

# ROCKSTAR DOGS



## Training Manual

# Introduction

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Congratulations on having recently started your **RockStar Dog** training program. We're so excited to present this manual to you as a user guide of sorts for you and your dog, to help you integrate their newly acquired skills and state of mind into their home environment.

During sessions with your trainer we'll be covering a LOT of information in a short time. There will be a lot of adjusting to do getting used to the new daily structure of interactions with your dog. This at-your-fingertips guide will help you to help your dog. It's super important that you take the time to go through all of the content here before your dog comes home from training!! It will take some time, so it's great to get started as soon as possible. Practice makes perfect! As you study this guide before your dog comes home, then refer back to it as needed, you'll find you feel a lot more comfortable and confident working with your dog. They will love you for it! They're working hard and can't wait to show you what they can do!

Change is rarely easy. Although challenging at first, if you follow these rules and guidelines, you will be well on your way to a fantastic relationship with your rock star dog for years to come. I hang out with dogs of all descriptions 24/7, 365 days a year. I can absolutely vouch for the fact that a psychologically balanced dog is a whole lot more fun to be with than a dog that doesn't know what is expected-or doesn't care. I have witnessed the transformation of a countless number of dogs from hyper, anxious, fearful or indifferent to a calm, confident, happy and cooperative companion.



## What's a RockStar Dog?

It's a dog that knows that the person they are with has their best interests at heart. A dog that trusts and respects the people in their life. A dog who is able to go anywhere dogs are legally allowed because they can behave in such a way as to be a safe companion in any scenario. That's the ultimate reward for both dog and owner, to have a dog that is free to go with you where and when you choose, knowing that you can rely on your dog to behave like the best friend you always wanted your dog to be.

We're here to help ensure that happens. We're always here for you. If you have questions or need help, don't hesitate to contact us. Don't wait until you're in over your head! We love to hear how it's going, so don't be a stranger! **This is going to be great! Rock on!**



# First Things First-Relationship Reset!

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## The Art of Living With Your Dog

In this section we'll go over some critical success strategies for training your dog at home. Each piece is an important piece of the puzzle. To ignore any single piece is to weaken the entire structure. **Dog training happens all day, every day, whether by intention or by default.** It's just as easy to **intentionally** train your dog to be happy and well behaved as it is to **inadvertently** train your dog to be a problem, all it takes is some awareness and consistency. And here's something to think about, if you aren't careful about training your dog, the dog may be training you!! Uh oh...

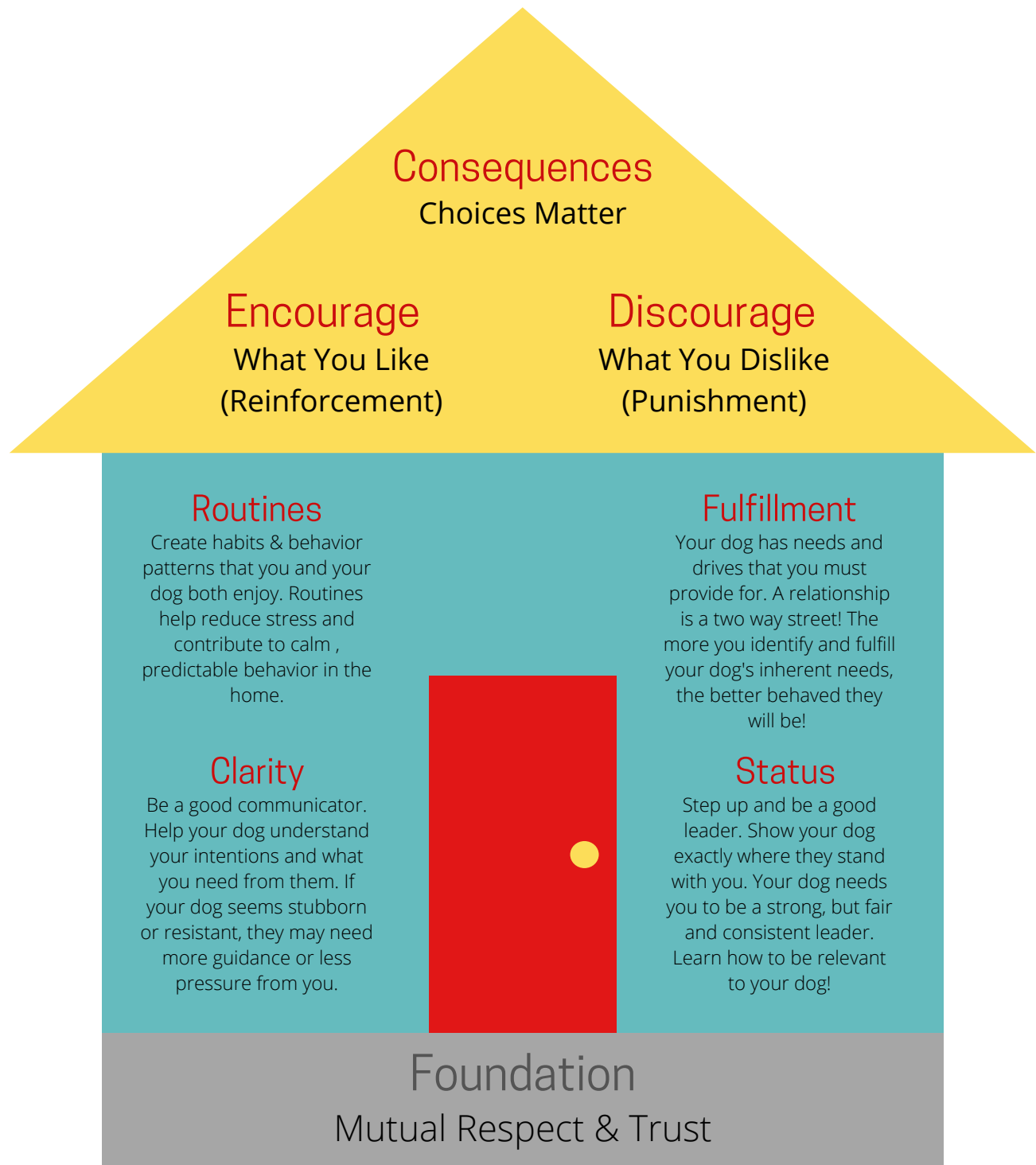
The single most critical element of behavior training for any dog is the relationship that is shared with **every member of the family**. Many issues resolve themselves once the proper relationship is established. As your dog's training progresses, all the daily interactions with your dog need to be evaluated and may need to be modified. This can seem a bit daunting at first and everyone needs to be on board! But don't worry, it's not as hard as it may seem and what follows is a tried and true blueprint to make it all easy and fluid. **The most important thing you can do right now, and without any special skills, is to learn and follow the concepts presented here and make them a part of your daily life, consistently, 24/7.**

Here is a visual representation to help you evaluate what areas need to be changed or improved to create a functional, cooperative and fulfilling relationship with your dog.



# Building Blocks Of A Great Relationship

## The Art of Living With Your Dog



# Key Concepts

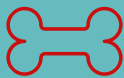
These concepts require no special skills and can be implemented immediately, regardless of the age or training of the dog. Although simple, if you are consistent you will immediately notice a significant change in your dog's attitude and behavior.



Employ Good Management  
to Limit Options



Direct Choices With  
Guidance and Support



Create Patterns to  
Establish Good Habits



Control Outcomes With  
Consistent Follow Through



Control Access to  
Valuable Resources



Set Your Dog Up  
for Success



Practice and Reward Calm



Be Consistent, Be Fair,  
Be a Leader

## The Three Ms of Successful Dog Training- Management, Motivation, Mutual Respect and Trust

All dogs need clear communication and consistency to become the rock star you know they can be! To get there you'll need to combine relationship adjustments, positive socialization experiences and foundational behavior training. While this is progressing it all needs to take place under the **management umbrella**. It's up to you to ensure that your dog has ample opportunity to practice all the things they're being taught in an environment that stacks the deck in their favor. **Dogs who have too much freedom too soon will inevitably make a lot of mistakes,** which will drastically undermine their chances of success.

