

Trainer Tips

to get your dog to listen to you faster!

Working with dogs is like working with anything else, to do it well you need to overlap a number of subtle but crucial elements. And in order to do that, you need to work through the behaviors hundreds and hundreds of times to form the muscle memory and to make these behaviors so comfortable and fluent that you don't even think about them.

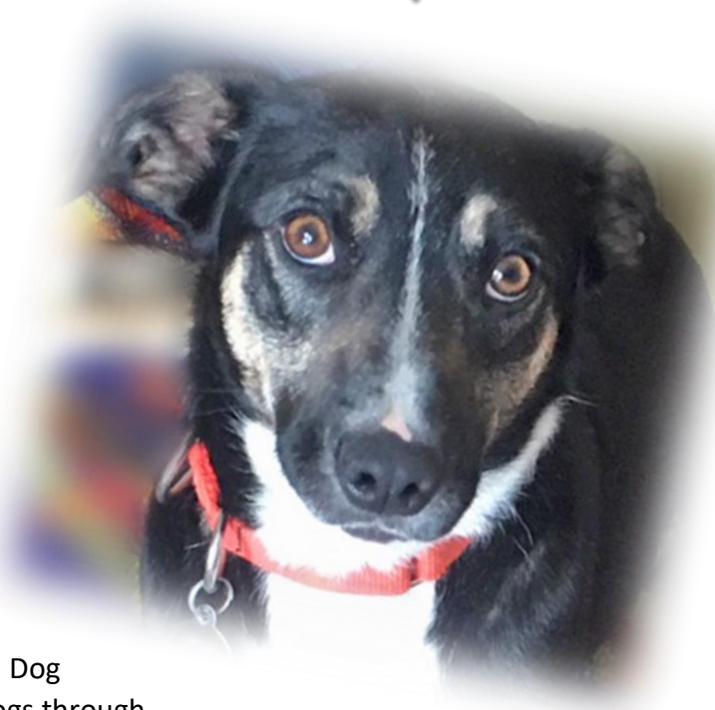
We all know professional athletes practice the basics over and over again. Basketball players tout the importance of dribbling and free-throw practice. Military and police do so much with their weapons with them, that it feels odd for them to do anything without them. Dog trainers aren't any different. We've run so many dogs through manners training that many elements have become second nature to us.

Once the basics happen without thinking, then the magic can happen. Remember, it wasn't until after we figured out all the nuisances of driving before we were able to listen to the radio or hold a conversation with a passenger, while we drove. Until then, we're busy trying to remember when to signal, what the speed limit was and where the car next to us was located.

With dog training, getting to this level frees us up to add additional items that make communication (and the dogs responses) faster – and easier. There are virtually hundreds of different strategies but we've settled on five.

Below are the five additional training elements used to improve communication between you and your dog. This list is not comprehensive but as I thought about the pieces we don't often allude to but always use, I found these five to be the most common and (hopefully!) easy to implement.

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1. Speak in their Language
 2. Go-to Behaviors
 3. See them 24/7
 4. Stop trying to Control them
 5. Goal is to Succeed



Speak in their Language

I'm amazed at how many people push back and demand to use words when working with their dogs. There are so many words floating around that we need the dogs – who we've probably told to go lay down or find something else to do - to distinguish that the words are actually for them and then act on them. Humans are verbal, we go to our words a lot; dogs not at all. They respond so much quicker if you speak in their language – using body language, signals and sounds.

I use body language to speak to a dog who's constantly smacking my knees when walking, for example. If the dog is doing figure 8's or trying to direct me, I'm use my legs instead of my mouth to change their behavior and ensure that going forward the dog stays clear of my feet. When asking for behaviors, I always default to hand signals, knowing I'll get a quicker and clearer response from the dogs. And when reminding a dog to leave something alone a sound will work 10x faster than a word.

But speaking to dogs is so much more than asking them to do something using a hand signal or cue; it's knowing how to hold your body, when to change your voice, which way to face and of course reading the dogs; if your dog pulls their ears back, what are they feeling? If they're licking their lips or standing on the tips of their toes, what then?

If I'm working with an anxious dog I have to get small, slow and encouraging; if I'm working with a strong, confident dog I need to stand and be direct. I have to do both of these until I have formed a rapport with the dog. Once that happens, I can start to be more like myself.

