

## Interrupt and Redirect

If you've ever worked with me you've heard me use the phrase Interrupt and Redirect.

It's the fundamental formula for changing behaviors you don't want to continue.

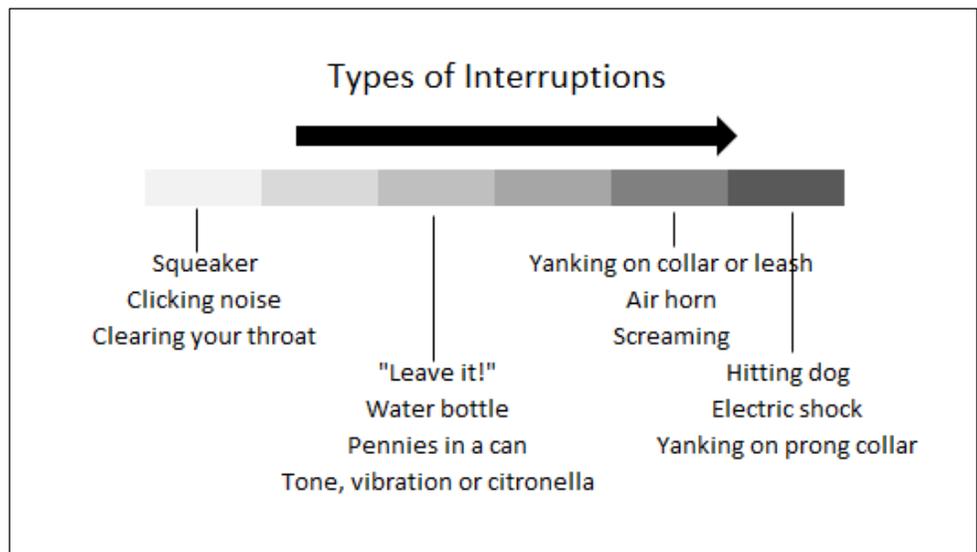
But how you implement that formula will determine whether or not you have success.

You see, the Interruption needed is dependent on the dog(s) involved, the escalation of the situation, and potentially you....do you have any sway with these dogs and can you manage the situation that ensues.

Simple Interruption may be the squeaker from a dog's toy or the sound of a clicker while a more intense Interruption is a squirt from a water bottle or the stimulation from an electronic collar (or fence).

Patricia McConnell is a world renown dog trainer and behaviorist who tells the story of how two border collies got into a fight. She pulled them apart by the base of their tails and held them up in the air, but still they continued trying to scrap. Just then the working dog of the house, a female Great Pyrenees came bounding through and let out a loud bark and everything stopped.

The level of Interruption she needed sounded similar to what's needed when a couple of siblings are going at it and mom comes in and breaks up the fight but the kids are still throwing jabs across the room – until dad comes in or hollers for them to stop. The level of the situation has a lot to do with the level of the Interruption



### Interruption Scale

*The key is to use the least Interruption possible for the given situation.*

For example, if your dog is barking but stops if you make a clicking sound then there's no need to escalate your response to a water bottle.

But if your dog is a dog who gets so caught up barking that he can barely hear anything else, you'll need something stronger like the feeling of a vibration or the spray of water or citronella. The key is to use the

Interruption appropriate for your dog but every couple of days or so test a softer Interruption and see if it works. And when you're testing, mark and treat for even the slightest correct response and you'll see your pup quickly figuring it out and being able to use less and less of an Interruption.

It's important to remember that the Interruption is short lived, sometimes only lasting a second or so. At that point it's up to you to provide the Redirection, the second part of the problem solving formula.

## Redirecting your Dog

Redirecting refers to asking your dog for a behavior other than the one he or she is currently giving. So a dog who is barking may be Redirected to go pick up a ball; while a dog who often jumps is Redirected to greet from the sitting position. The Redirect is as important as the Interruption but will be dependent upon your dog and environment.

As dog trainers we're always working in an environment which sets the dog up to succeed, therefore it's important to ask for behaviors that the dog is able to give. For example, if I'm working with a dog on a trail who is dog reactive, I would never Redirect that dog into a down position, since laying down is a submissive position for a dog and not something many dogs can comfortably do when other dogs are passing by. But I would ask this same dog-reactive dog for a sit and encourage him/her to hold that sit while the other dog walks by.

The length of the Redirection can determine your success. If a dog is walking past your home, it will be important to give your dog something to do that either lasts as long as the dog passing or is more fun than reacting to the dog.

### **Incompatible Behaviors**

Asking your dog for a behavior which is incompatible to the behavior they are giving will help you resolve unwanted behaviors quickly. For example, if a dog is very pawey and constantly putting his or her paws up when it's not asked for or wanted, Interrupt the behavior then ask them to do something that keeps their paws on the floor, like going in circles or practicing push up's.

Incompatible behaviors can include distraction exercises (Touch, Watch, Find it, Circle, Downward Dog, etc) basic behaviors or more advanced behaviors. But again they should be dependent on the dog and the environment. Dogs that are doing freshmen level distraction behaviors at home may really struggle with these same behaviors when out in the environment; while dogs who are acting more like Juniors and Seniors at home will do better in the environment.

Remember anytime you're practicing in a new environment to go back to Freshmen level – high, frequent rewards to set the tone. And remember the formula; **Interrupt and Redirect**.