

Relationship Performance Evaluation (RPE)

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I worked in corporate for 25 years and dreaded performance evaluations. Afterward, I felt better because I knew areas I was doing really well at and strengths I needed to develop. I was lucky. I had managers / mentors, one a psychologist who was working as a corporate head, who knew that positive reinforcement would get employees to accomplish more than scaring them. I still dreaded PE's but it gave me an opportunity to clarify my manager's, and my, expectations.

As a self-employed business manager, co-founder of a non-profit organization, and a dog training behaviorist, I've changed my approaches many times over the last 20 years, mostly thanks to dogs! I've had the opportunity to explore how it feels, internally and externally, what it is like to teach another species, give myself performance evaluations, and to like hard-working volunteers inspired and appreciated.

For dog-training, my own creative approach is [A.C.T. Awareness Centered Training](#). It is based on relationship, well-being, education (teaching) and respect. It is how I like being treated and it works! Living and learning with dogs has taught me that dogs (and humans) become complacent if bored, scared, conflicted or too stressed out. I endeavor to "not struggle" harder than I need to get a goal, short or long-term, accomplished. Re-inventing the wheel that already turns well, in my point of view, is a waste of energy. Being a curious and creative individual, who likes being appreciated, I enjoy observing any being light up when they learn something new or feel good about themselves.

Reflecting on a book recently called [The Fifth Agreement](#) by Don Miguel Ruiz, he explores human nature, giving us an easy approach to daily living, but hard to practice until we learn to block out sensory overload and be clear about what we want. Here are the agreements in brief, but the book is worth its weight in gold: 1. Be impeccable with your work, 2. Don't take it personally, 3. Don't make Assumptions, 4. Do the best you can at everything and 5. Be skeptical, but listen.

Our relationships whether with partners, friends, families or our dogs can be easier and healthier by following an approach that has been used successfully in businesses for a long time called Performance Evaluations. Let's explore this concept ***Relationship Performance Evaluation (RPE)***. Stay with me, it gets better:

1. Know your Top Ranking VIPs (Very Important Principles):

- a. Make a list of the top five things you need from your partner / spouse / employees / volunteers / dogs! Write them down and have them write theirs down too. Five too many? Try starting with 3. Dogs will let you know by their ***response to your intention with their attention or lack thereof***. Writing helps to etch it into our memory banks. Others

can't say I forgot or lost it. A business size card will fit in a wallet. Put it on your laptop or cell.

- b. At any job / project, even if you manage your own business or work out of the home, define what is important and expected of relationship. If for no other reason, you discover what is important (remembering to call when late) or what isn't (leaving the cap off the toothpaste). Is it relevant if your dog jumps higher than 6 feet? Maybe, maybe not.
- c. It is no-one's responsibility or business to decide what is or isn't relative but the parties involved, because, as Don Miguel says, "we all have our stories, but do not know another's." The lists should be respected and honored, age, species and skill appropriate. And, of course, it needs to be reviewed every quarter or 6-months (you decide) like any good performance evaluation! Set the date and time to be sure it's accomplished.
- d. ***Here is an example /create your own:*** 1. Remember to call when late, 2. Be engaged in the conversation and listen, 3. Work as a team, 4. Have my back like you would a team at work, 5. Laugh, play, humor, 6. Treat me with respect, 7. Do something nice even when not expected.

2. Think Three to One (3:1) Approach: In [Train Your Dog, Change Your Life](#), the message is, if you want to change your dog's behavior, you have to change your own. How is it that 5 positive things can happen and we focus in Techni-color on the one negative thing? Focusing and harping on negative (bad) behavior may make someone (including our dogs) comply out of fear or sick of hearing it. The magic formula is focusing on 3:1 -- three positive messages (reward) to one negative. Bad/good dinner table game is good too; sharing the day's bad, then ending on a good note. That's life!

