

ANIMAL TRAINING, ENRICHMENT, & PROBLEM SOLVING:
Enhancing Animal Welfare Through Behavioral Management

PREFACE

In July 2011, Valerie Hare, Margaret Whittaker, and I rendezvoused at my home in California. We coordinated our arrivals from various parts of the world; I from the Philippines, Margaret from Texas, and Val from San Diego. We had set aside 3 days from our dizzying travel schedules to focus on one monumental task – we were going to write a book. Actually, this very book. We set up ‘office’ on the shaded lawn outside my house, preferring open-air and lawn chairs to tackle the task at hand. Surrounded by a loyal band of furry family members, we engaged in animated discussions, conceptualizing, developing, planning, and organizing what we wanted to say and how we wanted to say it. In between our book planning, we broke bread (a crispy baguette) together and sipped our California wine on the patio as the sun went down over the surrounding hills. It was about the best start to a decade-long venture one could possibly imagine. At the end of the 3 days, we had an outline built, content assigned, and an aggressive timeline with a finished product in an ambitious 12 months. With satisfied smiles, we packed up, coordinated schedules for the next discussion, hugged each other, and headed off to our next consulting jobs and workshops.

Despite the momentum from that brief, yet amazing mind-melding, creativity-powered get together, over the following months our book venture slowly devolved to a sputtering vision of what could be, if only we had the time to make it so. Although we tried repeatedly to sustain the effort, we were just too busy traveling non-stop and physically spreading the words now written on these pages. It took another 11+ years to finish what we started so long ago. I am just happy we finally did it.

As a way of introducing your authors, let me just say that the 3 of us have enjoyed the best jobs in the world. We’re colleagues and friends who over the years worked with all kinds of animals in many different places, met like-minded people wherever we went, and had the opportunity to make a small positive difference in the world. What more could you ask for? Just as in our workshops, we bring different yet totally synergistic perspectives to these pages. We are animal behaviorists, trainers, caregivers, consultants, and instructors, committed to enhancing animal welfare through our specialties in positive reinforcement training, environmental enrichment, and problem solving. Collectively we have over 100 years of experience working with exotic animals in zoos, sanctuaries, rescue centers, aquariums, and research facilities throughout the world. As frightening as that number may be for those of us admitting to it,

those years add up to a mountain of experience. It is fair to say that between us we have worked with nearly every mammal species, and an impressive number of bird, reptile, and fish species, that one may encounter in a zoological facility anywhere in the world. On a personal note, our love for animals is reflected in a long list of valued family members including dogs, cats, birds, rodents, rabbits, racoon, horses, chickens, tortoises, pigs, donkeys, goats, sheep, and cows.

We have collectively produced an impressive array of articles, chapters, papers, and conference presentations, yet we have spent significantly more time 'doing' rather than writing about it. We have always preferred travelling the world working directly with animals in their home environments and with the keepers, trainers, caregivers, curators, and animal managers who care for them. The work has been challenging, sometimes exhausting, but incredibly rewarding; and we're insanely grateful for the opportunities to focus on making life better for animals in human care.

One of our most favorite avenues for sharing information has always been through Workshops. They are a great opportunity to meet, teach, guide, and get to know a wide variety of people from many different places in a 5-day timeframe while only traveling to a single destination (yay!). Our Workshops, like this book, always present a behavioral management perspective (see Chapter 1) and an overview of animal welfare (see Chapter 2). They are well known for their mixture of positive reinforcement training (see Part 2) and enrichment (see Part 3), and the hands-on opportunities to do both. They are also renowned for being incredibly inexpensive and serving really good food in copious amounts. There is one portion of the Workshop, often voted the most favorite in post-workshop surveys, where we ask participants to share real animal behavior issues and then guide everyone through an effective problem-solving process that produces realistic and practical solutions (see Part 4).

Our Workshop format worked so well that we created our own designer line of Workshops, offering an array of attractive options for the discriminating trainer and caregiver. One could choose a Training and Enrichment Workshop focusing on a specific taxon, say primates, elephants, felids, or birds. For the generalist interested in everything from mammals to fish, we have our Training and Enrichment Workshop for Zoo and Aquarium Animals. Val developed and taught the Shape of Enrichment Workshop all over the world, mostly in developing countries. And we recently added an Animal Behavior Research Workshop to our repertoire. Because we have worked in many different countries, with participants who listen and speak in many different languages, our materials and our words have been translated and presented in a significant number of them.