### Management

One of the most frequently ignored aspects of training is management of the environment and other factors that influence a dog's behavior. In order to be effective, all training must be accomplished under the **Management Umbrella**.



We all get good at things we practice routinely. Everything your dog learns needs to be repeated and practiced in multiple scenarios, gradually increasing the distractions and other elements that challenge your dog just enough to help them become more confident and reliable in all situations.

The key to great performance is managing your dog and the training setup in the initial phases of training to set them up for success!! Dogs are supreme opportunists and insatiable gamblers, they love a good game of chance! If they have tried something 99 times and failed, but succeeded on the 100th try, they will keep playing the slot machine if the payoff is something valuable enough in their eyes. **The more self reinforcing the behavior is, the more you will have to be vigilant in limiting their ability to achieve it in order to stop it altogether.**

Good management sets you and your dog up for success by creating a controlled environment that minimizes distractions and limits the opportunities for your dog to practice mistakes while instead teaching and patterning the desired behaviors. Some management techniques will only be temporary, bridging the gaps until further training is accomplished or your dog simply matures. Others may need to be employed for the lifetime of the dog. Common management tools are things like leashes, crates, baby gates, certain toys and specially designed collars. While in training, keep in mind that careful, intentional management not only speeds up the training, but will also greatly improve your relationship with your dog. Managing their options makes it **easy for them to practice doing things the right way and hard to get it wrong**. Sound simple? It is. A lot simpler than dealing with the fallout if you don't manage them properly.

### FOLLOW THROUGH!!!

A critical element of management is follow through. I cannot stress this enough! Remember how opportunistic they are, **never** allow them to get away with disobedience. **Do not give a command unless you are prepared to follow through**, no matter how inconvenient in the moment. If they try to do an end run around you, use the drag line to calmly direct them to complete what you asked of them. As you provide consistent repetition and follow through, your dog will develop the habits and behaviors you want, instead of those that are undesirable to you. Understand that canine nature requires them to experiment a bit to see if they can get away with non-compliance. They aren't being stubborn or a jerk, they are just being a thinking canine. Remember, your dog is by nature a predator. Hunters don't win every time, they only survive through being persistent!! You must show them there is a easier, more reliable way. It is a process and it takes time. **Hang in there and ALWAYS follow through.**

### The Next Step-Stacking The Deck

If you've done your job properly your dog will soon begin to show you that they are ready for more autonomy. Your dog can't learn to make good choices on their own unless they are given the opportunity to try and are allowed to make mistakes now and then. Take it slow, always stacking the deck in favor of the choices you want. **Again, don't give any command unless you are fully prepared to see it through and ensure compliance.** As you continue working together you will get a sense of when your dog is likely to make the choice you want and when they will need more guidance. If your dog makes a mistake, don't worry and don't get upset. See this as an opportunity to continue teaching your dog.

### Finally-Put It On Auto Pilot

Dogs are creatures of habit, as are we. They function best when there is a high amount of predictability to their day. Create rituals around things that you do every day, like going out to potty, feeding time or coming and going from their crate. Make a routine of them giving you something you want in return for a benefit they want. Things like sitting calmly and waiting to be given the signal to eat. Or pausing for eye contact and your signal before going out the door or out of their crate. Especially helpful habits are things that help at moments when your dog gets excited naturally. Requiring them to sit calmly while being leashed up for a walk, going to their "place" when the doorbell rings and waiting to be released before greeting guests, waiting patiently while you prepare their meals. These are small things, but the cumulative effect is powerful.



You must be the one to establish good habits with your dog. This will give them a great deal of confidence, make them a calmer dog and make life much more peaceful for everyone. Dogs should know that an open door is not an invitation to dash outside, that your coming home is not an invitation for them to jump all over you, or the fact that you are sitting down does not automatically mean you are going to pet them or toss a toy for them. Creating routines and habits that make life together run smoothly will result in a dog that is calmer by default and looks to you for direction rather than always looking for the next chance to get away with something.



## Motivation

This one can be summed up in four words; “Dog’s Do What Works”. Let’s be real here. We all need to be properly motivated when asked to do something that we feel is unnatural, unpleasant, scary or uncomfortable. Dogs are no different. We can hardly blame them for wondering “what’s in it for me”. A lot of what humans consider “bad” behavior is just doin’ what comes naturally as far as dogs are concerned. If you can learn to look at things from the dog’s point of view, you’ll both be happier and you’ll be able to first teach your dog what you want and then give them a great payoff for doing things your way.



Once you are successfully limiting your dogs ability to be “naughty” through good management it’s time to introduce alternative choices. **While your dog is in training it is imperative to keep them on a drag line (a 4’ to 6’ leash attached to their collar) so that you can direct them away from things you don’t want (like jumping, chewing, grabbing things and playing keep away, etc.) and guide them instead to behaviors you want such as sit, down or place.** However, it’s not enough to simply stop unwanted behavior, you need to create good behaviors that will replace the less desirable behaviors, then **practice and reward the heck out of the new behaviors!!**

- **DO** pay attention to the things that motivate your dog to do what you want. It’s super important to continually motivate your dog!! Notice what motivates your dog best and use it to both of your advantage. This is the beginning of true cooperation and teamwork.
- **DO** be consistent! For example, don’t let them jump sometimes, but expect them not to jump at other times! Be fair to your dog, be calm but firm and super, super consistent!
- **DO NOT** miss out on the chance to reward them for good choices!! Make it worth it for them!
- **NEVER** punish your dog for making a mistake unless they fully understand what is being asked and were given a fair chance to do it. \*See Corrections vs. Punishment.

***If you start to feel frustrated or angry at your dog, I can guarantee, you need to look at yourself to see what you can do better to motivate your dog and make it easy for them to “get it right.”***

## Mutual Respect and Trust

As you begin your training it’s important to take an honest, critical look at your relationship with your dog. It may be helpful to get input from someone close to you and your dog as well. Does your dog respect you? Yes, you say. Okay, does your dog trust you? They aren’t the same. Do you trust and respect your dog? Are your interactions with your dog consistent from day to day, or do they change depending on your mood? Do you treat your dog with kindness and regard for their individuality, unique abilities, limitations and yes, even their feelings? They have them, you know. Do you baby your dog and treat them like a surrogate human child instead of the awesome canine they are, causing all kinds of confusion and uncertainty?



Please believe me when I say that you will never be able to successfully train a dog that does not trust you. They may obey you when they are within reach, they may even like you a whole lot. But if they don't trust you they'll always be on the lookout for the "bait and switch" and they will do whatever they think they have to in order to protect themselves. This results in a good dog developing a myriad of problem behaviors.

I don't mean to say that all problem behaviors are created by the wrong kind of interaction with people. On the contrary, often problems are simply a result of poor communication and the dog not being taught what is expected, or the genetics of the dog, or many other factors. However, I've seen many a mediocre trainer with a basically well behaved dog, simply because their relationship with the dog allows it all to flow very naturally. Some dogs are definitely more prone to trouble than others. They're individuals too, with their own unique personalities and life experiences. For these dogs it's even more important that the relationship is good and strong. It's up to us to teach the dog how to behave in a human environment and make it worth his while. But in order for real learning to occur, the dog and trainer must share mutual respect and trust and the dog must perceive the trainer as a competent, fair and worthy leader. Once that happens, they'll do their level best to cooperate with you!

