



THE AGITATION SNOWBALL

There are many methodologies, techniques, styles and theories, all of which have their place in the dog-training world. The goal of any training should be to proof the training against distractions and environmental stimulus.

In the context of dog training we define Distractions and Stimulus as:

- Distraction – Something that makes it difficult to think or pay attention.
- Stimulus – Something that rouses or incites to action or increased action. Incentive; an agent, action or condition that elicits or accelerates a physiological or psychological activity or response.

The “Agitation Snowball” is the process dogs go through when presented with distractions and/or stimulus. Understanding this process allows the trainer/handler to STOP THE PROCESS before the dog gets too invested in the distraction/stimulus and redirect the dog into a desired behavior, and subsequently reward him for the appropriate behavior. Timing is incredibly IMPORTANT.

The 5 L's of the Agitation Process

- LISTEN – When a dog hears a noise, it will typically cause him to look for the source. Many dogs will start the Loading Phase from the sound alone, especially if they have a conditioned emotional response to that sound. This is your first chance to STOP the process.
- LOOK – When a dog sees a distraction/stimulus; movement or sound is often a trigger for the look. Looks lead to locking. This is your last chance to STOP the process before the lock.
- LOCK – When a dog has identified the distraction/stimulus and has locked his eyes (or other senses for a blind dog) on it. Locking immediately leads to loading. Your dog is not thinking of you at this point; efforts to STOP the process will be much less effective and very likely impossible.
- LOAD – The loading phase starts as soon as the dog locks onto a distraction or stimulus. Once your dog is loading, you have lost the window to easily STOP the process.
- LUNGE – Once a dog has loaded enough adrenaline, it will lunge. This could be a barking explosion, a launch forward, redirected aggression (on the handler), etc.

How You Can Help Your Dog

- Be aware of your dog's triggers and state of mind.
- Be aware of your surroundings; don't get “surprised”.
- Use distance as a buffer and make sure your dog is 80% successful before going 20% closer.
- STOP the agitation process EARLY - between Listen/Look and Lock. TIMING IS KEY!
- As soon as you STOP the process, redirect him to a desired behavior and mark/reward.
- If your dog reaches the Loading/Lunging phases, he is over threshold. Your options at this point are to Remove the Dog from the Stimulus or Remove the Stimulus from the Dog.
- Proofing against distractions is the process of Changing your Dog's Response to Stimuli