



## SECRETS OF TRAINING

We've all heard that actions speak louder than words and this is especially true when we communicate with our animals. Thoughts influence behavior.

Therefore, what you think and feel during training will impact your effectiveness as a teacher. Your dog can literally *feel* your confidence, fear, anger, sorrow and happiness.

All animals communicate on the non-verbal level, including humans. However we are not aware of it most of the time. It is nonverbal communication that allows us as infants to communicate with our parents. We learn that smiling elicits smiles and crying brings relief. It is this interaction that helps us to learn to talk and communicate with other people. Think of what would happen if your parents only occasionally responded to you when you first tried to talk. What if they hugged and kissed you each time you frowned. You might learn that frowning is a very good thing to do.

The greatest challenge in teaching dog owners to become dog trainers is explaining the importance of perfect timing and consistency for corrections or reinforcement of behaviors. Sometimes different family members have different beliefs with regards to how the dog should behave. This only adds to the dog's confusion.

Many times the problem is that the owner doesn't have a clear image of what they expect from their dog. In order for you to successfully teach your dog, you must have a clear vision of what you are trying to teach your dog. That is the only way that you will be able to give correctly timed feedback to your dog.

**The trick to accomplishing obedience training is accurately observing your dog's actions and quickly linking reinforcement with the correct behavior.** You must



remain focused on what you are teaching or your dog will quickly become confused and frustrated.

The more astute your observation skills and the more accurate your timing, the faster your dog will learn.

In general, canine students are better

observers than human ones. Because dogs communicate nonverbally they tend to be more practiced at reading body language. Because of this, your dog will sometimes make the wrong association. An astute trainer can mold the natural behavior patterns of his dog toward his desired outcome.

So the keys to effective training are: 1) A sharp image in your mind of what you are trying to accomplish. 2) Astute observation of your dog's behavior. 3) Clear and consistent associations between an obedience direction and the dog's behavior. 4) Appropriate correction or praise for your dog's personality type. 5) Timely application of praise or correction.



### **THE MAGIC IS TIMING**

Learning the proper timing is one of the keys to success with your dog. One of my students from the *Dogsense Seminar* took his acquired knowledge of proper timing and created a very innovative solution

for his dog's behavior problem. He explained to the class his pup relished sorting through the trash.

After participating in the creative problem-solving portion of the seminar, he designed, and then tested a solution to his problem. He smiled when he said that he thought he had permanently corrected his pup's dumpster diving behavior.

In the bottom of his trashcan, he placed a walkie-talkie radio, then "set-up" the pup by placing a tempting tidbit into the bottom of barrel. He went inside the house and spied on the pup through the window. At the instant the pup tipped the lid from the top of the can, he boomed his most authoritative voice over the walkie-talkie, "NO. Baaaaaad Dog!" The pup was caught at the moment of the crime. The pup, who was one of the more sensitive personality types, was so shocked by the apparent fact that his owner was now in the bottom of the garbage barrel, he dropped from its rim and high tailed it away from the can. Because of the genius of the timing and the perfection of an appropriate correction, that was the last time the pup was in the garbage.

I unwittingly experienced the power of perfect timing when I began my career as a trainer. My own first dogs were two black lab pups from the same litter and these boys were best buddies. Often their play was so caught up with each other that I had no way of getting their attention, even if they were headed toward a danger.

One day, I had them out to play in a field. They began to run, as usual, looking at each other, tongues rolled to one side, absorbed in a game of chase and tag. I was enjoying their enthusiasm until I saw the barbed wire fence. Considering their current direction I knew they were headed straight for it and would smack into the barrier. I shouted "NO!" at the exact instant the two of them hit the fence. Because of my unintended, yet impeccable timing, the pups thought I had some magical powers. From

that moment on, whenever I said “No” the two of them put on the brakes and looked to me for further instruction.