## **NILIF- *Nothing in Life is Free***

This section is the biggest section in this manual. There's a reason for that. The importance of what follows cannot be overestimated, so heads up! What follows is a gentle and fair program designed to earn you more respect from your dog. Deprived of clear leadership, dogs inevitably develop behavior problems that will get in the way of your mutual happiness. They may be unruly and out of control, demanding and anxious, refuse to follow commands, bark like mad, or run off. In some cases they may bite their owners or others. On walks they can exhibit reactivity towards other people or dogs, pull on the leash and generally act like a pain in the neck! They may decide they don't want anyone to come near them or pet them and can pose a problem for pet sitters or dog walkers or when grooming or medical exams are needed.

Dogs that growl at or bite people are attempting to explain their rules to people who "just don't seem to listen." For example, if your dog bites when someone tries to remove him or her from the bed, here is its message to you: "This is my bed. I let you sleep here too, but it is my bed. You have no right to remove me from it. I have told you and told you by growling. Now I must show you by biting."

This is life in the Twilight Zone, where your dog is convinced that he or she owns the house and everything in it, including the people. Yet, try as they might, dogs do not make good leaders! After all, they live in a confusing human world. Many dogs live in an environment that is very alien to them and are not given much of an opportunity to simply be a dog. To flip the situation around, you must employ good leadership skills and NILIF. Before long, you will find your dog becomes more relaxed, more affectionate, more tolerant, and so much happier.

Nothing in life is free? That's right, nothing. For a period of time, you will control ALL of your dog's resources. Think about this—we control resources every day for children. We do this as a gift, for their physical and psychological well-being. We can and must do the same for our dogs, especially dogs that exhibit symptoms of poor psychological adjustment. Never reward your dog for doing nuthin'. Sorry if that sounds harsh, but the reality is that your dog needs to work to earn their goodies, just like everyone does. This means in order to get what they want they need to give you what you want. This applies to food, play, privileges, the whole nine yards.

This isn't a "magic pill", but it's amazing how much behavior improves just with this simple practice. So... going forward until you and your dog get things straight, make sure that there is no more absently giving your dog whatever they want. No letting the dog sprint through the door without first waiting for your approval, no food lying about for them to eat whenever they choose or stopping to sniff or mark at every. Single. Bush. No, I don't want you to be an evil dictator, and this is not forever. Well, some of it may be, but not all-I'll explain.

## The Game Plan-You Are The Gateway

NILIF is about the benevolent control of resources.  
Your dog needs every single one of these resources.

Food	Toys
Time	Space
Affection	Access



Unfortunately, if your dog believes they get all of these things simply because he or she was born a special and powerful puppy into a home full of servants, your dog will appreciate none of them! So the task is to teach your dog that **you control all the resources**. Make it very clear that **YOU** are the **GATEWAY to all the good stuff!** Furthermore, teach them that the fastest way to get what they want is to give you what you ask of them. As you help your dog earn resources as payment for a job well done their perception of you, and the value they receive as a result of listening to you, will change in a very good way.

### How We Control Each Resource

#### Food

**Do not free feed.** I'll say it again... **do not free feed!** Give food at designated meal times only, not left on the floor all day. A very high percentage of problematic dogs are allowed to pick at food all day long. In nature, dogs must work hard to find food. The psychology of your dog depends on working for food, this is a genetically programmed need. Most dogs will be fed twice per day. At mealtime, have him or her sit in front of you. As you put the bowl down the dog must remain sitting calmly until you release them, allowing them to eat. This is easier to teach than you might think, as the average dog is pretty sure they want to at least sniff and maybe even pick at the food. This is a minimal form of working for food, and it matters. Remove uneaten food within 10-15 minutes. Do not offer food again until the next meal time (trust me, they'll be fine). Do this for the rest of your dog's life.

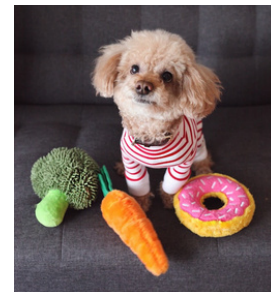
Treats are also a food resource. For the first 2 to 4 weeks, treats can be used as training rewards only. Reduce your dog's daily meal portions to compensate for treats given as training rewards. This will help your dog get on a regular meal schedule, and also shows them you are no longer a servant. After 2 to 4 weeks if you want to give your dog a treat, ask him or her to do a small series of jobs to earn it. Ask your dog to come, sit, or down. Use the treat as a reward, not as a bribe. Do this for life.

#### **IMPORTANT NOTE!!**

If your dog shows any signs of aggression, stress or guarding of food, toys or space, be sure to bring this to our attention and follow our process for resource guarding behavior.

## Toys

Store all toys out of sight where your dog can't help themselves. When you think your dog would enjoy playing with a toy, you select one from the box and give it to them. Ask your dog to do a simple task like sit or down before giving the toy. Teach your dog a reliable "out" or "drop it". Your dog should be able to drop the toy and move away on command. Then when the dog is sitting calmly you can initiate play again. Teaching your dog to start and end play as you ask, is great for bonding and impulse control. When you decide playtime is over, put away all the toys again. Do this for the next 30 days minimum, longer if your dog is toy obsessed.



## Time

You are the one who decides what you and your dog will do at any given moment, unless they need to go out to potty, of course. Do not allow your dog to demand anything else specific. For example, if you've decided that your dog should lie quietly by your side for a few moments, do not respond to any attempts to distract you from that goal. Merely place your dog on leash, hold the leash and gently prevent him or her from leaving the area, barking, or soliciting play. Eventually, he or she will settle and lie down. This is called tethering (or Sit On The Dog). If your dog is pesky or demanding, do this several times per day for 5 to 10 minutes, and do it for 30-90 days.

## Space

You get to decide where your dog will put its body-and where they won't. A very high percentage of dogs with behavior problems sleep on their owners' beds and/or have free access to furniture. If your dog has any behavior problems, no matter how small, they should not be allowed on furniture or to sleep in the bedroom until the problems are resolved. At the very least make sure they sleep on their own bed or in a crate.



This can be a tough adjustment time for all of you if your dog has become accustomed to having free access to furniture or has claimed a certain area as "mine". Any place where the dog exhibits guarding behavior will now be restricted and access is granted by you as you choose. This includes even their crate if they get growly when people or other pets come near. During training dogs should have a 6'-10' drag line (a leash without a loop at the end) when at liberty in the house. If you cannot be there to directly supervise the dog, they should be confined to a crate or a room.

When your dog goes somewhere you don't want them to be, simply say "NO", pick up the line and direct them elsewhere. If they're supposed to be staying in place, say "NO" and direct them back to their place with the drag line. Be persistent, and eventually your dog will learn to stay off furniture and stay in place until you release them. If your dog is not a biter, do this for 30- 90 days or until the behavior issues are resolved. After that, if you don't mind them on the furniture, you can allow them access to the furniture, by your permission only. If you prefer, your dog will be fine with his own doggy furniture, so long as they don't get possessive of it.

When walking through tight spaces, such as through doorways, don't allow your dog to race through before you or block you or be too lazy to move out of your way. Claim your space! Simply use your body language or verbal commands (like "back" or "wait") to block the openings giving you free access. Thresholds are yours, for safety's sake your dog should learn to wait until you say it's ok to go through any threshold, whether in the house or the car. Do this for the rest of your dog's life.

Crate training is very healthy for your dog's state of mind. Dogs are born in a calm, quiet space such as a whelping box. Instinctively, they can learn how to enjoy this private space. The reality is that at some point in time it is highly likely that your dog will need to be crated. If your dog needs to be boarded for medical reasons or for travel or if guests or workmen are over, it can be very stressful if your dog isn't comfortable in a crate. Dogs who learn to enjoy their crate periodically enjoy a great advantage over those who do not. Help your dog learn to regard their crate as a sanctuary, similar to how you regard your own bedroom.

### Sniffs on Walks

Sniffing interesting smells when on the walk is part of being a dog. That makes sniffing opportunities an important resource! When walking with your dog there will be times when you want to make sure that they walk close to your side, not out ahead or doddling behind. They should be taught to walk on a loose leash at your own pace. Don't make the mistake of trying to keep up with your dog or stopping whenever they want to sniff. That doesn't mean your dog can never enjoy the sniffs or wander freely.



