

## Dog Training — the Basic Steps!

### Part VI

Last month I wrote about the second stage of the recall exercise, where, in a safe place, the leash was dropped, the handler walked backwards and called the dog. Hopefully, those who have practiced this have met with pleasing results.

#### The Recall continued

Now let us progress to the next stage by introducing another dog on to the scene to provide a distraction! "Oh, dear!" I can hear people say, "I know my dog will never come in that situation!" Well, you never know what you can do until you try. You must think positively. However, when you enter into a further stage like this, always start off by going back one stage in your training; that means carrying out the recall exercise holding the leash. It may well happen that your dog will not respond to your call, "Millie, come," because it wants to get to a dog some distance away, which its handler has on a leash. So, if your dog does not respond to your call within one second, uphold your command with a horizontal jerk on the leash towards you as you walk backwards and be sure to praise your dog the moment it responds. Do another recall on the leash and if your dog responds immediately without a jerk on the leash, you will know that your dog is really respecting you and your command. Then do the next recall dropping the leash and you should achieve an excellent result. Well done!

But that's not the end of it! There is still more work to be done, very important work as you will see. Having got your dog to sit in front of you, carry out your vocal and physical praise. Now your dog will know that that dog, from which you have called your dog away, is still there. Don't ever assume your dog has forgotten all about it. It hasn't! In all probability your dog will seize the opportunity in turning its head round to look at that dog. You must anticipate this happening. Such distraction must be corrected immediately. If you continued to praise while its head had turned round, even though the rest of its body hadn't moved, then you would be praising your dog for looking at the other dog. Your dog will interpret that, as doing the right thing. In this case, I'm sure you can understand quite simply how the dog's mind works. A few days later, you may call your dog in an off leash park. Let's imagine your dog responds immediately and gets about half way towards you. Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, another dog appears on the scene. Seeing it, your dog thinks, "Now, you have praised me in the past when I turned to look at another dog. So today I will do more than that — I'll run off to play with it!" And that is precisely what happens.

I would like to reiterate what I said in Part III (VicDog January 2007). To correct your dog for looking around, when it is sitting in front of you, use the corrective vocal command, "Leave it" and immediately correct with a quick shake using both hands on

each side of its neck. Praise immediately your dog looks straight at you. It doesn't have to look up to your eyes, although some do. As long as it looks to the front of your body is all that matters. So, you have to be quick to correct and quick to praise. When you have dismissed your dog, it should then be at liberty to look at anything as it relaxes.

When I am training clients daily on an individual basis, my own dog assists me. I put her into a drop stay position on the far side of the lawn in my back yard. She acts as the distraction while I can move around instructing the client what to do. She has done it thousands of times and knows just what I require. My daughters' dogs do the same job whenever they come to stay, so they earn their keep too! It is always very amusing when I instruct clients to drop the leash. They hang on to it and are terrified that their dogs will not come when called. After about my third instruction, which is said in a firmer tone, "Drop your leash!" they do this somewhat nervously, call their dogs, and are absolutely amazed with the results. When I instruct in class situation, which may consist of about ten handlers, I get each one in turn to walk towards the rest of the class. If there is any uncertainty as to whether any dog might not respond, a long light cord is attached which I can use if necessary to assist the handler.

### Drop stay

Last month I wrote about teaching a dog to drop, also known as the down. Having taught this, we can now take it further by training the dog to stay in that position for us to leave it for a short time. Really, this exercise is quite easy, especially if a dog already knows what the Sit Stay is all about.

So, bring your dog to heel and get it to drop and praise it. When preparing for the Stay, hold the handle of the leash in your left hand, command "Stay" and step slowly around to face your dog. It is very important that the leash must be kept quite slack. Ensure that the last twelve inches of leash at the clip end do not move. That one foot of leash should remain on the ground beneath your dog's chin. If your leash becomes even a little tight, your dog is likely to get up, thinking you want it to come to you. So you see how careful you have to be. If your dog seems quite stable, try side stepping to the right, then to the left and right again to the centre to face the dog. Moving slowly around in a frontal semi-circle helps to keep the dog's attention on you. Don't use any praise while you are out in front otherwise your dog is likely to come to you. Keep your own body upright; don't stoop which your dog may recognize as a body signal for it to come to you.

When you return to your dog the same way you left it, (don't attempt to go round the back of it at this early stage), stand beside it for a few more seconds before you praise it, otherwise it is likely to anticipate the praise given immediately you return and, in consequence, get up. As a precaution, lightly place your left hand on the dog's shoulders and slowly stroke with your right hand under the chin towards its chest, as you say quietly and slowly, "Good dog!" Stroking the dog this way will act as an incentive for it to keep down. If it does attempt to get up, say "Drop" immediately and push it down with your left hand, and praise again. To finish this exercise, you could either dismiss the dog, or heel it in any direction with the words, "Millie, heel!"

The next stage is to do this exercise by dropping the leash. This will enable you to move further away from your dog. As you side step around in a larger frontal semi-circle, with the front of your body facing your dog, pretend that you still have the handle of the leash in your left hand by holding it out in front of you, with your thumbnail in line with your dog's eyes and your own eyes. These little points help you to keep the dog's attention, so that you can get the best results.

If your dog breaks from a Stay, don't worry, just take it back to the same spot, face the original direction and start again. One can always expect any dog to move in the early days of teaching it to Stay. Lay a good foundation. Dogs don't always move because they are disobedient. Some move because they become very anxious. Therefore, keep the times and distances short until the dog builds up confidence in you and itself. I shall talk more about the recall and the drop next month. Enjoy training your dog. Happy days!

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