training philosophy. The second DVD provides instruction on how to use natural dog training to teach the basics of obedience — Sit, Stay, Down, walking on a leash and coming when called. In fact, seeing Sattin in action and having a visual guide to this training method is essential to grasping it.

Reading a list of instructions isn't as helpful. The DVDs and more information about the method are available on Sattin's Web site, [naturaldogblog.com](http://naturaldogblog.com).