As with other resources, you choose when it's time to stop and sniff or wander at will, as long as they are polite and don't drag you around. Give your dog access to interesting things as a reward for walking nicely. Of course, be sure to let them eliminate as needed, but no stopping to mark constantly. You may think this is a tall order, but you would be surprised how easy this is. Your trainer will show you how! Do this for the rest of your dog's life.

**Note:** Until you have established a functional, cooperative relationship with your dog, JUST SAY NO to retractable leashes!!! Not only do these pose a health potential risk to you and your dog (Google Flexi leash risks) but there is no way that you can have a proper structured walk with a retractable leash. Letting your dog run around at the end of a 15-20 foot leash completely sabotages the cooperative relationship that you are working to establish. Consult your trainer for specific advice on what collar/leash combo will be best for your dog.

### Affection

This is the hardest resource for humans to control, yet it is one of the most important. Simply stated, the one who decides when you show affection to your dog will control the relationship. Affection can be defined as talking to your dog, touching your dog, and giving eye contact to your dog. Do not give affection just because your dog demands it. Like everything else, your dog needs to understand that your attention and affection is something that is earned. I know, those eyes! Our dogs are experts at eliciting loving attention from us and making us feel guilty for anytime we have to say no. Keep in mind, THIS IS A RESET, it's not for always. The more demanding your dog is, the more they need you to hold the line. You can still share love with them! Just make sure that they behave first and don't become demanding, pushy or whiney. Help your dog earn your affection by behaving calmly and complying with your requests. It's all about developing a healthy balance. If your dog is NOT a biter, give only the minimum amount of affection for 2-4 weeks. If your dog is a biter, you'll need more time for them to get the message that life is better when they cooperate with you.

### Try it. You'll like it!

You may be skeptical or feel some emotional distress over the requirements of this program. I understand and empathize with your feelings. But...I must tell you that I train many dogs with problem behaviors. This program works wonders for the vast majority of them. After a short period of confusion due to the changes, the dogs become far happier than they ever were before the program. Dogs do not want—and do not know how—to be a leader. Despite what you may see at first, they want YOU to be their leader, they truly do. Give your dog the gift of confident leadership, and you'll both be far happier. *Don't skip the relationship reset!!*



# Principles Of Canine Learning

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The following principles will serve as a guide to you as you embark on your dog training journey with your dog. Read and re-read this material often! If you're having trouble, go through this guide to help you identify where the problem areas are and how to correct it. Don't take things too seriously though! Training should be enjoyable for the trainer and the dog. If you find yourself or your dog feeling frustrated, just stop and see if you can identify and correct the problem. ***The relationship you share together is everything.*** Nurture it as you would any other relationship in your life. If you need help, we are always here for you! Never hesitate to call or email us if you need to. Remember to ***make training your dog a lifestyle, not an event***, and you will enjoy many happy years together!

## 5 Ways Dogs Communicate

### 1. Body Language- *PAY ATTENTION to how your dog reacts!*

- This is the native language of the dog, it's the strongest and most powerful communicator. It overrides any other tool in our communication toolbox.
- Encourage engagement or behaviors by teaching the dog to look at you and pay attention. Eye contact is hugely important. Using facial expressions (pleasant and unpleasant) can help communicate.
- Food hands should be kept at low hip level (prevents jumping) or high to chest or chin (promotes eye contact).
- Body relaxed and erect communication shows assertion and confidence.
- SPATIAL PRESSURE: controlled by moving into the dog, more assertion, you can make the dog back up just as moving away from the dog can pull the dog towards you.
- Avoid going to the dog, the dog should always come to you! Teach the dog to follow.
- Kneeling down and to the side is passive and more welcoming and also provides more of a target to the dog. This is especially helpful for timid and nervous dogs.

### 2. Tones Sounds for Clear Communication

- Give meaning to the words we say to the dog using tone of voice to help communicate our meaning.
- **To give meaning to "NO"**: when a dog growls as a warning it's a low tone. When you say "no" use a low tone as it will help give meaning.
- **To give meaning to "GOOD"**: when marking the dogs behavior as correct use "good" with a neutral tone of voice that encourages the dog to continue doing what they are doing. This is a bridge word to help them stay on task. Some dogs need a little more excitement in your voice to keep going, but others will get overstimulated and have trouble concentrating, so be careful of your tone.
- **Release marker "YES" or "BREAK"**: when a dog is excited it's uses a higher than normal tone. Play time for dogs results in high pitched barks! When you say "Yes" or "Break" in a happy, enthusiastic tone the dog is released from the behavior and rewarded.

### 3. Scent- Engage your dog

- Control the dogs food intake by removing the dog's dish.
- Meal time becomes training time because FOOD and a HUNGRY dog is key to keeping the dog engaged and motivated to work for you.
- NO MORE FREEBIES = you want this? Good. Now I'll TEACH you with it! If you do what I want, you'll get what you want.

### 4. Intent

- This one is a little harder to quantify, but very big for dogs. Some call it energy, intuition, etc. Whatever you can it, every animal is connected and sensitive to primitive survival instincts that alert them to potential dangers. You can't lie to a dog, and they won't lie to you. This is where building trust is so important and why we won't get far without it.
- Don't try to trick your dog, they know better. They can be bribed, in the short run, but that undermines you in the long term.
- A calm, but firm demeanor is reassuring to your dog especially if you don't know one another well. Be Patient! But let them know following your lead is the best deal for them.

## 5. Touch

- Pleasant touch: praising soothing touches, petting, massages.
- Unpleasant Touch: leash tug, pressure from a training tool.

***Never rely on one tool exclusively in the communication toolbox. We always combine, alternate and balance these tools using whatever we can to keep the dog motivated and engaged.***

## 5 Keys to Shaping and Modifying Behavior

When all 5 keys are in check and applied properly you will get success in shaping and modifying behaviors!

### Key 1: Timing

Your timing is **critical** to helping your dog learn. Dogs live in the moment. They do have memory but cannot recall an event upon request as do humans. You can't say to the dog, "Do you remember what we did last time when we went for a walk? Do that again, please." Instead you have to consistently capture the dog's behavior in the moment to help them learn much faster. **Dogs learn by association.** When they do something and it is directly followed by either pleasant or unpleasant consequences in the instant immediately following the action, they begin to form a rudimentary human vocabulary. The better you are at marking desired or undesired behaviors in the moment directly following the act the faster they will learn and the more confidence they will have in following your direction.

Commands or cues come just before or during the behavior and markers come immediately after. You have .5 to 1 second to capture a behavior as good or bad (desired or undesired) and mark the behavior. Delivery of the reward reward can and often should wait, but the marker needs to be immediate.

- Good timing: Just as the dog jumps on you "No" is marked and when he withdraws you mark the desired behavior as "Good" the moment his feet hit the floor.
- Poor timing: Dog is jumping up at you repeatedly and you say "No" to mark the jumping as undesired behavior, if you're off by even 1 second and the "No" comes when the dog actually withdrew from and put their paws on the floor, you then you missed the opportunity to mark the actual undesired behavior of jumping on you. The dog is actually being told no for not jumping on you.
- Good timing: The dog goes into a sit and you mark it with "Good". As you go to give a treat for the sit, the dog moves out of the sit to receive the food. You must mark this undesired behavior "No" and remove the food because you don't want the dog to move. Moving from the sit is the undesired behavior. As soon as the dog goes back in to sit he hears "GOOD" and reward can occur without the dog moving to receive it.

### Key 2: Clear Auditory Communication

As mentioned above, canines communicate in their own way. One of the biggest mistakes we humans make is relying too much on our own language as a means to communicate with our dogs while ignoring other more effective means of communicating with our dogs. Naturally, most people rely on the language that is most familiar to them, but when communicating with another species we must take into consideration what they will understand. Try not to talk to the dog as you would to a human, keep "your words" to a minimum. The dog does not always understand the meaning of words you are saying until they have an association with them. Dogs use vocalizations of various tones as one means to communicate their intent to another dog, but their understanding of human vocabulary is limited, so don't confuse things with a lot of words.

