

Training Tip Tuesday: Baby Steps!

When you are teaching something new; regardless of what it is – think about teaching it in baby steps. Break it down into each component, and work on that. Have fun with it; reward any effort and gradually raise the standard until you reach your goal. Whether you are teaching a complicated trick like getting a beer from the fridge, or an obedience skill like Loose Leash walking – take it one step at a time.

Paws up is an exercise I teach every dog; it helps them learn how to follow a lure, build up confidence, and it's a great foundation skill for other work. It's a great way to practice your communication skills too! When we start, we just ask the dog to acknowledge the platform. You can use anything from a phonebook, to a cushion. Even an upturned bowl will work. It just needs to be big enough to accommodate their front feet, strong enough to support their weight, and no more than ankle height. When the dog sniffs at it, we praise. Then we try to lure the dog forward onto it. As soon as the dog picks a foot up – even if he doesn't put it on the platform, we mark it and reward. The dog is starting to realize that the platform and his feet have something to do with each other! Of course.. if we just rewarded him for picking his foot up – we wouldn't progress! We want to keep raising the standard. There is no magic here. It's a simple matter of luring the dog forward, and rewarding any effort! Get one foot up, click and reward! Do that a few times.. then go for two feet! Get one foot up; praise, but withhold the treat and keep encouraging. You'll get that second foot! It may seem tedious to go this slow; but trust me on this. Taking your time to build up the foundation is far better! Resist the urge to pick your dog's foot up and put it on the platform. This accomplishes nothing. We want our dog's to learn how to think and do this on their own without help! Do not force your dog. Take the time to figure out how to help him, and encourage him. It may take a little time – Its worth it!

Once you can reliably lure him onto the platform, put it on cue. You can use anything you want (I use Paws up! for my dogs..). From there, you can start fading the lure, adding distance and distractions, and using different objects.

If you have a very fearful pup – this is a great foundation exercise to start in the comfort of home. Being successful at little things has a big effect!

For Ms. Chanel – we learned step up as a precursor to getting into a vehicle. It also helped build up her confidence, and trust in me. It helped her learn how to follow direction and try new things. By going slow and being really encouraging she learned to love learning and trying to problem solve. You may also notice that she's not wearing any special training equipment. There are no correction collars - there is no way for me to FORCE her to do anything. This is about learning to communicate and work TOGETHER! (okay – you may have also noticed Chanel isn't a dog! But the same principles apply... working together, one step at a time, will always get you farther than force, pain and fear!)

https://youtu.be/cjVf0bIvQ_A