And remember, sounds can be found anywhere. Anyone who has worked with me knows, my favorite go-to tool is a squeaker from a dog toy. I clear my throat as a reminder to my dogs and drag my foot across asphalt to signal a heel.

Start to pay attention to your body language and see how it affects your pup. If your dog is anxious, are you causing it?

If your dog isn't listening to you and you're sitting down, stand up. If you're tiny, get bigger. If you're big, get smaller. One of the best things guys can do to help dogs, is to get on the floor.

If you want to communicate clearly to someone, anyone, speak in their language



Go-to Behaviors

A strategy to change our emotions is to have an image in our head as a 'go-to,' something that we can focus on that makes us feel good, like a snapshot of our families, our dogs or a successful time we've had. Focusing on one of these, can quickly change our emotions from weak or bad to happiness and strength.

The same is true for our dogs, our dogs need a behavior they can go-to whenever they're stressed, anxious, uncomfortable etc. But just like us, we have to teach and practice it *a lot* before we actually need or use it.

For dogs, consider distraction behaviors such as Look or Touch. By encouraging dogs to look at us when they're upset, it's a quick signal to us that something is going on. And it gives the dogs something specific to do with their anxiety. Look can work better than touch, since it can last as long as you want it to, but be sure to factor in your dog's abilities.

Some dogs cannot look away from a 'threat,' especially if you haven't yet proven to them that you've got their back and you're going to protect them. If this is the case, ask for shorter behaviors such as Touch, Circle, Bow etc to dissipate some of their anxiety.

Also consider that the more we get a dog to think, the less likely he or she is to act out or repeat behaviors we don't want. The way we get them to think is to teach them lots of different behaviors and then practice them over and over again (in different locations and under different weather and other environmental conditions). By asking them to preform behaviors when they would otherwise act out, you can distract them and give them something specific to do with their anxiety.

Note: many dogs who act out, act that way due to anxiety. If you're pup has anxiety, consider using Safe Spot as a go-to behavior. In this exercise we encourage the dogs to come to our side (and remain there) while the scary thing goes by. It takes a few days to encourage them to your side but many dogs love this go-to behavior more than many others.



**The time to pick a go-to behavior is before you need it;
be sure to practice it before hand as well!**

See them 24/7

It has been proven that a dog gazing at us releases Oxytocin (considered the attachment hormone, among other things) and that us gazing back does the same for them. This gaze creates a physiological bond between us; changing the very hormones in our bodies and in theirs. But of course, it's more than just 'seeing' them.

- ☛ Healthy relationships need five positive interactions for every one negative interaction, every day. I believe we need something similar between us and our pups. If you're always correcting your dog making them feel like they can't do anything right, they're not going to be in a place of learning. Remember being a kid? Remember how it felt when you couldn't do anything right? How eager were you to learn something from the person that made you feel that way?
- ☛ It's our jobs to show our dogs the world; what's okay and what's scary, when they're allowed to react and when they're not. I think we've focused so much on training that we've missed the bigger and more important concept - which is **to expose and teach them about the world, provide them with coping mechanisms in case things go sideways and you're not there, and give them enough security/routines that they can be themselves.**

☛ Every dog is an individual; treating them as such causes you to relate to them in ways that show them you have their backs (so to speak). Timid dogs need their confidence built while being challenged to grow and expand. While strong, cocky dogs need a solid routine and often a lot of reminders to 'take it down a notch.' If our goal is to build a solid animal who is there for us as we are for them, then it's important that we see them and take their needs into account.

☛ Dogs give us clues constantly as to how happy or unhappy they are. If we ignore these cues or don't see them, we're not being a good best friend.

Dogs see us constantly, if we can be a bit more aware of them, it can go a long way toward improving our relationship



Stop trying to Control them you're in a relationship

Dogs are part of the family, they're with us when we are truly ourselves; when we have bedhead, when we're sick, when we're upset. Sometimes they lean on us, sometimes we lean on them. But they're there with us, through it all. So how do you act with them? Personally, I treat puppies like kids; needing guidance, education, manners etc. I treat adult, trained dogs like friends and companions and respect them similarly.

