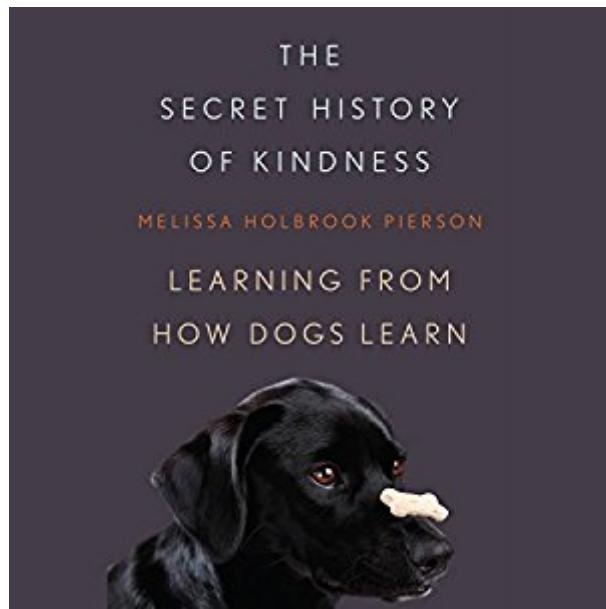


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# The Secret History Of Kindness: Learning From How Dogs Learn



## **Synopsis**

An intimate, surprising look at man's best friend and what the leading philosophies of dog training teach us about ourselves. Years back, Melissa Holbrook Pierson brought home a border collie named Mercy, without a clue of how to get her to behave. Stunned after hiring a trainer whose immediate rapport with Mercy seemed magical, Pierson began delving into the techniques of positive reinforcement. She made her way to B. F. Skinner, the behavioral psychologist who started it all, the man who could train a pigeon to dance in minutes and whose research on how behavior is acquired has ramifications for military dolphin trainers, athletes, dancers, and, as he originally conceived, society at large. To learn more, Pierson met with a host of fascinating animal behaviorists, going behind the scenes to witness the relationships between trainers and animals at the National Zoo in Washington, DC, and to the in-depth seminars at a Clicker Expo where all the dogs but hers seemed to be learning new tricks. The often startling story of what became of a path breaking scientist's work is interwoven with a more personal tale of how to understand the foreign species with whom we are privileged to live. Pierson draws surprising connections in her exploration of how kindness works to motivate all animals, including the human one.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This is the most important book I've read in the last 10 years. I do not write reviews for books and am not prone to hyperbole. Unlike the reviewer who would not put this at the top of his pile (because he thought the book was about dog training -- after all, it has a picture of a dog on the cover), I believe that this book is too important not to be priority reading for anyone who leads, manages,

teaches, trains, coaches, mentors or, indeed, communicates with other living entities. For precisely the same reasons that many outside of the dog training universe dismissed (or ignored or never really read) Karen Pryor's earlier books, Don't Shoot the Dog and Lads to the Wind, the reviewer giving a less than stellar rating never really got the message. He was looking for something else (and must have ignored the subtitle, Learning from How Dogs Learn) and when it didn't meet his expectations, he gives it a low rating. In rating or recommending anything, I consider whether the author accomplished his or her purpose and how well. This book does, in spades. The therapeutic, training and coaching professions have largely ignored the discipline of operant conditioning while still practicing many of its tenets, though inconsistently and ineffectively. If you ignore the source of your most successful interventions and do not endeavor to learn its disciplines, you can self-perpetuate a career because your patients and clients will always have behavior problems, for which you can sell the next greatest solution that will not work in the long-term. Why? Because you never get to the source of the issue. Skinner was not ostracized by religious zealots -- and I think it's dishonest to say that this was what Pierson implied in part of her book.

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