Find your clients a **dog trainer** in **4 easy steps!**

1. **Get online.** Visit the training professional’s website and find out what certifications he/she holds. Dog training professionals (DTPs) are not licensed nor required to have any level of knowledge before they can call themselves a dog trainer, behaviorist or pet behavior consultant. All certifications are voluntary. The curriculum of each certification may be entirely different from the next, and none are overseen by any governing body outside of the certifying organization. A great DTP should have at least one certification and/or degree. The groups offering the most commonly encountered certifications are below in no particular order:

   - CCPDT (Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers, ccpdt.org)
   - KPA-CTC (Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training and Behavior, karenpryoracademy.com)
   - PCT (Pet Professional Guild, petprofessionalguild.com)
   - IIABC (International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants, iaabc.org)
   - CTC (Academy for Dog Trainers, academyfordogtrainers.com)
   - PMCT (Pat Miller Certified Trainer, peaceablepaws.com).

   Dog training professionals may also have a bachelor’s degree (BA or BS), master’s degree (MS) or doctorate (PhD) in an animal-related field. It can be a plus to work with someone who has formal education in animal behavior. An applied animal behaviorist (AAB) has a MS or a PhD in an animal–behavior-related field. You can find out more about the AAB certification at animalbehavior.org.

2. **Get on the phone.** Ask how many and which continuing education courses were attended in the past year. The DTP should have attended at least two CE courses within the year. Next, ask which methods she/he uses. The DTP should be committed to using positive reinforcement methodology and should clearly state that choke, pinch or shock collars are not used. Positive reinforcement training is the most scientifically based and effective methodology for altering an animal’s behavior without causing fear, anxiety, stress and injury. If the DTP mentions using these tools, hang up and keep searching.

3. **Be wary of guarantees.** Ask whether the DTP guarantees the dog’s behavior after training. We all want that guarantee—whether it be from our doctor, our spouse, our child’s teacher or our dog trainer. Just as you would never guarantee the outcome of treatment because you cannot control entirely what happens in an animal’s body, a DTP cannot guarantee the outcome of one or even 1,000 training sessions. There are too many factors affecting the dog’s behavior (pet parent, dog, environment) for anyone to guarantee results. A DTP should not guarantee the dog’s behavior after it is trained. Instead, they might be able to let you know how many dogs they have trained and what the results were with those dogs.

4. **Meet in person.** Watch the DTP teach a class or ask to sit in on a consultation. The person should be empathetic, effective and professional. They should stay in their own lane professionally and should not recommend medications or dietary changes (these should be the purview of the veterinarian who is trained in nutrition and pharmacology). Ask if they can work with you as a team, sharing information regularly on the patient’s progress, any abnormalities they notice during session and any challenges the client is facing. In turn, make sure that you offer the same.

More information on training methods and how to find a good dog trainer can be found at:

- flvetbehavior.com
- avsab.org

**Source:** Lisa Radosta, DVM, DACVB