

Training Tip Tuesday: Impulse Control

Today's post is part tip, part soap box rant. I apologize in advance. I have taken a number of calls this week (as have many of my fellow trainers) that went something like this... "I don't care about teaching all that silly stuff.. I just want my dog to walk on a leash" or "I don't need touch, or sit – I just want my dog to listen". Well... I have news for you – all those silly little things play a major role in how your dog responds to you. I've also gotten the "Can't you just put an e-collar on her and shock her into compliance?" call this week. Here's the problem with aversive methods. Yes – they work. You can force a dog to listen. You can torment them and force obedience with fear and pain. But you are destroying your relationship. You are undermining trust. You lose all respect. And when that piece of equipment fails, or the impulse is greater than the possible punishment, or your dog finds a way out, you're screwed.

Instead of having a dog do something because they are afraid of what might happen if they don't – I would much rather have them do something because they understand, they respect my request, and are proud to show off!

Regardless of what you are trying to accomplish...If you are struggling; stop focusing on the end result and break it down into baby steps. Have you taught your pup what you are asking? Let's take Loose Leash Walking (LLW). Dogs aren't born knowing what a leash and collar are.. in fact, it can be quite terrifying the first few days they have that thing on around their neck. Have you taken the time to teach them what these things are? Have you created a positive association with the tools? If you only throw a leash on to take your dog to the vet..he may not be so keen to see the leash come out of the closet! Have you taken the time to show your dog how you expect him to walk, and what position he should be in, in relation to you when you walk? Have you eliminated external factors? (if your dog is scared, and pulling to get away from whatever it is that frightened them – its not a LLW problem, it's a confidence problem) If the pavement is too hot, or they are young and you've pushed them too far – these are all things that might result in pulling, but actually have nothing to do with the leash! If you have looked at all these things, and are still struggling; look at how you might tackle the problem from a different perspective. A dog that pulls from excitement or because they see something they want to chase would benefit greatly from impulse control, focus work, and learning to place a higher value on their handler. Instead of fighting the leash; I would work on place, touch, middle, I choose you, proximity, paper plate recall, etc...

Don't discount 'the silly little things' when it comes to training. Tricks and games; things both you and your dog can get excited about, help the learning process. Don't get so fixated on the end result, you forget to teach the steps to get there.. (It's like me saying "I don't want to learn addition or subtraction, I just want to do trigonometry!" You'd tell me I was crazy, and insist I learn the 'silly' stuff first!) Don't be afraid to mix it up, and choose different exercises as opposed to drilling the same ol' thing. Find a way to help your dog understand your requests and help them be successful.

In the video, I'm using Place to help teach Jake impulse control, which he applies to LLW. There are no chains, no prong collars, no e-collars. In fact; other than the cot he uses as his place mat, the only other 'tool' I have is a piece of yarn! You can see how happy and relaxed he is. He's enjoying his success and it's making him try even harder! What you don't see on the video, (because I simply don't have enough hands!) was the beautiful LLW Jake did next to me, while I carried the family cat! It took a lot of will power on Jake's part, but he demonstrated remarkable self-control; which all stems from learning Place!

<https://youtu.be/DSwX2HY1DoU>