- a. Oftentimes, people feel neglected or rejected when denied or not paid attention too. I take my cue from working with dogs, who become complacent when asked to do the same thing repeatedly, and do not receive any feedback. Why bother?
- b. **Most of us have knee-jerk reactions, at different levels on the hurt-o-meter, depending on where, when and what kind of day we are having.** Write it down (journal), then decompress and let others DC too. If it bothers you enough, it will re-surface again. Ask "is this always true or am I just having a bad day -- this too shall pass?" If we quiet our minds, the answer appears. Get a good night's sleep because sleep deprivation is prevalent.
- c. Shining a more positive light on interactions, genuinely listening, and then addressing the negative or bothersome behavior, as calmly as possible, creates small miracles in behavior change. Patterns are difficult to change overnight, but with intention and practice, it works!

3. Don't send your dog to horse school? There are similar principles and approaches to positive, train-no-pain, for dogs, horses and humans. Horses are prey animals even though their size and

strength may seem otherwise. Dogs are predators. Humans are both. We are simply different creatures with our own culture and talents. When communicated effectively, we “get it.”

- a. **Frank McNair, in his book, [The Golden Rules for Managers](#) shares:** “effective managers help employees identify their gifts and then match them with the jobs they’ll excel at. For example, don’t ask a shopaholic to handle the budget or an Old English Bulldog to quickly bring you a life preserver in the ocean. If the drive, ability and focus are not present, why struggle? Remember [Sisyphus](#) (Roman Mythology), the king punished by being compelled to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down, and to repeat this throughout eternity? Ask for something that can be accomplished unless you enjoy rolling boulders uphill ... yikes!
 - b. **Example:** I would love my husband to not leave clothes strewn all over. The fact is he picks up when he has the time, and more often than not, is well put together, especially for work. At home, during time off, after decompression, is when I ask for him to bring his “A” game, showering, getting rid of the mess, and acting interested in conversation beyond sports and remotes. He does because I sit patiently (or leave the room) when the remote flicking gets neurotic. Same with dogs. It is being Sisyphus to ask your partner or dog (anyone) to complete a task exactly like Martha Stewart. Identifying the “means a lot” and the “okay I can live with that” makes living with our own species more bearable. I am a counselor and when my mentor said “save your energy for things you can change because it is a perfect whatever it is”, I know NOW what he meant.
 - c. **Clarify the tasks, split the tasks, and share your feelings about it with integrity!** Putting yourself in the other person’s moccasins is one of the oldest and most universal metaphors. Whether at home or work, with partners, employers or dogs, don’t assume they know what you do not share! Be sure by having them repeat it back to you and vice versa.
4. **Perform a [360 degree review](#) of your relationship, training program, other: A 360 degree review** uses evaluations to assess an employee’s performance. Oftentimes, we are more open to receiving constructive criticism from strangers than friends, families or partners. Inherently I know when my dogs are disgusted. Their body language - harrumphs and/or walking away is clear indication that I am being impossible. My partner is learning not to swear at me under his breath because that only makes me glow in red. We tend to criticize our dogs and close partners more easily because they love us. Sounds dumb but it is true. They are AVAILABLE, and most often, care enough to catch the feedback without taking it personally. ***Having a quarterly or every 6-month relationship review*** helps clarify and balance how much, when, where, and for how long. In other words, is it working? People don’t appreciate feeling disrespected, used and abused. A 360 degree requires courage, but you can learn things that can improve your relationships overall. Sit still for a moment, close your eyes, and inhale deeply to the count of 4-8 (whatever is your lung’s

capacity). Hold for 4. Exhale for 4 to 8. Do this several times and imagine yourself floating over your relationship(s) or a particular issue that's bothering you. You need to be calm to assess what it is that you can and cannot tolerate any further. How important is it, and write it down for future reference.

