

What Went Wrong

Here we are half way through the small game, duck, and goose season and some of us are elated with our dog's performance while others are frustrated and disgusted. However, after some serious consideration maybe these feelings should be directed at the lack of time and energy that the dog owner put into his dog's development and training. The dog's behavior is a result of training and, therefore, is the responsibility of the human.

To start with let's step out of the hunting forum and talk about general obedience with your dog. Before your dog can be a proficient hunting dog it must be an obedient, biddable, good citizen. It must obey commands. It must be able to sit when told, come when called, and not jump up wildly (the most potentially dangerous situation for a hunter with a loaded gun). To get this desired behavior takes teaching the basics, more basics, and more basics. When the basics have been thoroughly taught, the requirement is repetition, repetition, and repetition. I believe that after you train something 100 times the dog has a grasp of what you want. To translate into the field, hunting grouse with a pointing dog takes 500 grouse encounters before the dog gets the picture.

Whether it is a hunting or non-hunting situation, many of those who train do not graduate the training level. In other words, these people train in low distraction situations. You need to raise the bar-make it hard, test your dog. Your dog is not always going to be in your controlled environment with the same boundaries, the same people, and the same noises. Change is inevitable' and our training strategies and tools can change as well. We are in a time of instant internet, fast cars with power windows and AC, and cell phones with all the modern features, and yet we fail to use the modern conveniences of the dog world. The three basics are the dog crate, the outdoor dog pen, and the electronic training collar.

People continue to argue that, when they grew up with a dog, their parents didn't have these things; and they are absolutely correct. Your parents (and mine) did not use these things, but look at the changes in our home lifestyles in the last 25-30 years. We live in a whirlwind world that is pulling us in every direction. Moms used to be at home with the dog all day, kids came home to play after the school day, and dads were at home at earlier hours. The work day was shorter, there were fewer meetings, and people socialized and ate at home because their schedules allowed them to. There was much more time for being with and training the family dog. Life was much less chaotic, so dogs were raised and trained in less chaotic environments.

Life has changed in so many ways so must our methods of dog training. After working with almost 1500 situations in the last couple of decades, this picture is very clear to me. The way that I have seen more people have the most success in the least amount of time is with an electronic training collar. This has been the only method where I have seen people become totally successful so that the dog is doing for the people what it was doing for me. Two other areas enhancing people's success with dog training are the use of the dog crate and the outdoor dog pen. We get fewer calls dealing with the death and injury of a dog caused by being run over, being lost or being poisoned as more people take the recommendations of using these three training tools.

Just having these tools in your possession is not enough; the dog owner must have the gumption to use the tools. In order to get the dog to do what you want it to do 100% of the time, you must be in a position to reinforce the command 100% of the time. Do not give a command that you can not enforce: *Actions speak louder than words*. This way of thinking is tough because we live in a non-touching, hands-off society. Dogs, especially puppies, need to

be shown what to do before they are told; and then they cannot reason, they can only respond behaviorally to what they have been trained or not trained to do.

For example, if you have a dog that is jumping on you, it clearly has been trained to be allowed to do this behavior. "No, no, no, down, off," will not teach the dog not to jump on you. Instead, **every** time the dog jumps up, you **must be** in a position to train the dog that it is not allowed. This training can take many forms whether the dog is not in a position to jump up because it is confined, whether the dog is on a leash, or whether the dog is stimulated by the electric collar. Discomfort is the key to 100% success in dog training. Discomfort, not to be confused with abuse, is what causes the dog to eventually respond to your words. All dogs have a prey drive, a function that makes them chase things and zone in on activities, good and bad. An E-collar will interrupt that zoning effect and bring the dog back to a listening posture. This method is the only method I know that works 100% of the time in any situation be it a high or low distraction.

Trained behaviors take time to learn and time to change. Today people have less time. No amount of verbal praising or pleading alone will change the behavior of a dog. The dog continues to do its own thing without the discomfort (the reason not to). Eventually the person resorts to screaming, leading to losing his cool, and then the hammer comes down. What has this person really accomplished? Most often the person has created a cowering, less trained dog and has given himself higher blood pressure. Unlike a professional trainer, who has the time, the controlled environment, and the strategies to accomplish a trained dog in a shorter amount of time, the average person needs the training tools and the knowledge of how to use the tools to train the dog to be both a good companion and a proficient hunter.

Whether you want a good hunter or a good companion, you need an effective way of training the dog to do what you want and need him to do. You need to get serious, to get involved with a trainer, to take some lessons, and to invest the time and energy to be involved with the dog. Your dog's behavior is often a product of his environment (given you have started with a genetically sound animal).

Once you have the tools, you need to use them. Use your dog crate and dog pen. Give your dog off time in a place where he can't do anything wrong and you have no need of yelling at him.

Most importantly remember that it is never too late to train your dog. It may take longer with bad behaviors that have been allowed to go unchecked and even tolerated for some time. But start today and you will not believe how happy you both will be!

Good Luck,

John

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