



PRESS RELEASE

Positive reinforcement for the planet

Dog trainers are perfectly positioned to have a huge role in responding to the climate and ecological emergencies.

At a time when we need more than ever to come together to respond to global crisis, in general society has become increasingly polarised. People are spending far too much time online, even when they are not they may only engage with people holding similar views.

Fortunately some professional groups transcend these barriers, taxi drivers and hair dressers are well known to spend time chatting to a diverse range of people. I think it's fair to say that dog trainers also squarely fall into this category, better still they are experts in behaviour change.

Whilst the dog sector has yet to be explored, there have been some incredible behavioural change projects with charities teaching hairdressers who went on to successfully inform thousands of their clients about environmental issues. Dog trainers have spent years honing their teaching skills and behaviour change techniques, so could be one of the best sectors to engender positive change.

Whilst most of a trainer's time will undoubtedly be focused on the needs of the dogs and their guardians, there is nearly always a need for some small talk, perhaps an icebreaker, break up a tough session or just for conversation to fill some time whilst preparing for the next activity.

We're confident that this will go down well with clients, the environment is a theme that brings nearly all of us together. A recent study found that only 3% of the UK population have no concerns about the climate crisis, most people are just looking for guidance on how to respond.

If a trainer sees perhaps 20 clients a week, that's over a 1000 people per year, just a small change from half of these people would have an enormous impact. Now imagine hundreds of dog trainers also doing the same, the overall impact could be magnificent.

If you are a trainer and are unsure where to start, here are some suggestions for how you could use your position and teaching skills to have an enormous impact to improve the welfare of all animals:

Air pollution

"Have you seen our electric dog van: ...it's great fun to drive.. far less air polluting for dogs on board... we can leave the air conditioning on so they are safe in the summer without any exhaust fumes"

Climate

"How did the dogs get on with that heatwave last week:...far too often we can't walk our dogs at lunchtime... heatwaves are becoming more frequent, we really need to stop the climate getting worse...we're doing things to reduce the impact of our business.. did you know we've offset our emissions are net positive business"

Ecology

"Isn't it wonderful seeing so much nature when you walk the dogs: ...at certain times of the year we keep the dogs on the lead to stop them disturbing ground nesting birds... we make sure we pick up after our dogs, as their poo can damage natural habitats..."

Food

"Is it ok to use these treats for this exercise...we often use these fab plant based treats, the dogs love them... we're passionate about the welfare of all animals, plant based treats such as carrots are a good way to reduce our impact...even switching the type of animal meat in their food can reduce the carbon pawprint of your animal."

Plastic

"Would you like to use one of our compostable poo bags: ...They are made from starch rather than oil so are more environmentally friendly.. they are nice to use... you can pick them up in most shops and don't cost much more"

At PACT we've been embedding climate literacy in our courses, developed guides and held webinars to support our members. Given the scale of the challenge facing us all we'd encourage everyone to do the same.

So next time you see a client, why not have a chat with them about the environment, who knows you may just be encouraging some towards becoming the next Sir David Attenborough.

Notes to Editor: This article was written by Jason Light, the PACT Director of Sustainability, a Chartered Environmentalist and Fellow member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.

BEIS Public Attitude Survey

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/beis-public-attitudes-tracker-winter-2021> (Accessed 2 June 2022)

There are several studies assessing behavioural change, this is a good example.

Baden, D., Prasad, S. Applying Behavioural Theory to the Challenge of Sustainable Development: Using Hairdressers as Diffusers of More Sustainable Hair-Care Practices. *J Bus Ethics* 133, 335–349 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2398-y>