- **Consistently use the same words**, such as "Yes", "Good" or "No", followed by a pleasant or unpleasant consequence, in that order. **The marker must come first!**
- **The association is made by the marker, which tells them what action it was that earned the consequence that follows. Thus they learn how to make their own good choices.**
- When it comes to verbal communications your tone of voice is the strongest indication of your intent towards them, followed by whatever association they have with the words you use, similar to a human toddler.

### Key 3: Consistency and Follow Through

Inconsistency kills training in anything we are trying to accomplish whether it be learning a language, losing weight, gaining muscle, etc. Be consistent and remember to LIMIT YOUR DOG'S OPTIONS to practice behaviors you don't want!!!! If they're able to consistently do what you don't like, you're basically doomed, haha! Alternatively, if you're consistent in your rules and daily routine, your dog will begin to form habits that support the behavior you're looking for.

- Be clear and consistent with your expectations.
- Give GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT to encourage good behavior, then you have a more chances to reward your dog for the behavior you actually want, building that all important history of reinforcement.
- If you're inconsistent then it's actually very unfair to correct or punish your dog.
- Be sure that **every time** the dog does the desired or undesired behavior it gets the appropriate consequence: pleasant or unpleasant.

### Key 4: Motivation

The individual dog dictates for itself what is motivating and what is not, we don't decide that! All dogs are different. What motivates one dog might not motivate another.....except food. All dogs must eat. :)

Dogs are not eager to please us!! Dogs are eager to please themselves, just as we are. Dogs do things for 2 reasons.

1. To increase pleasant things in their life and better their situation OR:
2. To decrease unpleasant things in their life.

There are 2 types of motivators: (+ pleasant ) and (- unpleasant ).

You need to control the pleasant and unpleasant things and administer in balance to motivate and shape behavior and gain a proper relationship.

Examples:

- Pressure on and pressure off.
- Reward administered and Reward removed.

One very big thing to remember-ALWAYS BE FAIR!!! Ask yourself, if you switched places with your dog, would you follow you?

### Key 5: Increase Difficulty Gradually

Raising criteria too quickly, or never raising it at all will both kill your dogs motivation. Asking too much too soon will confuse and frustrate your dog. Not asking for more advanced work at the appropriate time will simply bore your dog to the point that they won't want to continue working. Dogs learn step by step, much like we did in school. We didn't start off writing essays. We learned the alphabet, then short words, the short sentences, then paragraphs and so on. If we successfully capture the dog's behaviors in the moment we can be more effective in helping them understand what is expected. For example, a dog that can come from 5 feet away may be perplexed at a distance of 12 feet. We must teach the dog how to come to us from all distances, but we build gradually, step by step, taking care not to raise the criteria too quickly or too much. We can't tell the dog the predicted consequence, the dog must experience it for himself to predict whether or not he will do it again.

# Four Stages of Learning

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Understanding the four stages of learning is important to knowing where the dog is in training so that you can plan accordingly. It's important to manage the training setup at all times to set you and your dog up for success.

1

## Teaching

Learning what is actually required to get a reward. When beginning to shape any behavior the general rule is to not to name it at this stage. You are only shaping and teaching the positioning required until the lightbulb comes on and the dog is popping into position. At that point he understands what you want him to do to earn a reward. This can take anywhere between 10 to 50 or more reps. This phase usually does not take long at all, seconds or minutes. Then you'll move to the automatic phase.

*Tip: Don't beat a dog up with repetitions, that's a motivation killer. Work only 3-5 minutes on a new behavior in a session. You can do multiple short sessions a day, if your dog is into it.*

2

## Reinforcement

In this stage you may still be helping the dog into position with luring or leash guidance but the dog is responding as asked pretty much each time. Now you can name the behavior and give meaning to the command. Slowly begin to phase out the lure or leash guidance to help until the dog is doing the behavior on command automatically with no help, 5 or 6 times in a row right away. Now the dog fully understands the command. This phase should only take 50-250 reps. As before, don't work too many reps at one session!

3

## Testing and Generalizing

This is the stage that takes the most time, and the place where most training breaks down. Unless you persist in this phase, your earlier efforts are wasted. SO DON'T QUIT NOW!!

Once the dog knows the behavior on command, start adding the **Three D's-Distance, Duration and Distractions**. You are now reinforcing what the dog already knows and expanding on it. Dog's are very contextual, so when you change even tiny things you must keep reinforcing and generalizing, teaching the dog that even though something has changed, their task remains the same. As you begin to work and get success in new environments: trails, parks, parking lots, stores, other homes, etc. you are building the kind of reliability that simply doesn't happen without this phase. You can now add more pressure (negative reinforcement) to make the command happen as the environment will be competing for our dogs attention and must be offset with a balance of negative reinforcement and high value reward for positive reinforcement when needed. Some creativity in finding new and more exciting reinforcers for your dog will help tremendously!

Phase in distractions in small increments. I cannot stress this enough. Don't change too many variables or raise criteria too steeply at once. Rules don't change, your expectations are that dog continues the asked for behavior until you give the release marker "break" or an equivalent command.

In this phase you'll need to pay close attention to the Goldilocks Principle, meaning that once your dog is performing as desired 80% of the time, you need to increase difficulty (raise the criteria) by 20%. Conversely, if your dog is struggling and unable to be successful at least 80% of the time, you need to go back to when they were able to do as asked and build up again from there.



# 4

## Maintenance

Maintenance is all about keeping the dogs training up even though our formal training sessions are few and far between at this point. The dog will not forget, but reliable obedience will slide if not maintained, so periodic maintenance should occur to keep what the dog has learned fresh. Your reinforcement schedule must remain. Training is for life!! This does NOT mean you have to have treats on you in order for your dog to obey, rather that you continue to praise and use other types of reinforcers to keep your dog motivated. Use their obedience in your daily life as part of your routine to keep things in good shape. Make it fun! I usually do a few exercises here and there throughout the day, especially before bed. Make it a bonding experience and something your dog looks forward to!

## Principles Of Canine Learning

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We've talked about how dogs communicate and how we can shape their behavior when teaching them how to navigate the human world that they find themselves living in. Now let's get busy establishing a communication system that will allow our dogs to understand very easily what we are asking of them. The way we will do this is by employing the well established behavioral science methodologies known as Classical and Operant Conditioning.

### Classical Conditioning

**Classical Conditioning strengthens the predictive power of something by consistently placing it ahead of something else.**

Derived from Pavlov's research with dog's, and later Watson and Skinners's research, the process is one of associating a neutral stimulus (for example, a clicking sound) that repeatedly occurs just before the presentation of a high value stimulus (such as food). After a number of repeated incidents where the pair of stimuli are presented together-**always the neutral (click) first and the high value reward (the food) second**- the subject will begin to anticipate the reward (the food) when they hear the click. Yippee! Food is coming!!

**Classical Conditioning is passive learning**, meaning that the click is always followed by the reward, regardless of what the dog is doing. This is often used to "reprogram" a dog's perceptions and feelings about things they have had trouble with, such as fears or phobias, separation anxiety and aggression issues. The dog learns to associate things that were previously unpleasant to them with something that is very good for them. The dog learns "that scary vacuum thingy isn't so bad; in fact good things happen to me every time it comes around. I like vacuums!"

