
Grisha Steward

Top Dog Trainer & Owner Ahimsa Dog Training



Grisha Steward is brain – a mathematician with a master’s degree in theoretical mathematics! She’s also the founder of Ahimsa Dog Training in Seattle, Washington. And she’s a certified dog trainer and instructor of puppy and dog classes, including Growly Dog class. Grisha has been voted Seattle’s Top Dog Trainer by the readers of *CityDog Magazine*. She is also certified in Pet First Aid by the American Red Cross and Canine Good Citizen evaluator.

So Grisha – how do you get from math geek to dog trainer?

GS – I have had dogs in my world for most of my life, but I got my own dog in grad school and completely fell in love with dogs and behavior. I read 50 books the first summer I had my dog.

What I did as a mathematician was theoretical, not practical at all, so it would seem like the complete opposite of dog training. But math is also problem solving and critical thinking and that’s what I do all the time as a dog trainer.

One thing that I really love about being a trainer is watching the dogs and people make progress. I get to save lives every day, and they actually all want to be learn what I’m teaching, which is a big difference from my college math classes.

I noticed you named your training facility “ahimsa,” a Sanskrit term meaning “do no harm.” What inspired you to use this moniker and does this describe your philosophy of dog training?

GS - I picked the name Ahimsa for the school because I do reward-based training and I know how seductive it can be to do punishment-based training. Even though it’s not the most effective method in the long-term, punishment is very rewarding for the trainer because it seems to work right away. I wanted a business name that would keep me honest!

There are lots of facilities that offer dog classes. What makes someone a “certified” dog trainer?

GS - Most of our trainers are Certified Pet Dog Trainers (CPDT), meaning that their certification is through a branch of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers, a respected international organization of reward-based training. There is a test, you have to have trained for a certain number of hours, and you have to have letters of recommendation from a peer, a vet, and a student. It’s probably the most standard certification, because it is independent of where one learned about dog training.

Three of our trainers are also Certified Training Partners of the Karen Pryor Academy (KPA CTP). That means we went through their program on animal behavior and training and passed a practical exam.

I am both a CPDT and a KPA CTP. Yes, I'm a geek.

What's the best way for dog owners to find a certified dog trainer?

GS – The Association of Pet Dog Trainers has a dog trainer search feature at <http://apdt.com/po/ts/default.aspx> where you can find certified trainers all around the world.

Tell me about Growly Dog class – sounds kind of scary!

GS - It's a great class. It's a support group for the humans and aggression rehabilitation for the dogs. It's for dogs that act aggressively toward other dogs. Even though the techniques are pretty much the same as what we'd do for dog-human aggression, I don't want any of the students to feel unsafe, so we limit the aggression to dog-dog issues. Dogs with aggression to humans meet with Kathy Sdao for private training.

Each person brings their dog to a different session of Growly Dog class, and we have volunteers for the dogs to practice being friendly. So it's not just a room full of barking-lunging dogs. I've had about 200 dogs go through the class and people are pretty happy with it.

What are your top dog training tips.

GS – Make a list of what you want and what you don't want. Pick the most important ones to work on first. Make sure the behaviors you want get paid for with attention, food, and permission to do fun things. Make sure that's NOT the case for the things you want the dog to stop doing. You have to be 100% consistent with making sure the dog is not paid for bad behavior. The good news is that you don't have to be as consistent with rewards – being more like a slot machine than a predictable soda machine is a good thing!

Can you tell us about your new Fit With Fido classes?

GS – We wanted to create a social, fun class where people can train their dogs and get some exercise at the same time. The main thing we train is how to keep walking without jumping after distractions and also to walk without pulling. We meet at a great walking trail around Green Lake in Seattle. Having a nice scenic environment also helps!

It's an ongoing class, so people can join it at any time. Any of our current training students can also go for free, if there's space.

Anything you'd like to add?

GS – I think people have so much to learn from dogs and the way that we interact with them. People can learn to set boundaries with other people, without violence, by learning how to do the same with their dogs. They can learn to live in the moment, as dogs do. And as you point out in your book, Fit As Fido: Follow Your Dog To Better Health, they can learn to get moving and be active, as dogs do!

I also do some training via Skype, for people who want reward-based training or help selecting a dog, but can't find any trainers who fit the bill in their area.

A great trainer like Grisha really can inspire you to work with your dog – and the time spent training is always rewarded many times over! If you're lucky enough to live in the Seattle area, check out Grisha's full class schedule at <http://ahimsadogtraining.com/>. If you don't live near Grisha's facility, you can still benefit from her expertise by following her blog, also at this same website, or taking advantage of her virtual training via Skype.
