

## TO THE EDITOR of VETERINARY INFORMATION NEWS (VIN)

It was with relief and satisfaction that I read this VIN article and saw that AVSAB is stating what has needed to be said for a long time: when the lay public sees Cesar Millan on television they are seeing an "entertainer" rather than a trainer working with the kindness and patience to improve a dog's behavior. Millan's show THE DOG WHISPERER showcases him as a charming ringmaster - but in the circus tradition of old-fashioned lion-tamers and elephant wranglers.

There are two Cesar Millans: other dog trainers often see him in a different light, as I've been told that up-close-and-in-person Cesar has a gift with dogs and can get effective results. However, what the public sees on his TV show are often cruel attitudes and techniques - terrifying and physically abusive, using fear-and-power-based "training" techniques to physically exhaust dogs to the point of danger (with English Bull Dogs and others) in order to achieve what is technically resignation in the dogs. I have taped and watched close to 100 hours of his shows, as an investigative reporter and dog expert with two live weekly radio shows (called DOG TALK® and CAT CHAT®). I am motivated to dissect both his popularity and the training messages he seems to be imparting so that I can better inform and guide my listeners in their own choices and behavior. Based on prevalent theories of learning and training, what Cesar does appears to be a temporary "giving up" by the dogs, which improperly explained gives other people the wrong message about being over bearing and domineering with their pets. I am grateful for the AVSAB position which I hope will help open peoples' eyes about how unkind and ultimately ineffective the techniques are that Millan employs.

What concerned me in the VIN article was the use of Martin Deeley as a spokesperson or defender of Cesar – without disclosing the very close relationship the two men have, including a photo of them together on Martin Deeley's website (he trains dog trainers) where he makes clear the professional and economic tie between them. When Cesar Millan is sending you customers – and his celebrity lends cachet to your brand or business – I think it's fair to say there is a bias or conflict of interest that should properly have been divulged by Mr. Deeley or discovered by the VIN journalist in researching or fact-checking. I have had Martin Deeley on my live NPR radio show DOG TALK® and knew of his personal admiration for and economic ties to Millan.

In order to fully examine these issues of whether Millan's techniques are a throw-back in dog-training terms of an era of old-fashioned attitudes to women and children in our society – "spare the rod and spoil the child " and "wives should be beaten regularly." There was a not-so-long-ago time when this was conventional "wisdom" about how learning took place and social order was maintained – this kind of patriarchal, archaic thinking should have no place in today's training of our companion animals.

February 28<sup>th</sup> I am going to devote the whole hour of DOG TALK® to a round table debate on this topic with Martin Deeley – and AVSAB members Dr. Sophia Yin of U.C. Davis (quoted in the article), Dr. David S. Spiegel and Dr. Lisa Radosta-Huntley . My personal evaluation of Millan's tactics and techniques (having watched entire seasons of

his show, often in great dismay) is that he relies on dominating, terrifying and exhausting dogs to get a momentary response. My research shows this is a terrible message to be sending to the public, many of whom need professionals to evaluate and treat dogs. Some of these animals may just need common sense environmental changes and some average obedience training, while others may have serious personality or underlying medical issues that make them dangerous. I hope this roundtable debate will shed light on all these issues.

Respectfully,

Tracie Hotchner, author of THE DOG BIBLE, THE CAT BIBLE and producer/writer/host of DOG TALK® and CAT CHAT®.