

Training or Untraining Dogs: Which Method Is Yours?

One of the best known bird dog trainers ever is a man named Delmar Smith. He grew up and lives in Oklahoma and has literally trained thousands of dogs. His favorite saying that I always remember is, "You are always training your dog, good or bad." Most people are of the belief, including me, that you can train your dog in 15 minutes a day. The only problem is that you cannot let the dog do as it pleases the other 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours of the day. This does not mean you are formally training all day long, but what it does mean is that during the rest of the day your commands (not requests) have to have consequences for the non-compliant dog.

Dogs need consistency every day from everyone in contact with the dog. One of the biggest pet peeves is a dog that jumps on people or things (your new car for example). Why does a dog do this? You may not like my answer to this one: you trained the dog to do this activity. Remember you are always training. Your dog cannot distinguish between your "dress" clothes and your "weekend" clothes, so if you let the dog jump on you on Saturday when you have jeans on, it will do the same thing on Monday morning when you are attired to go to work. The comment I often get is, "I don't mind the dog jumping on me *sometimes*." **Dogs don't understand *Sometimes***. *Sometimes* can be a small or defenseless child, an elderly person, or a hunter with a loaded shotgun. Remember that you are always training.

Another common problem that I encounter is with the seemingly best all-purpose command that can be extremely detrimental to a pointing dog. This command is *Sit*. Everybody wants to teach his dog this one. Why? Because he can. This is the most important command for a retriever or a flushing dog. You need control when working with these sporting dogs, and the command *sit*, when learned properly, is a great way to get control. However, remember the old adage that action speaks louder than words. Most people will say, "sit, sit, sit, sit, sit," in a voice that gets louder, louder, and louder. What they are actually teaching the dog is to respond (or not to respond) to yelling. Instead, one should give the dog a leash correction after the first sit command. This is done by pushing down on the rear end of the dog or by stimulating the dog with the E-collar. These actions will get the desired response: the dog will sit.

Many people teach their pointing dogs to sit (most pro trainers never do). However, most people use the sit command as a punishment and in pressure situations. Each time the dog does something wrong the owner yells, "sit, sit, sit." This training is detrimental because when you start working those dogs in a pointing drill on live birds and you use the command *whoa* the dog feels pressure and sits. Unless you can teach the command sit with no pressure on the dog, trainers highly recommend against teaching a pointing dog the *sit* command.

Another common training problem that I encounter several times a year is that of gun shyness. Yes, gun shyness in dogs is a man made problem; therefore, it is a training problem. AMEN. Do not take your dog to a skeet field, gun range, or out while you and your buddies are shooting. This is overwhelming to most dogs especially young and untrained dogs. Train your dog to the gun in a goodwill manner. One or two shots per session usually during feeding time or while using live birds is the recommended time for shooting around a dog new to the experience of a gun. The excitement of the food or the bird overrides any discomfort the dog may experience from the shooting and soon you will have a dog excited by the stimulation of the gun. Gun shyness is a totally avoidable problem; however, once the damage is done, it is often impossible to correct without an abundance of time and money.

A hard mouth in a dog is also a man made problem which usually developed from tug of war events in either playful or struggling situations. Remember that your spouse, your children, and the creators and marketers of dog toys can be the best untrainers that you'll ever meet!

When the dog returns to you with an object you should give a command such as *drop* and remove the object from the dog's mouth. Do not try to pull it out. Either you should apply pressure in between the dog's jaw or step on the dog's toes as you are saying *drop*. Do not get into a tug of war situation as it encourages chewing and pulling apart the objects. Again you must remember that a young or inexperienced dog can not differentiate between playing and doing its job in the field when it comes to objects in its mouth.

My final thoughts for you in regard to training your dog revolve around mixed messages. Many people comment after watching a training session that I use little or no praise. Praise is fine for a dog that is obeying the command and is consistently under control. However, most people use praise as a plea to get the dog to achieve the desired behavior. An example of this is when the owner wants to get the dog to come to them. "Come on, good boy, that's my boy!" These praises mean nothing to an untrained dog. On the contrary these words often act as fuel to the fire. An example of this is when you tell the dog to sit and stay followed by, "good boy, good boy, oh you are such a good boy!" The next thing you know the dog is in your lap instead of sitting and staying as you commanded. Why? Because you have trained the dog to come with the praise words and tone of, "good boy, good boy," and as he gets closer you continue to repeat these words. Always remember what you are expecting the dog to do and use the appropriate and consistent commands.

In closing, remember to use one word commands, to be consistent with commands and actions, and use commands that have been learned (the dog knows how to do the behavior expected). As I tell everyone who trains with me, "your words mean nothing!" If you give the dog a command that he does not know or understand, continuing to scream at the dog accomplishes nothing. By saying "come, here, sit, come, stay, come sit, get over here, what are you doing, sit come, stay you stupid dog!" you are training your dog to not respond to you.

Take a minute, think about what you expect, and give a simple command followed by an action (a leash correction, a pushing down on the rear end, or a use of the e-collar) that reinforces and teaches the desired response.

Keep it simple and have fun.

John