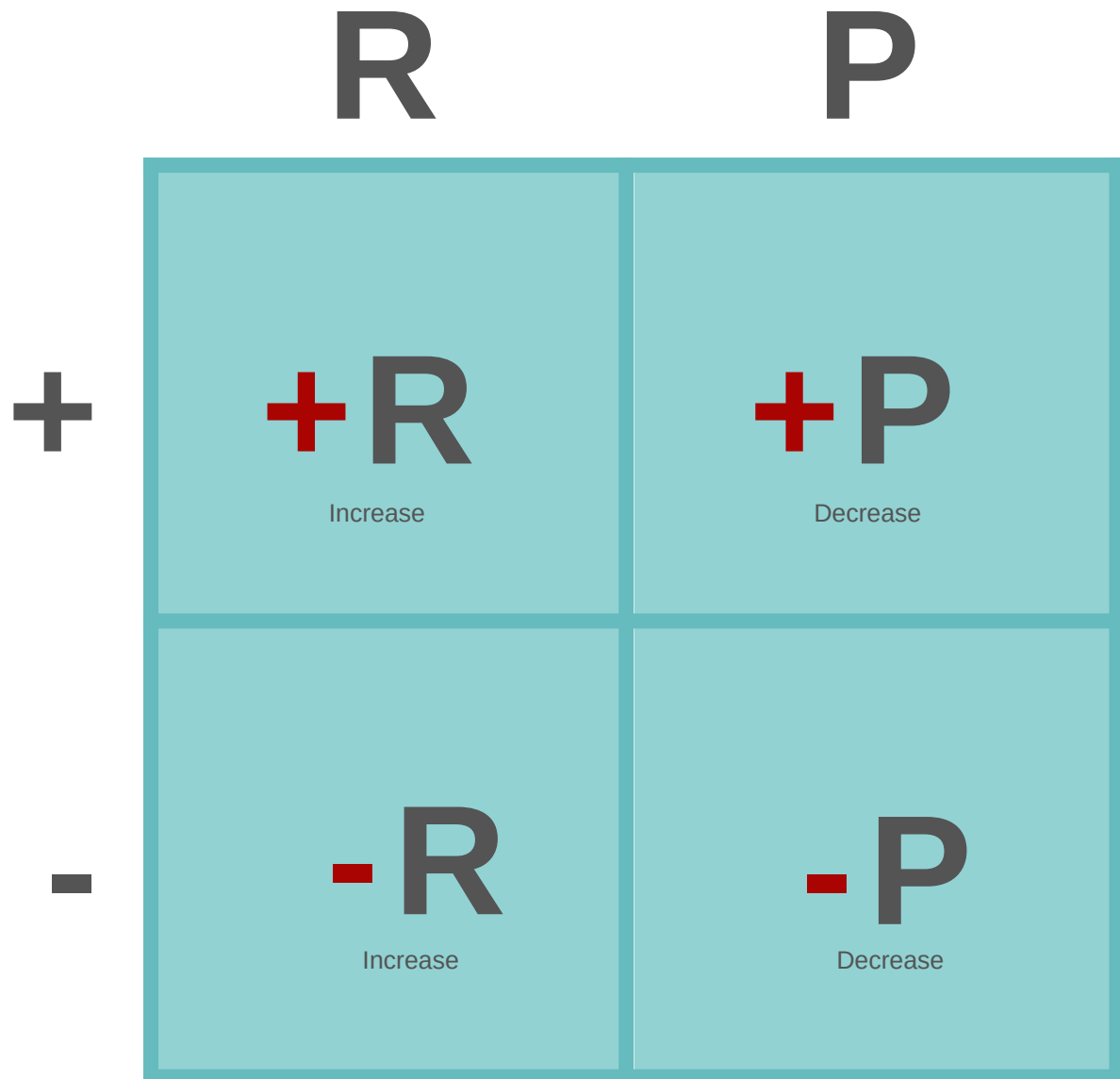
### Operant Conditioning

**Operant Conditioning is the process of deliberately manipulating consequences to control behavior.**

Unlike Classical Conditioning, **Operant Conditioning is active learning for the dog** where the dog learns that their own behavior choices will determine the outcome. The trainer increases or decreases the likelihood that the behavior will be repeated by deliberately manipulating the consequences of a behavior. For instance, the dog learns, "huh...interesting...I put my rear end on the floor and I get food. I'll try that again...Yep, It worked again! Cool!" Viola!

Behavior that is rewarded is repeated and behavior that is corrected or punished is not repeated. Remember, "Dogs Do What Works". This type of training is most commonly used to teach foundational obedience behaviors and relies on the use of reinforcement (increases behavior) and punishment (decreases behavior).

## Quadrants of Operant Conditioning



### Two Types of Reinforcers

The quality of your reinforcers will greatly affect your dog's motivation. Pay attention to what your dog really likes and what they find just "meh" and what they actively dislike.

#### Unconditioned Reinforcer (Primary)

These are things that your dog naturally enjoys.

Food, Treats, Toys

Possibly praise and affection

#### Conditioned Reinforcer (Secondary)

These are things the dog has been conditioned to enjoy.

Markers-clicker, words like Yes and Good

Possibly praise and affection

## Rates of Reinforcement

To really tap into the power of positive reinforcement you need to understand how to vary your rate of reinforcement to produce true fluency in a behavior, meaning that the dog knows the behavior well and will offer it on cue under a variety of conditions, including high distraction situations.

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### *Continuous Reinforcement:*

When teaching a new behavior the trainer will use a high rate of continuous reinforcement, meaning rewards are given out every time the dog offers the correct behavior. This frequency is used to increase the dog's focus and motivate the dog to continue offering the behavior.

### *Variable Reinforcement:*

Once the dog is responding reliably, you can move to a variable schedule of reinforcement. Reliable is defined as responding to the cue the first time it is prompted 90% of the time in at least 5 different places / scenarios. So not just at home, but outside at the park, at the pet store, at your friends house, when friends come over, etc.

A variable schedule is a random pattern of awarding rewards. Research has shown that a variable schedule makes the response to the cue even stronger than the continuous schedule. A good example of this is the addictive nature of playing the slot machines. The rewards are varied and unpredictable, but the small payoffs keep coming now and then, and the potential jackpot looms enticingly.

It's great fun to surprise your dog on occasion with a jackpot for a really good response. A jackpot is a whole bunch of high value treats rather than just one. Make sure you don't hand it all over at once, dribble it out so your dog really gets to have fun with it. One trainer I know occasionally hides a cheeseburger in a tree at the local park. Then she'll do recall exercises with her dog. When the dog does a really impressive recall, she marks it with the clicker and a hip, hip, hooray, then she pulls the cheeseburger magically from the tree. WhooHoo! Result: one happy dog with a rock solid recall!

Gradually phase out rewards as follows:

- Mark and reward 1 in every 3 correct responses
- Mark and reward 1 or 2 in every 5 correct responses
- Mark and reward 1 in every 7 responses
- And so on...

## Timing + Consistency = Motivation

Pay attention to your Timing and Consistency!

*If your Timing is good and your Consistency is solid, your dog will be very motivated.*

*If your Timing is bad and/or your Consistency is uneven, your dog will lack motivation.*

# Conditioning Behavior Markers

Desired Behaviors - Mary with "Yes" or "Good"

Undesired Behaviors - Mark with "No" or "EhEh"

Release Word - "Break"

## Key Points

- It will take many repetitions, up to 100 - 200 for your dog to really learn a new behavior.
- Dog knows what "Good" means when he looks at you expectantly for a reward when you say it.
- You can multitask by teaching a position while giving meaning to "Good", "No", "Yes" and "Break".
- DO NOT say both "Yes" and "Good".. "Yes" terminates the behavior.
- "Good" builds duration of behavior.
- Think of "Good" as "Keep Going" and "Yes" as "All Done".
- Keep your markers clear and consistent, use only one at a time.

## Timing Matters

The dog must first hear the marker, then you deliver the reward or refuse the reward, depending on the dog's behavior

## Delivery of Rewards

In early stages of teaching something new always pay on "Good" to keep the dog in the behavior. Once you're sure the behavior is learned, cut back to only paying on "Yes".

