

Dog Training — the Basic Steps!

Part V

Since my first article *Food for thought* and subsequent articles on dog training have been kindly published in VicDog, I have received overwhelming support from readers in the canine fraternity. They have written letters, sent emails, telephoned and visited me. All have shown great enthusiasm by saying that they can't wait for the next installment! So on behalf of all, grateful thanks are extended to VicDog for publishing my articles. Rest assured that I shall continue to convey much needed information in order to help and guide those who wish to do the best for their dogs. At the same time I sincerely hope I can contribute to bring people back on track to understand the dogs' mind and adopt simple and reliable training methods.

Two months ago, I wrote about training a dog in the recall exercise whilst allowing it to walk freely on full length of leash up along a straight footpath. Hopefully, those who have tried this daily will have achieved success and, provided all the points mentioned in the article have been carried out, handlers have found the exercise quite easy and rewarding.

Recall on the leash - next stage

When you are confident that your dog will recall on the leash as you walk backwards and you don't have to make any corrections, you should then go on to the next stage by dropping the leash, but not in the street! Try this in a safe, enclosed area like your backyard. Carry out one recall on the leash as you have been doing over the past week or so, and then do the next recall by discreetly dropping the leash as you free walk your dog. Walk backwards for a few steps while your dog continues to walk forwards. Recall your dog in a positive tone, "Millie, come!" Give praise immediately when your dog's head turns towards you. Then, as you continue to walk backwards in a straight line and continue to give praise, go through the motions very precisely with one hand after the other as if you were gathering in an imaginary leash. The dog, recognizing your hand movements and believing it is still on the leash, should come to you. As it comes close to you, take hold of the clip part of the leash only and, whilst walking backwards, place your other hand over the dog's behind, command "Sit", and guide its hindquarters down and towards you. Keep its attention with prolonged, quiet vocal and gentle physical praise, and then dismiss your dog. If your dog fails to come after two or three calls, walk up to it, pick up the handle of the leash, say, "Millie, come" and carry out the recall as before. This procedure will uphold your command. You should now see why the leash is still attached to the dog in this interim stage of the recall where you have dropped it out of your hand. You never know when you might need to pick it up again.

There will always be the possibility that your dog may suddenly be scent distracted and stop to have a good sniff on the ground whilst doing the recall. This is where you have to be very quick with a corrective command like, "Leave it", followed by, "Come", followed by, "Good dog — very good!" Quite simply, you have to vocally correct your dog, and

then tell it what it must do, and immediately praise it for responding well. It is vitally important that you deliver the words in the correct tone of voice and that you get your timing right.

Many handlers find this difficult to perform. Whenever I am instructing a client on an individual basis or a class of about ten people, I run through the procedure taking the part of the dog myself. I have always found this the most effective way of making everyone very conscious of using the right commands and encouragement on the spur of the moment. So, as instructed, when I walk several yards away, the handler calls me and, acting like a most responsive dog, I turn around. If the handler does not give immediate praise, I stand still! There is silence! So I ask, "Why have I stopped?" The handler thinks for a moment, and then realizes it is because no praise was given. We do it again and the handler gets it right. But then on moving towards the handler at a brisk pace, I suddenly divert towards some distraction. It may be several seconds before the handler gives the corrective command, "Leave it!" There is silence again! I say, "Yes, you gave the vocal correction, but what do you want me to do?" After a few more seconds, the handler works it out: "Oh, yes of course! Come!" I immediately respond, but if I hear no praise I stop in my tracks! And so the performance goes on until the handler realizes that, while I promise to respond, I may, like any dog, suddenly and without any warning run off to some interesting distraction. The handler also realizes that he or she must be very alert to the unexpected and therefore develop excellent vocal control to achieve success. The dogs also get to know that their handlers are going to be extremely quick in their control, whereas in the past, they were slow, perhaps they didn't give vocal corrections at the right time and possibly forgot to praise when their dogs did respond. I hope that this example will be of great help not only to handlers when they are training their dogs, but also to instructors when conducting their classes. Several years ago I showed this method in a special course I held in South Australia. Everyone learned a lot from it and at the same time club members were in fits of laughter when they saw me act like a mischievous dog playing up! The handler put on a marvelous performance just as I wanted, and at the end of it I expressed my utmost praise to her for a job well done. Several weeks later I received several photos of that episode, unknowingly to me, taken by one of the club members. They were all very amusing, taken just as the whole demonstration happened.

Drop or down

The main reason for teaching this exercise is that when a dog is required to stay for a long period of time, it would be unkind to expect it to remain in the sit position. The longest sit stays in obedience trials are 3 minutes. 5 and 10 minute stays are always in the down position. I like to teach this exercise in about the fifth or sixth lesson. By this time handlers have had an adequate amount of tuition in learning how to train and control their dogs in the basic exercises and the dogs are showing great respect for and confidence in their handlers.

A few different methods can be used. Firstly, have your dog in the heel and sit position. Hold the clip part of the leash in your left hand and place your left hand on the dog's shoulder blades. Cast the rest of the leash behind you. Place your right hand fingertips on the ground directly beneath the dog's nose. Say, "Drop!" or "Down!" as you tap the

ground. If your dog is curious when it hears the taps, it is likely to go straight down to investigate. Your left hand can assist as you guide it down straight. Retain your left hand on its shoulders as you slowly stroke the dog under its lower jaw. If this method doesn't work, don't worry! Try this — with your dog in the heel/sit position and left hand on its shoulders (as in previous method), turn your feet at 90 degrees to face the dog's right side, kneel down on your right knee, slide your right forearm behind its right foreleg knee joint and take hold of its left knee joint, with your thumb on the front. Give the command to drop or down and lift both paws up towards the dog's chin. With the little pressure you have in your left hand on the dog's shoulders, it should go down. Praise your dog in the same way as stated in the previous method. Stroking the dog under its lower jaw, will give it an incentive to lie down and remain in that position. After about 10 to 15 seconds, dismiss your dog. Do two more drops at intervals in different places. Select soft grass in the shade if you are training outside, or a comfortable carpet when indoors. Don't use a shiny floor because the dog will slide and start to panic. You should always aim to make it a pleasure for the dog to drop. It should not be used in the form of a submission as some dog training programs advocate.

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