What is NePoPo®?

By: Michael and Bart Bellon

NePoPo® is a training system used around the world. NePoPo® was designed to create reliable and highly motivated dogs who are enthusiastic about their jobs, whatever those jobs may be.

Philosophy of NePoPo®

NePoPo® is an acronym that describes the basic of NePoPo®: Negative - Positive - Positive. NePoPo® is a training system where the dog always does on cue with heart and soul. How do we get there? We need to know, why does a dog do something? A dog does something to better his own situation. How can he better his own situation?

- Adding nice feelings (positive reinforcement/PoPo)
- Taking away small unpleasant feelings (negative reinforcement/NePo)
- Taking away small unpleasant feelings followed by adding nice feelings (the NePoPo®reinforcer)
- Or by avoiding high unpleasant feelings (avoiding punishments/corrections or aversive stimulations)

The system is designed to create a dog who looks like he is doing the behavior spontaneously when cued to do. The things we want to train our dog to do are almost always already in their repertoire. To illustrate this point, we put forth two common **examples:**

1. When a dog picks up his food bowl and bangs it into you, communicating "feed me", he holds that metal without chewing, without dropping it, with ears up, tail high and eyes burning like cigarettes. Conversely, we take that same dog and when we teach him to fetch the dumbbell, he is slack jawed, holding the dumbbell like a hot potato, ears down, tail down.

2. When you go for a walk with your dog, and he smells something on the ground. He stops walking to stay sniffing. You try to pull him away, and he stays on the stinky spot. You think it might be something truly disgusting, so you try to kick him off it, but he stays sniffing while his back end avoids your kick. That same dog, when you teach him to track, he acts like he doesn't have a nose. Despite everything you try to do to motivate the dog on your track, his nose is up like he is watching the birds which are much more interesting.

What do we do wrong in training? To answer this question, you must know fully inside and outside the consequences for doing and not doing in positive training and in negative reinforcement training (also called avoidance training and escape training.) Most people train in positive training when they implement consequences for doing, and those people use the consequence (+P)* from another system (avoidance training) when they implement consequences for not doing. This is what we call PoPoNe. To train in NePoPo®, you need to understand operant and classical conditioning. Operant conditioning is capturing a spontaneous behavior. Classical conditioning is pairing two signals by using a new signal that has no meaning in front of a known signal with a strong meaning. Operant conditioning done well lets the dog think the behavior is his idea. The more the dog believes that the command you gave was his idea, the more intensity he will give to protecting and doing that behavior.

With more and more restrictions on bitework and training tools that we are allowed to use worldwide, NePoPo® adheres closely to the animal welfare law which around the world is basically the same (but is interpreted differently): It is forbidden without a valid reason to inflict pain on your dog or to make your dog suffer. The valid reasons are to save the life of the dog or to protect a person from harm caused by the dog. The interpretation of pain and suffering is sometimes open to interpretation. By staying within the animal welfare framework and making all trainings acceptable for "Joe Bob" to watch, we increase the chances that we will maintain our ability to keep the dogs that we need, train the dogs we need, and use the tools that we need. We are building a coalition. It must be indisputably correct. More information can be found in the NePoPo® Online School. (www.nepopotraining.com)

How do we implement NePoPo®?

NePoPo® is the implementation of negative reinforcement fol-

lowed by an extra positive: pressure on, pressure off (first positive), extra reward (second positive). Before we implement NePoPo®, it is important for the dog to have hope/expectation/ignition/gasoline. Can you drive a car without gasoline? If the car has no gasoline, we must push the car. If the dog has no gasoline, we must push the dog. We don't want that. Yes, it is possible without ignition to just use negative reinforcement on a dog to create activity; but to do this, you need golden hands and most people who do this create the opposite of an active dog which is a flat dog.

*Positive punishment/positive correction is where you add something unpleasant (that is in the same language as your negative reinforcer) after disobedience.

Ignition is the first step. We are ignition trainers who implement NePoPo®. The pressure must be minimal and fair with a clear outcome possibility.

Principles of NePoPo®:

In NePoPo®, we want an active dog with intrinsic motivation. We don't want to push. We condition him to find his advantage in doing the things we want him to do.

- In NePoPo®, we are applying appropriate measured consequences for doing and not doing. And yes, consequences for not doing are different when the dog does not fully understand.
- In NePoPo®, we use the full power/all the advantages of positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement, and we strategically use the systems in our favor.
- In NePoPo®, we can use

positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement or a NePoPo® reinforcement as consequences for doing. In NePoPo®, dogs understand the full power of all the systems (PoPo, NePo, and NePoPo®) and we can pick and choose which reinforcements/corrections we want to use that would work best with the dog in front of us.

- Additionally, we engage in conflict management training where the dogs do willingly engage with us and ignore the distraction.

Applications of NePoPo®:

- Professional working dogs: military, police, search and rescue, and service dogs benefit from NePoPo® because NePoPo® fosters independence, confidence, and the willingness to perform under stress.
- Sport and Competition Training: these dogs can benefit from the system that accentuates the dogs' precision and enthusiasm.
- Pet training: Although NePoPo® was designed initially for high performance dogs, NePoPo® trained pets have excellent relationships with their owners due to the clear communication and the resulting harmony that is achieved.

What is the signature of a NePoPo® trained dog?

