

# Whale Done *Parenting*



HOW TO MAKE PARENTING  
A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE  
FOR YOU AND YOUR KIDS

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An Excerpt From

***Whale Done Parenting:  
How to Make Parenting a Positive Experience  
For You and Your Kids***

by Ken Blanchard, Thad Lacinak, Chuck Tompkins, & Jim Ballard  
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## Foreword

*Jim Atchison is president of Busch Entertainment Corporation, which operates 10 U.S. theme parks including SeaWorld, Busch Gardens, and Discovery Cove.*

**W**E FIRST MET Ken Blanchard seven years ago in Orlando, Florida. Ken was promoting his new book with appearances in the three SeaWorld parks. The presentation he gave at Shamu Stadium that day borrowed heavily from the themes of *Whale Done! The Power of Positive Relationships*, a 2002 collaborative project between Ken, marine mammal training pioneers Chuck Tompkins and Thad Lacinak, Ken's longtime friend and colleague Jim Ballard, and SeaWorld. That book would go on to help hundreds of thousands of people establish more productive and positive relationships at home and at work.

Ken had no way of knowing that morning that Elli and I were soon to embark on life's greatest, most rewarding, and, sometimes, most frustrating adventure: We were about to start our own family. In the brief time that has passed since meeting Ken, we have had three beautiful children. Caleb is six, Nathanael is four, and Bethany is two, ages that are represented in many of the young characters in this book. We are pleased to report that every technique you're about to learn has been validated—repeatedly—in the Atchison house.

Our chat with Ken that morning in Orlando revealed that he is, at heart, a teacher—a man who reflects on his own experiences and delights in sharing them with others in ways that make life easier, more fulfilling, and more productive. After reading just one of his books, a collaboration with legendary Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula, it was clear that an association between Ken Blanchard and SeaWorld was inevitable.

As Ken likes to point out, SeaWorld does many things well, but one thing better than anyone else: caring for, training, and showcasing marine mammals. SeaWorld's sophistication in marine mammal care translates for our guests to really only one thing: fun. But it meant a great deal more to Ken. From his first visit to our San Diego SeaWorld in the '70s, he realized that training marine mammals, including large predators like killer whales, must have applications for human relationships. How could it not? A killer whale can weigh 13,000 pounds. It is the ocean's top predator. As SeaWorld trainers are fond

of pointing out, a wise person *demand*s nothing of a killer whale. You rely on a relationship based on mutual respect and trust, then you *ask* something of a killer whale.

All of us at SeaWorld are delighted to continue our relationship with Ken in this latest evolution of the Whale Done philosophy, *Whale Done Parenting*. We hope the lessons in this book provide meaningful insights that work as well in your home as they do in ours.

— Jim and Elli Atchison



# Introduction

## Redirecting Your Thinking about Parenting

**A**S A PARENT, have you ever had a child throw a tantrum or refuse to go to bed on time, eat good foods, or share toys? Do you find yourself scolding or yelling at your child and overusing the word *no*? Have you despaired of training your child to use the potty? Do you struggle with getting a child to do homework or chores? Do you deal with teasing, fighting, or poor manners? Do you need better methods for setting limits and handling time-outs and discipline?

Parenting can be trying. As challenges pile up, it's easy for a mom or dad to get into a rut and become locked into a negative, downward spiral that makes the relationship unpleasant for both parent and child. At such times

it's difficult even to imagine that there might be a better way. But that better way is precisely what this book offers. Simply put, it's a way to feel good as a parent—good about yourself, good about your relationship with your child, and good about life at home again.

*Whale Done Parenting* contains a formula that is positive and based on principles that are scientifically validated. Most important of all, it works! This is a book about bringing to the parenting of children the behavioral principles that have succeeded spectacularly in marine mammal training. The principle is a familiar one: Accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. It's actually simple, but it is anything but easy.

Much of the book focuses on children up to the age of five, but later chapters explain how the same techniques can be applied to older children, including teenagers. Indeed, the Whale Done approach works with people of all ages because it is based on universal principles of behavioral science.

Most new parents model their approach on what their own parents did. In some cases this turns out okay; more often these parents perpetuate the negative aspects of parenting they remember. The results can be disastrous. The principles and techniques presented in *Whale Done Parenting* are taken not from memories of childhood or armchair speculation, but from solid behavioral science principles.

As we described in the first book, *Whale Done!*, modern marine mammal training is based on positive rein-

forcement. It wasn't always so. In the early 1970s animal training was a different world. At that time, there was very little science in the approaches animal trainers used.

Animal training at that time was a male-dominated profession. In most cases, individual trainers forged their own styles and strategies with limited success and with limited attempt to cooperate or share ideas with their fellow trainers. Back then we weren't purposely ignoring the science of operant conditioning—we simply didn't know what operant conditioning was!

SeaWorld animal trainers began to think *there must be a better way*. They undertook a thorough examination of the field of behavioral science. The result was that SeaWorld was instrumental in pioneering the reinforcement-based training now used throughout the world.

