

Obedience

In dog training when we think of obedience we think of a class at a gym or some other indoor facility. Typically, we think of going for an hour a week for 6 to 8 weeks and getting instruction both for the owner and the dog. After teaching that type of class for many years, my observation is as follows: If there were ten dogs in the class, 1 or 2 would be good to excellent, 5 or 6 would be acceptable and the others would be a mess. There are several factors that play into these results. Breeding, socialization, and breed of dog all contribute to the behavior of a dog; but the dogs that really win are the ones whose owner would practice, practice, and practice. The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.

One of the misunderstandings about obedience training dogs is that the training ends when the obedience class ends. The truth is that obedience training a dog lasts forever or at least for the first 3-5 years of the dog's life. Obedience training is an ongoing process. Most obedience problems owners have are inconsistency, not using the same commands (confusion), and not enough repetition. As a pro trainer I tell people the dogs need 100 repetitions to truly understand the concept. PRACTICE. The two essential phrases for dog owners to learn in dog training are: 1) you are always training and 2) actions speak louder than words. If you combine these two phrases in your mind with the practice you give your dog, you can have an obedient well mannered companion.

Many people think that dog training is a 10 minute a day practice session and the rest of the day Fido does as he pleases. This concept is why most dogs are not trained. To have success you must realize that a dog (not unlike a child) needs on time and off time. Think how you would feel if you were on or working 24 hours a day. By letting a dog do as it pleases for all the time that it is not being trained puts incredible pressure on the dog, both physical and mental.

So you ask, "How do we give dogs off time?" You can put the dog in the crate, on a cable, in a fenced in yard or in a kennel. What this means is that the dog can have activity without being connected. It is in a safe environment where it can be a dog without having a chance to misbehave. The greatest problem when you don't have on and off time is as follows. Your dog is essentially on 24-7 which means you are constantly giving the dog commands. Some of these are meaningful (the dog complies) and some are empty commands (the dog doesn't comply). The dog that is on 24-7 sometimes seems deaf. The truth is that all of your words are gibberish. He hears, "blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." He is not held accountable for what you told him to do so you say, "Oh well, I guess he isn't that smart." The dog is immune to your voice because your words mean nothing.

Currently I have a 1 year old English Springer Spaniel in for training. He is from a very successful repeat breeding. Dogs from this breeding in the past were happy, willing, and eager to work. When the dog came to me he was excessively submissive and scared. After working him in obedience and bird work every day for 3 weeks, the owner came to watch him work. We saw that the dog had improved in every way except for retrieving which was a puzzle to me as that is this breed's strong suit. This dog acted as though he was afraid to retrieve. When I asked the owner if something bad had happened to the dog, he couldn't site anything that he recalled.

After some time of brainstorming with the owner, the situation came to light. His wife and children had screamed at the dog to drop anytime he picked anything up. This dog has been bred to retrieve, to carry, to run around with things (birds) in its mouth. Though this training to not retrieve was unintentional, they trained the dog to not do the very purpose he was bought to do. If the dog had been given off time, it would be less likely that this situation would have

happened as he would not have had the opportunity to get the shoes, the toys, the socks, or the objects to retrieve. When he was on he would have been supervised with proper dog toys to retrieve and carry. This situation may be able to be fixed with countless amounts of work, but the mind set of this family is what really needs to be changed. As Delmar Smith said, "You are always training your dog."

Usually we think that we don't train enough, but sometimes we over-train (beating a dead horse) without even realizing it. An example of this is with the *sit* and *stay* commands. Every time the dog does anything unacceptable we scream, "**SIT, SIT, SIT, and SIT.**" When we teach the dog additional commands and we start screaming the new command, the dog will sit or stay. This type of training leads to confusion and confusion breeds inactivity. Dogs do not understand language, you have to show and guide them. Also, in case you didn't know it, dogs are not deaf so stop screaming at them. Give a simple command that the dog understands and *make* the dog follow through.

Unfortunately, many people today believe dogs to be on a higher level than they actually are or they think that the dog has human thoughts and feelings - they anthropomorphize. Because people do this, I see many interesting situations when people come to train with me.

One thing that happens almost always is that when a person wants to show me what he has done with his dog he is in awe when it doesn't respond as well at my place as it did at home. The reason for this is that they are training at home in a low or no distraction level, then they come to my place or any training facility where there is confusion and the distraction level is usually medium to high. Something I talk with my clients about is a control zone. This is where the dog does as you command *all the time*. It might be in your house, in your yard, or on a leash or e-collar.

We have many calls from people who have bought dogs from us so we know what these dogs are capable of - both good and bad. The people and the dog's names are different but the end of the story is the same. Everything from a 3-month-old puppy playing in the yard to an older dog that someone was hiking or hunting with can cause stress and grief. The dog was out of control, ran into the road and was killed. Tragic, yes; Necessary, no. If these dogs were on a leash, or were conditioned and wearing an e-collar, or if they were controllable in distractions, there could be a happy ending.

In this day and age of free spirit, we want all of the freedom of life and some of us can handle much freedom and some cannot. Dogs are no different, except that dogs would rather have structure. But you say, "But my dog would rather run free." You are right, but is that safe? You are RESPONSIBLE for your dog's safety. Just like a child, what a dog wants is not always what is best for him. If you would like your dog to run free, fence in some land. I have a $\frac{3}{4}$ acre fenced in area that is safe, and the dogs do very well in their off time here.

You can teach an old dog new tricks, but it is much easier starting with a pup. Don't be afraid of change or doing things differently, we live in a different world with a different pace than we grew up in, and the needs of an animal are different today than they were 20 to 50 years ago. As a trainer I strive to train dogs with less pressure, and I transition them to their owners and help people to live a productive life with their dogs. Your relationship with your dog should be as a master/companion not as a parent/grandparent. Have lifestyles changed? Of course they have, and so has dog training.

Get progressive, find a book, videos, or find a trainer. Take action and commit yourself. A dog is a commitment, a very large commitment. You not only have a commitment to feed and water

your dog, but you also have an obligation to the commitment of training him and keeping him safe.

It won't happen overnight but eventually through the action of training you will have an obedient dog.

Good Luck,

John

at Kirby Mountain Kennels