## Behavior Markers



=

Dog-Well done! You got it right!  
You-Reward your dog, either toss away or bring to them.



=

Dog-Continue what you're doing!  
You-Move to the dog and deliver reward.



=

Dog-That's not right, try again.  
You-Remove reward.



=

Dog-This behavior/session is over, you can go get your reward.



# Distractions and Drives

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It's important to be aware of the environment you are training in and how it affects your dog. Always make it easy for your dog to succeed! Teaching new commands in areas of low or no distractions will help both of you enjoy your training as well as help your dog learn faster. As your dog becomes more fluent with the new commands, you will need to introduce distractions into the training environment, or train in more distracting environments to help solidify and proof the commands.

## The primary drives we work with when training dogs are:

It's important to be aware of the environment you are training in and how it affects your dog. Always make it easy for your dog to succeed! Teaching new commands in areas of low or no distractions will help both of you enjoy your training as well as help your dog learn faster. As your dog becomes more fluent with the new commands, you will need to introduce distractions into the training environment, or train in more distracting environments to help solidify and proof the commands.

**Social:** relating to maintaining the pack/family unit.

**Prey:** relating to the acquisition of food.

**Defense:** self-protection and self-preservation.

**\*Fight:** the willingness to stay engaged in battle long after the sense for self-preservation should have removed the desire to fight.

\*Note: Fight drive is not commonly exhibited in most dogs these days, but the latent potential is present in all dogs. There are still dogs out there that exhibit strong fight drive. Fight drive is often developed or promoted through frustration when training. When planning our training areas, it is important to include distractions of **each of the first three drive qualities (social, prey & defense)**.

## Levels of Distractions:

### Low Distractions:

have the characteristics of being both common to the environment and buffered by distance. Close enough to be noticed by the dog, but not so close as to be anything more than of casual interest.

### Moderate Distractions:

are close enough to be more than of casual interest, perhaps bordering on being engaging.

### High Distractions:

are highly engaging, and may be interactive as well.

## When considering the training set up and the use of distractions, we must match the level of distraction to the working level of the dog.

The key to success is to be attentive to how your dog reacts to distractions, starting slow and gradually build their tolerance for distractions while maintaining their motivation for the task. If the dog can't successfully work against the level of distraction 80% of the time, then you have to consider that the dog is not adequately prepared. Conversely, if the dog is successfully working the task at some given level of distraction, and is working it successfully 100% of the time, then you have to consider that either the level or the type of distraction is not adequate to challenge the dog.

As you build up their tolerance for distractions, your dog's confidence will increase, and they'll begin to understand how all this works and become more willing to follow your lead. If you remain supportive, calm and firm while working them through distractions, their trust in you and your bond as a working team will grow. Likewise, your trust in what your dog can do will grow as well.

## The Three D's (Distance, Duration & Distraction)

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When we begin to teach anything new to our dog we want to start off in areas of low distractions. Even mild distractions can really make things harder on both of you in the early phases. As you move from the Teaching and Reinforcement phase to the Generalization phase you'll need to begin testing your dog's reliability by gradually increasing the difficulty and employing the Three D's. Failure to challenge your dog and support them through all phases of learning will inevitably result in a breakdown of everything you have worked for! Don't quit too soon. It's a journey, not a destination.

**DISTRACTION:** is a measure of the dog holding true to a command while there are other things competing for his attention.

Distractions come in the form of sensory appeal: sight, sound, touch, smell. Each individual dog will be distracted by different things. For some dogs, simply being on or near grass or other plants is hugely distracting, but they can ignore other things like another dog or person, or noises, etc. For others, the presence of a dog or person is all encompassing and they are unable to focus on anything else. The sound of a doorbell or delivery truck may be a big distraction for some dogs.

Issues with reliability around distractions are very common and all too often excused by the handler. It's easy to get a dog to be obedient to commands in a familiar environment when nothing interesting is happening. It is another thing to have them follow through when there is a competing motivator in the area. When distractions are present things start to get difficult. The key with adding distraction proofing to your dog's repertoire is about starting slow and building on success. We can't expect a reactive dog to remain sitting when another dog charges the fence if he can't even sit when we bounce a ball in front of him. Start with small distractions and build up in intensity as the dog gets the hang of it. By gradually increasing distractions while training we build up the reliability of the dog.

### Types of distractions

Refers to sensory appeal: SIGHT, SOUND, TOUCH, SMELL.

### Qualities of distractions

Refers to how the dog is challenged on an emotional level: jealous regard, possessiveness, protectiveness, defensiveness, etc., etc.

**DISTANCE:** is a measure of how far away things are (you or the distractions) from your dog, while he is holding a command.

Distance from distractions is the easiest parameter to control, and serves as an adjustable buffer to increase or decrease the level of distraction for our dogs. Even so, this is often the most challenging piece of the puzzle for most people and frequently the overlooked key in building to higher levels of success. When you add distractions to a dog's proofing work, keep them at a tolerable distance in the beginning. Tolerable means finding a distance where it challenges your dog, but is not so over-stimulating that it makes it impossible for you to get things back on track (the Goldilocks Principle).

The biggest key to success in the proofing process is learning to layer the 3Ds appropriately. If you keep the distraction low when you start building your distance from the dog, it is easier for the dog to learn the proper response. If you want to work on higher levels of distraction, stay nearby in the beginning, so you can quickly intervene and fix mistakes if needed. If you want to work a long duration exercise, do not immediately add the second variable of going out of sight from the dog. Add variables in a way that allows you and the dog to succeed.

### **DURATION: is a measure of how long your dog will continue to hold a command.**

For instance, if you ask your dog to Sit, how long will he remain in that position? Does he sit for a brief second, until you turn your attention away from him, or until you give him an indication he is finished? My preference is to teach a dog to remain in position until you indicate with a permission cue (Yes, Break) that he is finished with the task. The simple addition of permission cues for release defines the exercise and adds clarity to the dogs understanding. Now the dog understands there is a definitive ending to an exercise, and you will determine it rather than him having the burden of making that decision and perhaps making a wrong choice. This is how you create the concept of "Stay" in the dog's mind. Duration is the first concept I focus on with the majority of dogs I train (there are always exceptions to a rule, but for most dogs, duration is the place to start in building reliability). I believe duration helps the information sink in, and there is no logical reason I can come up with that a dog can't learn to hold simple stationary positions (with limited distraction present) right from the start.

### **Raising Criteria**

What exactly does raising the criteria mean? The criteria is whatever you decide is required for the dog to earn their reward. As we introduce the 3 D's to our training, we are raising the difficulty level and our expectations for the dog's success. So if the dog will hold a stay for 3 seconds, you might then raise the criteria to holding the stay for 5 seconds. Then again up to 8 seconds and so on. If you need to lower the criteria you would go back to the last criteria that the dog was able to be successful.

As I've mentioned, it's important to realize that dogs don't generalize well. What this means is that while the dog may do a lovely "sit stay" in your front room with no one around, they may act as though they have no idea what you're talking about when the mailman arrives. And out at the park? Forget about it! Why? Are they being stubborn? Nope, they just don't translate the behavior to a new setting with distractions. At this stage the dog thinks that "sit stay" is something that happens at home when all is quiet. Again, look at it from the dog's point of view. You're outside and the smells are AMAZING! They can't wait to go check it out. Then suddenly you say "sit....sit....SIT!" The dog's thinking; "Say what? I gotta go! Surely you can't be serious".

Best selling author Patricia McConnell PhD. states it this way;

“The least intuitive part of training a new behavior is one of the most important, and that's asking your dog to perform in circumstances that are gradually more and more difficult. A common training mistake is, for a week or so, asking for behavior when it's relatively easy for your dog, then slipping over moderate levels of difficulty and proceeding directly to asking when it's truly difficult. The dog can't handle the level of difficulty and fails miserably. An analogy is going from regular ice skating to doing a triple lutz at the Olympics. After a few sessions of being over their heads, both dogs and humans can get pretty discouraged. But a little thoughtful planning can avoid that problem and lead to a gold medal performance in the long run.