We were very limited with the kinds of reinforcement that we used. The use of one reinforcer—food—was limited in its ability to develop deep, lasting relationships with the animals. Gradually SeaWorld trainers—using a wide variety of things whales liked, to reward and reinforce desired behaviors—evolved stronger bonds that eventually allowed us to get in the water with the animals. This led to the spectacular performances you see from these animals today.

As Thad and Chuck were learning about training killer whales, Ken Blanchard was observing the negative effects of command-and-control leadership on people in organizations. Ken was suggesting that the key to developing people was to catch them doing something right. Serendipity

brought Thad, Chuck, Ken, and Jim together, and the result was *Whale Done! The Power of Positive Relationships*.

Since its publication in 2003 *Whale Done!* not only has achieved extraordinary success, but it also has changed lives in the process. It's a story of how a man established good relationships with his family and company by applying the same set of principles used by professionals to train killer whales. In the years since bringing out *Whale Done!* we have often been asked, "Can the principles featured in that book be applied to parenting young children?" It became very clear that a second book was needed that would provide a resounding *yes* to that query. Applying Whale Done training to children is a natural process. In fact, it's much easier and more lasting than with adults.

Whale Done is much more than a set of techniques. It is an entire philosophy, one that is sorely needed in the world today. Simply stated, what we call Whale Done is a way of looking at people and seeing the best that is in them. Our hope is that this book will educate and inspire mothers, fathers, grandparents, and others who help raise children to look at their roles with new eyes. And we trust that as you read the story of Amy and Matt and their son Josh, you will recognize what you knew all along: there's power in being positive.

CHAPTER  
*One*



## An Exciting New Job and Challenges at Home

**T**AKING A BREAK at SeaWorld, Amy Sheldrake sat deep in thought by a large pool, watching several of her favorite killer whales. *How can it be possible that a whole year has passed since I came to work here?* she thought.

“You all are some of my closest friends,” Amy said aloud. As the great gleaming black-and-white forms moved by, their eyes lifting and their great heads nodding at her, she imagined they understood every word she spoke.

“Not only that, you’re the best teachers I’ve ever had. I can’t tell you what it means to me that you’ve given me such a great start as a mom. You’ve helped me lay the foundation for all the years ahead that I’ll be spending with my son. What a difference it’s made, to be here and watch how you’ve responded to your trainers’ kindness and consis-

tency. Every time you perform your incredible aerial maneuvers in the show, or ride us on your backs, or lift us high out of the water in one of your super leaps, the fans in the stands applaud in amazement. To them, it's a mystery how we trainers get you to do those things. But we know, don't we, my friends?"

Amy fell silent and spent time just watching her finny companions. She loved all the whales, whose names were derived from the Alaskan Indian culture. The name of the big whale, Kusti, meant "way of life." Sagu stood for "joy," which was fitting. Kagan meant "light." Tutan translated to "hope," and the youngest, Taat, meant "night."

Amy continued, "I've always been able to count on you guys to show me when I'm being inconsistent. You've not only taught me the Whale Done process, you've also inspired me to apply it in my role as a parent. Watching my boy Josh respond to the principles is always a thrill to me. I just hope I'll always remember what you have taught me so well!"



*One year earlier . . .*

Amy was sitting with her fellow trainees, Steve Gutierrez and Lorraine Ackerman, high in the stands of the aquatic park stadium.

"There's the signal for the whale to leap out of the water! Come on, Kusti!" Amy whispered eagerly.

Moments later a chorus of *oohs* and *aahs* rose from the stands as the audience responded to a spectacular leap by the eleven-thousand-pound killer whale. They watched in breathless fascination as a female trainer—whose wet-suited form had been seen moments before treading water in the center of the pool—was catapulted out of the pool on the nose of the gigantic animal as it rose suddenly and spectacularly from the blue depths below her. Up, impossibly up, went the huge glossy black-and-white form until it seemed to hang in the air, water showering down from its sides. The woman stood relaxed and poised atop the whale's nose until, at the height of the lift, she made a perfect thirty-foot dive back into the water.

“Let's hear it for Kusti and Laurie!” the announcer's voice enthused over the loudspeakers. While thunderous applause and shouts broke out from two thousand spectators around them, the three trainees grinned and gave each other high-fives.

“You called that one, Amy,” Steve said admiringly.

“Yeah, Amy,” said Lorraine, “nice job picking out the signal. I missed it.”

Amy smiled. “Thanks,” she said. “I was lucky.”

The three trainers-in-training had been assigned to watch the famous SeaWorld killer whale show from the stands in order to identify the hand signals, whistle toots, and other prompts given by the trainers that cued the animals during their performances. As the show continued,

Amy and the others took notes, carefully observing the cues the show staff gave for actions by the whales. As each feat ended and the audience's attention was cleverly diverted elsewhere, the trainees observed the reinforcing techniques that the trainers surreptitiously used to reward each animal's performance.