Despite the great pleasure we get from our Workshops, we also take them very seriously. After every single one, no matter how many times we've taught it (and we've taught some more than 20 times) we would do a thorough debrief on the last day while we're still together. We'd critique everything from lectures to hands-on activities and explore how we can improve the Workshop content and the participant's experience. We have always believed in direct, candid self-assessment in our continuing effort to grow and improve ourselves and the information we share.

That commitment is reflected in our admittedly lengthy multi-year effort to write this book. Those experiences in workshops and consulting activities presented the pathway, albeit a long and winding one, to a book we hope you'll find worthy of your time and attention. This book is all about positive reinforcement training, enrichment, and problem solving for sure, but it is also about the amplified power of each when implemented from a behavioral management perspective. That is why we sincerely suggest and respectfully request that you start at the beginning of the book, even if you have a greater interest in one topic over another. We promise you, Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for all that follows.

So, now that you know a little bit about your authors, what we've been doing for the past few decades, and why we decided to write this book, it's time to focus on the task at hand. We have prepared a bite-size FAQ designed to inform, enlighten, and create that feeling of anticipation as you begin your exciting journey through the world of behavioral management – training, enrichment, and problem solving. To ensure an even more meaningful experience, we have infused it with examples of fascinating creatures, real life situations, and a variety of photos to illustrate the information and enhance your understanding of these important techniques. It is our hope to encourage an appreciation for the richness of animal behavior and the challenge of making life the best it can be for the animals we have the pleasure and privilege to work with.

FAQ

Why write this book?

We want to create a resource that will contribute to improving the lives of animals in every kind of facility – zoo, aquarium, oceanarium, rescue center, sanctuary, and laboratory; and to enhance the skills of professionals currently training, enriching, and caring for these animals. For those that may not work in the field, it is our goal to contribute to your understanding and appreciation for the effort required to provide the best possible care for animals in human care. And finally, we want to offer a simple and clear guide to some very important techniques that can be applied to all animals - exotic, domestic, and companion - and to us humans as well.

Who is our audience?

Anyone reading this introduction. However, our primary audience are professionals – beginners to experienced - working with captive wild animals. We provide practical techniques

and insights that are relevant, no matter what species you work with, and supported by real-life examples from our collective experiences. We want you to learn something (or many things) that makes you better at what you do. We want you to take the information and apply it in a novice or advanced capacity. And most of all, we want you to use what we teach to make life better for animals.

What makes this book different?

Very simply, it is about the holistic realm of behavioral management – not just training or enrichment, or problem solving, but all 3.

What is it – manual or guide?

After consulting Ms Google, we discovered that the terms “**manual**” and “**guide**” both generally refer to a document that provides information or instructions. However, a guide tends to be shorter and more concise; a simple 'how-to' that has enough information to get the user started. A manual, on the other hand, provides more information and a complete, in-depth set of instructions.

So, what is our book? Well, it is actually both - a manual and a guide. It is a manual that provides all the relevant information needed to be the best trainer and the most effective problem solver while providing the most purposeful enrichment. Then all this insightful profoundness is distilled down into a simple guide with specific, easy to follow instructions (often step-by-step) to implement the tools and techniques necessary to succeed. To borrow from the lingo of wine connoisseurs, this book is big and bright, complex and intellectually satisfying, opulent some might say (with a knowing chuckle), yet crisp and refined with a smooth finish. Cheers!

What outcomes do we anticipate and desire?

Mostly we want this to become the go-to book for training, enrichment, and problem solving. We want our words to contribute to a greater understanding of what animals need and what we can and should do to meet those needs and to make their lives richer. We believe in win-win situations for both humans and animals. That’s what a behavioral management approach is designed to achieve.

Finally, after 10 plus years in the making, we just want to say what we feel needs to be said. And we hope you, the readers, find it reasonable and helpful enough to listen.

Gail Laule