~From "Fiesty Fido" by Patricia McConnell, PhD and Karen B. London, PhD

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## Training Made Simple

Good dog training is about crystal clear communication, motivation and reinforcement. Don't overthink your training. Keep it simple and stay on track with your dog training to avoid backsliding. Dogs are amazingly resilient, forgiving creatures, thankfully. If you run into trouble, go back, look at the formula to see where you messed up, and try again. Happy training!

### Stay On

# T

**Teach** the dog what it means to sit.

# R

**Reinforce** and **Repeat** Continue to practice and reward the dog for sitting.

# A

**Add Difficulty (3Ds)** Keep challenging your dog to make the behavior reliable in all situations.

# C

**Correct** for noncompliance, but only once the dog fully understands what is expected. Always be fair to the dog.

# K

**Keep Training** Use it so you don't lose it!

### TEACH

YOU are the teacher. First, show your dog what you want them to do-and not do. Be patient, make it crystal clear what is expected and repeat, repeat, repeat as needed until the dog really understands it.

### REINFORCE

Don't miss this vitally important step!! Good reinforcement skills result in the dog willingly giving you the behavior you ask for, time after time. Reinforcement is a two-step process:

- 1) First, mark the behavior.
- 2) Deliver the reward **after** the marker-never at the same time or before.

### ADD DIFFICULTY

If you want your dog to be reliable anywhere, anytime, don't forget to challenge your dog with the introduction of the 3Ds into your training. Increase difficulty gradually and manage the training environment to help your dog succeed. Build a strong history of success and reinforcement to create a dog that will perform reliably, with heart and soul regardless of what is happening around them.

### CORRECT

Once the dog understands what is being asked and you've provided ample motivation, guidance and reinforcement, the dog should readily comply. If they don't, it is time to correct them. In most cases the correction will be minimal and lets the dog know that it's simply not optional. Correction should not descend into a power play between you and your dog. Always set your dog up for success, don't ask too much too soon. If you find either you or the dog is feeling angry, frustrated or just tired out-STOP. Backup to the last place where the dog was compliant and end the exercise on a positive note. If you find you are needing to correct a lot, go back to the previous steps and work on that for a while.

### KEEP TRAINING

Use it so you don't lose it! Don't let all that hard work go to waste. In mere minutes a day you can keep your dog's desire to work and their new skills sharp. Use what your dog has learned in your normal routine, the more you use what they have learned in daily life, the more solid things will be. Remember, both you and your dog need to establish good habits and patterns in your life together.



## Obedience First

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As a dog trainer specializing in anxiety, reactivity and aggression (towards both dogs and humans), I know first-hand that the great majority of behavioral issues can be greatly improved, or “cured” altogether through an obedience first approach.



*“Obedience is like insurance.  
It must be acquired before the moment of need.”*

*~ William Koehler, The Koehler Method of Dog Training*



Many highly successful trainers old and new, including the late William Koehler, have employed this approach with great success. The main reasons the obedience first approach works so well in my practice and for my clients are as follows:

### Reducing Stress

#### Triggers

Most dogs with behavioral issues have “triggers” (things that set them off). The triggers themselves are usually not the root cause of the behavioral issues, though. Most behaviorally challenged dogs are suffering from stress, and the triggers just push them over the edge of their stress threshold (kind of like the old saying, “The straw that broke the camel’s back”). Stress layering (multiple layers of stress that stack on top of each other) is a common problem, and happens with humans and dogs alike. Things that can cause a dog stress can include, but are not limited to: being on a leash, new people, new surroundings, noise, being left alone, inconsistent or unclear communication from their handler, lack of training, other dogs, barrier frustration, unusual events, inconsistent schedule, lack of clearly stated behavioral boundaries, lack of impulse control, pain...the list goes on.

#### Resultant Behavior

Behaviors that result from stress can be leash aggression, poor manners with guests, unruly or hyperactive behavior, house soiling, destructive in house or yard, unwarranted aggression (towards dogs/humans/other animals), fearfulness, etc. Proper obedience can significantly reduce stress for dogs; it can peel back the layers of stress by giving the dog specific tasks to focus on, establishing clear and consistent communication between the human and dog and teaching the dog how to be in control of his own emotions and actions. Specific triggers rarely have to be dealt with individually, as the training lowers stress overall, so any one trigger is rarely enough to send your dog over threshold.

#### Building a Functional Relationship

Do you ever wonder why people act differently around strangers than they do around friends or family? Have you ever noticed that your dog acts differently around different people, or around different dogs? Have you ever wondered why? TIME AND EXPERIENCE. Time and experience create connection. It takes time and effort to build mutual trust and respect, as well as clear communication and cooperation. Most people that have dogs displaying behavioral issues have a fragile relationship built on “love” and hope, not a healthy relationship built on trust, respect, communication and cooperation. A lack of proper relationship seems fine when things are calm, but when pressure or stress is introduced, things fall apart quickly. I spend a great amount of time teaching my students how to build proper relationships with their dogs. A lot of this time

focuses on teaching them to properly train their dogs around distractions, so that their dogs can learn to be responsible for their own actions and mind-set, even when pressure and stress builds. Our relationships with our dogs is not built on moments of calm, but instead should be defined by how well we handle the moments of stress together.

### Teaching "Right Action" as the Preferred Alternative

Dogs, like humans, will be faced with many decisions to make throughout a typical day; having a history of success with making the "right" decisions will make the decision to take "right action" in every situation easier. Dogs that have solid recalls and proper impulse control don't chase cats, squirrels or run after people or dogs. Dogs that know how to properly heel around distractions won't pull on leashes or be reactive towards other dogs, strangers, etc. Dogs that can hold an extended "place" or stay don't harass your guests or react to distractions, etc. Teaching a dog to choose "right action" in situations where he is tempted to do otherwise should be our objective with training. The dog will learn important skills like impulse control, and having regard for other members of his social group. A dog that lacks impulse control and that has an over-inflated sense of "self" tends to do as HE pleases, which can be a dangerous thing.

### Building a Solid Foundation

When I train dogs and students, I do my very best to make the training motivational, enjoyable and fair, which includes making it easy for the dog to "get it right". While we have to use some stressors and pressure during training, I make a solid effort to avoid intense pressures. The "real world" is full of surprises and realities that can't be avoided, and that can be dangerous or deadly to our dogs if they are not properly prepared to deal with these pressures. Corrections and punishers, as a part of a well thought out and executed training plan, can be essential to the success of many dogs. If we have done a good job at peeling back layers of stress, building a proper relationship, and teaching alternatives, then our dogs will be prepared for a fair correction or punishment for failing to take right action when the situation dictates.

There are plenty of dogs out there that don't really require an obedience first approach; these are the kind of dogs that will listen up and straighten out with one leash pop or stern, "No". Even with this type of dog, I would rather reduce their stress, build a relationship with them and teach them "right action" through obedience training first. To me there is a difference between teaching a dog to be "under control" and teaching a dog to be "in control". The difference, in my opinion, is training and conditioning as opposed to forcing. When a dog is forced to be under control, his choices have been made for him. When a dog has learned to be in control, he is making decisions for himself, decisions based on experiences that he has had through proper and consistent training. When a dog has learned to be in control, he needs very little input from his handler, and has very little to worry about in his day to day life. Earning your dog's trust, respect and loyalty through an obedience first approach can make the struggle of dealing with your "difficult" dog a thing of the past. It isn't easy work, it takes time and effort, there will be times of frustration and times of elation, but in the end, it can get you what you have always wanted: a dog that will listen to you! In order to be heard, you must first prove that you are worthy of being heard. You must show your dog that there is value to be gained from listening to you.

It is important to remember that practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect. If you are repeatedly setting your dog up to fail, failure is what you end up teaching.