- 🐾 Whether you have a puppy or a newly adopted dog that has gone through a trauma, your dog needs a routine and structure. It's up to us to 'hold the space' for the dog, to allow them to watch and learn how the household works, and be patient while they fit themselves into it.
- 🐾 Once you have a routine and basic structure, the dogs will relax and begin showing their true colors. In some cases, they may act out. When this happens it's important to revisit the basics; asking your pup to sit and stay when their food bowl is set down, at the door, etc
- 🐾 A relationship is built on trust, and trust between us and our dogs is built over time, with consistency and by valuing the dogs' emotions. Oh, and on predictability....the more predictable we are the more comfortable our puppies are. We lose points with our dogs if we wake them up out of a sound sleep or pick them up off the ground for no reason.
- 🐾 A relationship is about sharing time together. So instead of correcting your dog, remind them to do the right thing (ideally, before they do it wrong!) For example, if you call your dog to you and they flick an ear, call them again or give them a reminder, don't wait for them to make the wrong choice, help them make the right one. If your dog is reacting due to fear, acknowledge what they're worried about and show them it's okay, then go on with your business.
- 🐾 So many people get a puppy when their other dog is older and well trained. It's crucial at this time to use the older dog to train the younger dog; but do it actively. The older dog and family together, train the puppy. Instead of grouping the dogs together as one.



Remind, Don't Correct

Goal is to Succeed



What is success for you? For me, success with my pups means to have a strong, solid relationship where we can count on each other. I rely on my dogs a lot, so I expect them to be responsive, well-mannered and polite.

If you don't know what you're shooting for, it's pretty tough to hit it. So, set yourselves up for success by taking the time to determine now what you want from your dog. Is it a protector, a best friend, a hiking partner, a therapy device, or arm candy? No judgement here, but take the time to decide, then plan your training accordingly.

🐾 If you need to change some of your dog's bad habits don't try to fix everything at once. Pick one thing to change and work on that; when you're seeing some success, begin another.

🐾 And don't be stingy with treats, praise and environmental rewards. I typically use treats for teaching a behavior and then quickly use play and praise as main rewards with an occasional treat mixed in. We don't want our dogs working for

treats - there's nothing worse than that dog that stares at your pocket during the entire walk! Instead of using less treats with these pups, try using less delicious ones. Kibble can work great for those dogs who get overly focused on the food.

- 🐾 When I envision a successful Come for a dog, the dog is running toward me, happily replying to my request...not slinking slowly toward me with their ears pulled back and their tail tucked. Dogs are all about energy, our vibe so to speak. How we treat them is communicated through their body language, strive for happy and play instead of control and power.
- 🐾 If your dog is struggling, the task has gotten too hard, make it easier
- 🐾 If you've lost your patience, end the session and pick it up another day
- 🐾 If your dog won't take a treat they typically like, they're stressed/upset or uncomfortable
- 🐾 Work the pause – remind dogs to sit and stay at doors by opening the door an inch and pausing, this gives them time to reset if their excitement got the better of them. The same can be done at the food bowl; ask for a sit/stay, lower the bowl and pause

To teach a behavior, break it down into unique steps, then train and ground each individually

Summary

As you continue to train and work with your dog, these five elements

- 🐾 Speak in their Language
- 🐾 Go-to Behavior
- 🐾 See them 24/7
- 🐾 Stop trying to Control them
- 🐾 Goal is to Succeed

What Type of Dog do you have?



Shut Down, Overly fearful	Shy, Nervous, Fearful, Timid	Practically Perfect	High Volume, Excitable	Highly Reactive, Out-of-Control
Need to build trust with these dogs	Build distance slowly Use woman's card Lots of patience Celebrate small wins	Follow typical training guidelines Vary treats Most Practically	Calm Confidence with these guys Sit can help calm them Use man card	Will need to repeat yourself with these guys Use man card

can help the process proceed quicker and smoother than otherwise. Remember to incorporate *What Type of Dog* information to address your specific pup.

And please, give yourself a break. I find that people are very hard on themselves when they're training their dogs, chastising themselves for repeating cues, overreacting or having bad timing.

Dog training is a skill that takes practice, just because you were great at it when you were young doesn't mean it'll come naturally to you now. Dogs are challenging, some more than others, give yourself as much latitude and patience as you do your pup and you'll find training times to be enjoying and fun!

