

Focus On The Now In Relationships With Pet Birds

A little recognition of our pet birds' positive traits goes a long way in helping us realize how much they enrich our lives.

By Chris Davis

Courtesy of Mike Allison, Pennsylvania

Focusing on your bird's positive behaviors can help to change your view of them.

We who are lucky enough to share our lives with pet birds know that, although the thermometer may drop and – for some – snow may fly outside, our little family members brighten and warm our hearts and homes the entire year. Most people tend to focus their thoughts in the past or in the future, without fully embracing each moment as it is lived. If we wish to change that, our birds can help us. They are artful masters of living in the moment and can be wonderful barometers for where we are at each moment of our lives.

The further we slip from living in the moment, the more likely we are to see problem behaviors in our pet birds. They demand interaction that is focused and respectful. When they are interacting with us, it is never superficial or absent-minded ... they are not mentally "off somewhere else." They are with us the entire time. Unfortunately, few of us can say that we reciprocate with the same intensity.

Ironically, when considering living in the "now," we need to consider our past behavioral patterns. Take time for reflection and contemplation, and look back over the past 12 months or more and assess those things we liked, or did not like, about our lives and relationships.

It also helps to remember the power of focus. Whatever we focus attention, time and energy on becomes important ... whether it actually was in the beginning, or not. For example, when clients call who are displeased with their birds but have no clear reason why, I encourage them to assess the past year and to write down the most important things in two lists: One list being those things or experiences they considered good; the other, things they considered bad. Then, I suggest they make a list of things they would like to change, including their relationships with their birds.

After evaluating their most important influences, many people find that the importance of those who are most precious to them often go unrecognized. It is as if the birds are so much a part of us that, like essential organs, we often do not consciously recognize the magnitude of their impact upon our lives until there is a problem. Usually, that very lack of recognition is the problem!

Many will, however, often remember those things about their pet birds that drive them crazy and focus their attention and energy on those aspects. I remind them that those behaviors or traits that we love most about someone, human or otherwise, are exactly the same things that eventually drive us crazy.

If, for example, their bird talks well, it may also become noisy; and if it is playful and rambunctious, using its beak for many of its favorite play activities, it may also destroy property or get a bit nippy when "wired." If it is a quiet and contemplative bird that enjoys gently nibbling on things, it may chew its feathers when stressed or bored.

In all of these activities, the people were usually silent when the bird was behaving well or being "good." However, they took time to notice and talk to or look at, or walk up to, the bird when it was misbehaving. Their focus and energy at that moment of interaction between them and their bird – the "now" – was placed strongly on the negative behavior. In essence, people were carefully training their birds to exhibit the very same negative behaviors that aggravated them!

Go Positive

Some of the most profound behavior changes can result from a mere shift of focus from the negative to the positive. It's easy to do.

Go Positive 1: First, make a list about all the wonderful aspects of sharing your life with a companion bird. For example, they make going home fun; they bring joy and laughter; they are infinitely interesting and entertaining. Be creative, and make your own additions to the list.

Go Positive 2: Then, every day, simply do something special for your pet birds. Spend a little extra time with them; scratch all their favorite little places; tell them how cute or beautiful their little toes, beaks or eyes are, and say it with meaning. Even if naked or, if they have misshapen beaks or bodies, they are still beautiful and shine inside and out when told

that.

Give your birds a foot massage or a little gift you know they will enjoy ... a toy, a new perch, a new healthy treat, some extra time with you on the sofa or on a tabletop perch, watching your favorite film or while you talk with friends. Give your bird some additional time with you in the mornings as you get ready for work.

Purchase a little portable perch, and teach your little friend to stay on it when placed there so you can take him with you from room to room. It is a wonderful way to keep your companion with you while still being able to accomplish whatever tasks need to be done.

His behavior can be reinforced by talking to him and telling him how good he is and that you like him sitting on the perch like a good boy. He will feel like he has spent more time with you, yet having him out with you can be easily assimilated into your morning schedule.

While you change your own behavior toward your bird, lessen your focus on his negative behaviors. Only you can teach him what you want. If he climbs down from his perch, tell him "No" one time. If he continues, just return him to his cage. Or, if your bird is becoming obnoxious in his cage, simply leave the room, or turn your back on him. When he is being a good bird – even if he is simply sitting quietly and minding his own business – look at him and smile, tell him he's a good boy, that you love him. Focus on him. Be fully in the "now" with him. Has your focus been spent on reinforcing the positive behaviors or, has it been on reinforcing the negative ones? It's up to you.

Reflect upon how your companion birds enrich every day of your life, and focus your attention and energy on that reflection. Practice it during the quietness of winter. Gradually, your relationship with your bird will change and blossom. If the relationship has been poor, it will get better; if it is already wonderful, it will reach another level of love and happiness. You and your birds deserve love and happiness.