The above examples illustrate how perfect timing can make a lasting impression. To have the most impact, praise or correction must take place **AT THE INSTANT** the behavior occurs. The longer the delay, the less chance your dog will make the correct association. Also notice that the effective corrections were powerful, quick and concise. Like a lightning bolt, struck at the most effective time, it is branded forever in Pup’s memory.



## **HOW TO TRAIN LIKE A PROFESSIONAL**

Like the T.V. specials that reveal the tricks of a magician, I want you to learn the secrets of Professional Trainers. Before we dive into the specifics of creating your own training program, you need some foundation facts. Just as the basic obedience directions form the base for your dog’s education; these Pro Tips are the foundation for yours.

### **Pro Tip One:** *Be a Leader*

Read this information before you pick up the leash to teach your pup. When you do begin, proceed as though you know what you are doing, even if you feel you don’t.

Give it your best shot. If you make an error, note your mistake and correct it, but never apologize to your dog. He is expecting you to be the leader, so take charge and proceed with authority. You and your dog will learn and improve together with practice.

**Pro Tip Two:** *No action is independent.*

Your dog's behavior is interwoven with your responses and visa versa. Behavior and response is knit together in an intricate web.

In our fast forward instant gratification world, training your dog is one activity that cannot be rushed. Like building a house you must to create a solid foundation and like a house's concrete base, obedience drills are the infrastructure of your future training and relationship with your dog. The heeling exercise for instance, has a greater purpose than teaching your pup not to drag you down the street. This simple but powerful exercise places you as leader. It gently but firmly lets your pup know you are in charge. It is the primary step to a healthy relationship with your dog.

**Pro Tip three:** *Your dog has a limited attention span.*

Americans are a society of "over doers". We over eat, over spend, over drink, over entertain ourselves, in short we have the mentality that if a little is good, more is better, but this doesn't work when training a dog. The quickest way to teach your dog is through consistently applied bite-sized dose of training. Prolonging a training session can cause resistance to training and create resentment for practice. I recommend that you practice no longer than 15-20 minutes at a time- but do it everyday. This will keep your

pup anticipating each session and he will learn rapidly. As you become more adept at training, you will learn how to change each session to keep it exciting and interesting for both you and your pup and may stretch the session to thirty minutes or longer. Caution: This extension in time should be added gradually and is only for “graduate level” training.

**Pro Tip Four:** *Creative repetition will establish a strong foundation.*

Your pup will learn the obedience directions you are teaching rapidly but avoid the temptation to move too quickly to new ideas. Even as new ideas are introduced, the foundation behaviors- the very first ones that you taught- should still be reinforced. As we said above, developing a solid obedience base is very important for your pup’s future training. A crack in this foundation will result in inconsistent responses from your dog. This will be especially apparent during periods of high distraction. So...practice, practice, practice.

**Pro Tip Five:** *If your obedience lesson is 15 minutes in length, allow for thirty.*

Training your dog is not something that you squeeze in between school and running off to soccer practice. Your dog will react to a rushed training session.

Before you walk out the door to work with your pup, put yourself in the proper frame of mind. For a high energy pup-take a deep breath-relax. You have to be relaxed and make yourself believe that you have all the time in the world.

Shy and quiet pups need lots of energy and a peppy personality from their handler. Because they are sensitive, the owner of this type of pup will need to be aware of how he is acting and reacting before he begins training and through out a session. If you have a pup of this nature, gear yourself up! Take a few minutes to arrange your outlook. When you are in a bad mood don't attempt a lesson. Because these hypersensitive pups are insecure, they will try your patience. If you lose it, you make create a major problem for future training. It is better to just skip the lesson for that day or try for a different time when you are mentally prepared.

Whatever your pup's personality, be prepared to give him your full attention, after all, you are expecting him to give you all of his. You are the power behind the session therefore the training lesson will only be as good as you are willing to make it.