- a. **Example:** Create a simple survey of 5 – 8 questions on topics that are of interest to you like communication, shared goals, trust, and alignment of personal views, team work, conflict, humor and general outlook on life. Do it with yourself first and then your partner, friend or family member. Dogs look at you funny, sigh, but listen well, until they fall asleep. When results are in, make an agreement that you will calmly, but honestly discuss the results like need to communicate more in certain area. Create small, meaningful, but successful changes with a check-in date. Give each other “target” signals like “ah, we’re going down that slippery slope again” or other creative cues to stop the repetitive behavior. Once, a counselor suggested to my partner to walk away, but never took it to the next level of communication, which would be letting me know why in the middle of something I’m heated up about, he would walk away without saying a word. To me, that was disrespectful, and because I am a counselor, I told her! So be careful. Let someone know why you are hanging up, especially if the topic is heated and repetitive. Just hanging up or walking away doesn’t change anything. Even quitting a job on the spot because you can’t stand up may give you immediate relief and “haha”, but in the future you will need references, and it won’t change anything for the next person in that job.
- b. Afterward, sit down and brainstorm ways to improve communication and resolve issues that can be put on a business card size file for your wallet or purse, on your cell or laptop to remind you. No excuses about “forgetting it” although we all slip back. Remember, it will be 3-steps forward and two steps back, but with practice we are always one step ahead to improve communication in relationships.
- c. Change is not easy, and it affects habitual lifestyle patterns that many of us don’t like to change, but most will if they care enough about the relationship.
- d. Remember teamwork. Knowing that someone has your back is valuable.

5. **Win-Win the Client:** In mediation there is something called “BATNA”, best alternative to a negotiated agreement. In business or dog training, win-win is a favorite of mine because I know how I like to be treated. I get excited when I can get another species to do voluntarily and joyfully do something. The mantra is you do something for me and I’ll do something for you, and it doesn’t have to be right now, but sometimes it does! I’ll let you know. How can we both feel good about this and still get this accomplished? If there is a communication blip, lack of intent, interest or respect, then one needs to know before creating change. Leadership can be win-win too. Sometimes, being more directive and assertive works best, but how we present it matters! Present assertively, with clarity and asking them to repeat it back so we know if it is clear. With

dogs, it is easy. If they aren't doing something we want, then we know we aren't communicating clearly. Read on, because this is cool ... and so true for most of us ...

- a. ***How often do you show up and wing it for a very important million-dollar contract, campaign or other meaningful project?*** Only you can honestly answer that question. Usually, if you have an important goal, you spend weeks, sometimes a year or more, doing your research, setting forecasting timelines, goals and putting together an "A" game team and plan to get it accomplished.
- b. ***At work, you would get warned and possibly fired if you put "zero" effort into your job.*** I fire myself on a regular basis, especially when I set goals, and then procrastinate. Sometimes, I get side-tracked which is easy to do working from a home office. In long-term relationships, we do it more often because we get into a comfort zone. Same with our dogs! Then "BAM" something happens to wake us up!
- c. ***Energy levels vary.*** We need time to decompress together and apart before dealing with questions, answers and decision-making. My point of view is that everyone deserves a time-off from decision-making. There is a mine, yours and ours to every relationship! It's not hard if you take turns, and stick to an agenda: "we are taking turns -- remember? Isn't it your turn to cook or clean the litter box." Flexibility is a part of healthy relationships, as long as it is clarified what we are being flexible about.
- d. ***The A-Game:*** In relationships outside of the "work place" partners (family and friends) must agree to bring their "***A***" game to the table as often as possible. Setting mine, yours and our time is effective. When together, let's set a time for engaging with genuine attention.
- e. ***Delegating and Directions:*** Women, delegate! I am one and know how this can play out. Letting go of perfection and thinking that we need to pole-dance while whistling "Moves like Jagger", while juggling a platter on our nose wears us down! I like to dance, so someone else will have to carry the platter! Universally, that's an easy task right? "Here, take THIS platter to THAT table and put it in THE MIDDLE, thank you. Directions are important!
- f. ***Treat your relationships like the client or team at work.*** You'll notice a difference in the response you receive back. Picture balance on scales. It will tip in either direction. That's life. Checking in with your team at home, as often as at work, to balance the scales, makes a magical difference. Things will improve dramatically!

A successful partnership (human or canine) takes work, but the dividends are priceless!
Enjoy the Journey!