The signature of the NePoPo® trained dog is the dog who is active and executes cues with

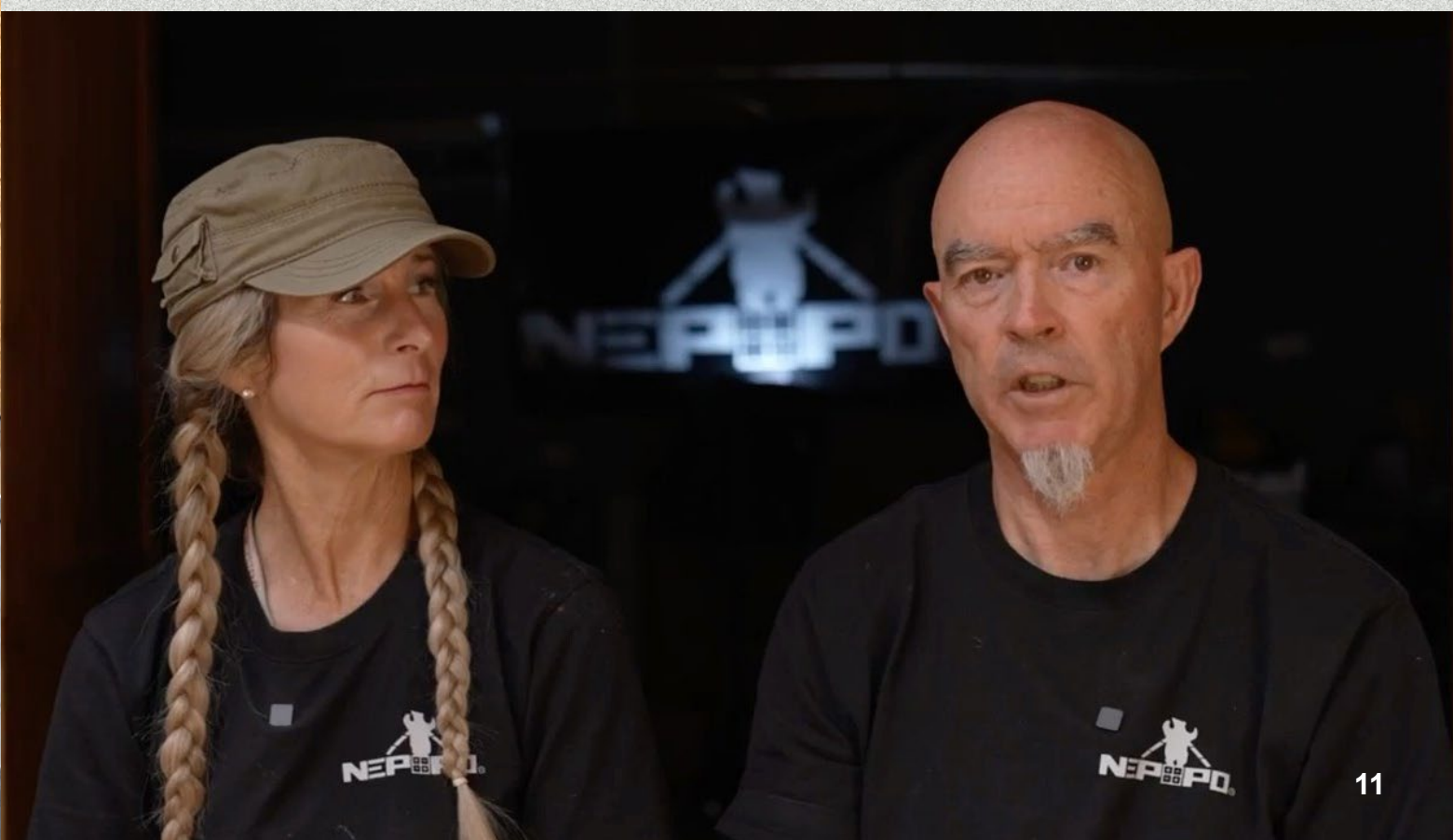
passion and intensity and precision. A NePoPo® dog seeks engagement and opportunities to work. NePoPo® trained dogs are resilient and adaptable.

Misconceptions about the system are rampant. Some people say the dogs are like robots. We assure you they are not. They are passionate about their work. Some people believe that NePoPo® is an electronic collar system. No, the electronic collar is one of the tools that we can use in the system.

Conclusion

NePoPo® is a seamless integration of positive reinforcement training and avoidance training that makes the dog reliable and highly motivated. Unlike the dog who is trained only in compulsion who does the behavior to avoid the punishment, or the dog trained in positive only who lacks reliability under pressure, NePoPo® trained dogs work with energy, confidence, and eagerness, and precision. NePoPo® training gives lasting behavioral results and a strong bond with the handler. NePoPo® is in line with the animal welfare law and creates the dogs we want and need. NePoPo® is the language of modern dog training where the job becomes the reward.

THE LANGUAGE OF MODERN TRAINING

Michael and Bart Bellon have been traveling the world giving seminars for many years. During those years, they saw that animal welfare laws were being more strictly implemented internationally. Bart and Michael were and are convinced that dog training must be politically palatable. NePoPo® is a reflection of this conviction. In addition to teaching seminars, Bart and Michael designed, patented and produced their own electronic collar brand, the Chameleon®.

This brand was designed with animal welfare in mind, striving to be the most animal friendly and inconspicuous collar on the market with the highest degree of functionality. In 2015, Michael and Bart started the NePoPo® Dog Training school. In 2018, they had the opportunity to purchase the Martin System® company, a worldwide leader in innovation in electronic collars for dogs. With the purchase of Martin System®, the Martin System® and Chameleon® brands were merged. Products from the Martin System® line were honed to match with the modern, animal friendly philosophy of the NePoPo® School. You can find Michael and Bart's full biographies at www.nepopotraining.com