**Pro Tip Six:** *Give an obedience direction only if you are prepared to follow through.*

Sometimes without even thinking what words have come out of our mouth, we inadvertently give an obedience direction to our dog. By far, the most abused word is "come". Often we use this word before we teach its' full meaning to our pup, withering what should be the most powerful word in our dogs vocabulary. We say, "come" when Pup is at a distance from us and the chance is a slim to none that he will respond. To make matters worse, we continue calling and Pup continues to ignore us further deflating the meaning of the word. Consistency is the key. Don't say the word, if you are not willing to make sure it happens. "Sit" means, "sit", each and every time.



## **LEARNING THEORY**

An animal learns by retaining information that allows him to repeat pleasant situations and to avoid unpleasant ones. Both people and dogs are creatures of habit. Dogs learn to repeat things that work and to keep repeating them until there is a good reason to change.

A motivator is something that encourages, or motivates an animal to continue doing the successful behavior. The strength of that motivation will depend on the animal's need. For instance, if a dog is hungry, food becomes a powerful motivator. If what he is doing to get food is not working then, he will change his strategies (or behavior) until he succeeds. After a short time, the successful method will become habituated and used until it no longer works.

Dog ancestors lived in social groups that needed to hunt as a unit to survive. The environment of necessary cooperation created a need among individuals of the pack for acceptance and approval. The desire to cooperate was paramount for the success of not only the individual, but for the entire group. This cooperative behavior allowed for the development of a complex social and communication system.

The trait of cooperative behavior has been magnified in the working, sporting and herding breeds through focused breeding programs. The degree to which a dog wants to please their owner/handler is known as tractability. For highly tractable dogs, belonging to the family group and the simple aspect of pleasing the pack leader (owner) is a strong motivator. For this reason, a highly tractable dog is easier for an owner to teach obedience directions to than dogs of a more independent nature.



Positive motivators can attract a dog to certain behaviors by encouraging him to repeat the performance. A tractable dog may be willing to work on his obedience skills just to hear his owner say, *Gooooood Boy*, or receive strokes on the head. For some dogs, the “work” maybe itself rewarding. For a retriever, playing fetch or chasing down a bird to bring back to his owner is a self-rewarding task. The same is true for a herding dog allowed to bring in the flock.

For dogs that are more independent in nature, motivators other than praise may be required. Often the motivations that come from the dogs’ environment are more powerful than the owner’s desires. The scents that enter a hound’s nose are more important than the request from his owner to come. Trailing enticing odors is a much stronger motivator than what most owners have to offer.

Other forms of positive motivation can be food rewards, an enticing game of “fetch” or rousting bout of “tug of war”. There may be times after a dog has been taught his obedience directions that the benefits of listening to his owner just aren’t strong enough to outweigh the greater distractions of the world. It is your job as teacher/trainer to find a strong enough motivator to recapture your pup’s interest.

Whereas positive motivators entice a dog to repeat a behavior, avoidance training repels a dog from unwanted behaviors thereby discouraging its repetition. When a correction is timed and administered properly, a dog will avoid repeating the behavior because of the obnoxious deterrent associated with it. However, most beginning trainers lack the experience to properly time their corrections and often create more problems than before. The timing of any correction must be exquisite and sufficient to alter the behavior with one application. Continued use of a non-effective aversive is abuse. A correction will suppress a behavior, but your dog still needs to know what to do in its place. Because of this, it is much more effective to think about replacing one behavior for another rather than correcting an unwanted one. Think in terms of what you would rather see your dog do. Realize that dogs exhibit a behavior because it is or has been motivated. Your dog jumping on you does get a reaction from you even if you don't appreciate the behavior. Giving the dog an alternate behavior, like sitting, will allow him to get what he wants, attention, in a fashion that you want.

Like raising a child, raising your dog should employ a combination of plentiful praise and a firm set of standards. Positive training doesn't mean no rules or no discipline. Rather it implies that the focus of the training should be guiding your dog to do the right thing by concentrating on right behaviors your dog is doing rather than concentrating on the inappropriate ones.