"They are hardly using any fish," Lorraine said.

"I think it's because it's a late afternoon show," Amy replied.

"Right," Lorraine came back. "The whales have had ninety percent of their food for the day by this time. That's why we're seeing mostly tactile and some of the whales' favorite toys used today."

Amy added, "I notice them using underarm rubbing for Kusti. He likes to be massaged under his pectorals. But I found out the other day that Kagan doesn't go for that. She's strictly into back rubs."

"Look," Lorraine said, pointing to the far side of the pool as the audience watched an event at the near end. "Jared is using the water from the hose to massage Sagu's gums, to reinforce the back flip he just did. He really likes that."

"You can't have too much variety of rewards for these animals," Steve concluded.

Throughout the event, the crowd reacted with awe and delight. The show ended with the huge stars sliding out on a ramp and waving to the crowd with their huge tails, called *flukes*. As the audience began leaving the stadium, Amy overheard the familiar comments: "Those

killer whales are amazing. How do they get them to *do* those things?” While the bleachers emptied around them, the trio sat comparing notes. Finally, they rose and made their way down to the pool and toward a door that led to the backstage area.

“Can you believe,” said Lorraine, “that soon the three of us will be out there performing for that audience?”

“I know. It’s amazing,” Steve said.

“But of course,” Amy reminded her peers as she opened the door, “the whales are the stars. We’re along for the rides.” She gestured toward the series of habitats where the huge rounded backs of five graceful killer whales were calm in the water. As she and the others moved toward the office with their notes for the debriefing session, Amy looked out at the now familiar scene. Kusti and Sagu, the two whales that had performed in the recent show, were now serene in contrast to the explosive energy and strength they had just demonstrated.

A whale named Tutan left the feeding area and swam over, eyeing Amy and lifting its huge head in greeting. The young woman felt a familiar tingle in her spine. It was the excitement of experiencing the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. From the time she was a tiny tot with a puppy named Scooter, Amy had been drawn to animals. Through the years, a succession of pets, from fish and turtles to gerbils, dogs, and cats (and one sick squirrel) occupied her home. It was when her father took her to see the dolphin movie *Flipper* that her passion for large aquatic animals was born.

In the end, it was the majestic killer whales that stole her heart. All those times sitting in the audience at the SeaWorld show, her mind had been fixed on one goal: she wanted to become a killer whale trainer. Following college, where she'd majored in behavioral psychology, she'd married Matt Sheldrake. And now there was Josh, their two-year-old son. Thinking of Josh, Amy couldn't wait to get home and see him again.



The day wore on, replete with hard work and demonstrations by coaches. On her way home, Amy had mixed feelings. On one hand was the excitement of being at SeaWorld. On the other hand, she missed Josh terribly and had concerns about leaving him. Like many youngsters his age, her son was a rambunctious child. Energetic and high-strung, he already knew how to manipulate his mom and dad. It seemed he was always pushing the limits of their control. Often their attempts at problem solving with the youngster seemed to lead nowhere. This, more than anything, was the reason Amy felt guilty starting a new career. By the time she pulled into the parking lot at Sundance Playschool she was thinking, *What kind of a mother would leave her tiny son to start a fun job as an animal trainer?* When she stopped the self-blaming and analyzed her feelings, she saw that, at bottom, she was really just missing Josh.

She hurried inside the center, noting other mothers helping their kids into their coats. Then her heart

leaped as she saw Josh come running, holding out his arms and grinning. She gathered him up in her arms, and they started out the door.

“Don’t forget the parent meeting tonight,” the head teacher called from the office. “It’s at 7:30.”



That night as Amy drove home after the daycare center meeting, she was thinking over the exciting day she’d put in at SeaWorld. She couldn’t wait to tell Matt all about the new things she’d learned in working with the killer whales. But as she opened the front door, her enthusiasm was stifled. Matt was sitting on the couch with his head in his hands. The place was littered with toys and other small articles. Screams and cries were coming from Josh’s room.

“What happened here?” Amy asked in wonder.

“What happened?” Matt said loudly in great frustration. “What happened was *Josh!*”

“Trouble getting him to bed, huh?” Amy asked.

Matt shook his head. “The kid wore me out!”

As Amy thought back to all the times she and Matt had picked the baby up and held him when he wouldn’t sleep, she realized regretfully that they had helped Josh form a bad habit. Now, at the age of two, the tyke was still acting as if Mom and Dad were at his beck and call after he’d been put to bed.

Amy and Matt looked at each other as their son’s moans continued. “He’s trained us well,” Amy said.

Matt sighed. “That’s right. I wish we could reverse it and become the trainers ourselves.”

“Funny you should say that,” Amy said, smiling. “I’ve been thinking there are some things I’m learning at Sea-World that we could use to get ourselves back into that role.”

“I guess it’s never too late to change,” said Matt, yawning and looking at his watch. “It’s late and we’re tired. I say we hold a meeting tomorrow and plan our attack.”

this material has been excerpted from

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