

Dog Training — the Basic Steps!

Part VII

In the past few articles, readers would have noticed that I have placed a great emphasis on the recall exercise. Although it is not the first exercise taught to the dog, the recall is the most important exercise in all forms of dog training. If a dog will not come when called, one cannot advance much further. I do not just look at this in regard to training a dog for the obedience trial ring. I look at it from the point of view that all dog owners, who want their dogs to have a good, daily run in a park, should be able to get them to come when called.

Recall in an off-leash park

When you are confident about doing a recall by dropping the leash in an enclosed area, try it in an off-leash park, especially when you see a dog owner with his or her dog on a leash enter and walk around the park. As you walk towards them, always try the first recall on the leash. By the time you have called your dog, got it to sit, praised and dismissed it, the dog owner with dog on its leash will have walked around a certain distance. If the first recall is good, once again, free-walk your dog towards them and this time drop your leash and recall your dog. You could do these recalls a few times using the same dog as a moving distraction. Always select an owner who has their dog on a leash. Don't attempt to do it with a dog off its leash. It may not be a trained and may want to play and molest your dog. That would make it very difficult for you and your dog. Remember, one stage at a time! Eventually, you should be able to recall your dog when it is either running after a dog or is playing with it. "That'll be the day!" I can hear you say. That day might not be so far away as you might think at present. Let's see!

Walking your dog in a park is a great place to exercise and provides opportunities for you to meet and chat with other dog owners, as your dog meets theirs. After a few minutes, just say to an owner, "If you don't mind, I'd like to practice recalling my dog while it is actually socializing with yours!" And so you call, "Millie, come!" Hopefully, she will obey immediately, but if she does not respond within one second, give a horizontal jerk on the leash as you walk backwards and praise. Now it may well happen that the other dog will follow and will want to sniff at yours while you are praising it in the sit position. Always welcome these times and tell dog owners that you don't mind their dogs sniffing yours. Your dog must withstand that until you've given the dismissal.

When your dog will come on command, without you having to give even a light jerk on the leash, try the exercise off the leash. Quite often, when I have called my own dog in an off-leash park, an untrained dog has come right up to her, sometimes wondering why she will not reciprocate its attention! Soon, a very apologetic owner runs up to me and says, "I'm terribly sorry that my dog is interfering with your dog, which I can see you're training. I'm afraid my dog isn't at all well trained!" I always assure the owner that I don't mind at all, and explain why. This immediately makes the owner feel more at ease, and even more so when I dismiss my own dog and allow her to play with theirs. I have

always found dog owners most obliging in these situations. They, and possible others watching, soon understand the importance of having a dog under control and that it will happily come when called, regardless of the surrounding distractions. Then, on being dismissed, will be equally happy to play with the other dog. So, we should take every opportunity in setting a good example in the community, to promote responsible dog ownership. People notice these things far more than we can sometimes imagine.

As you progress with the recall, try running your dog with another across a park and call it. Regardless of how far away they are, praise your dog immediately it turns to come to you, and keep your praise flowing until your dog sits in front of you. After you have praised and dismissed your dog, let it run with that other dog again. Repeat the exercise a few times during the course of your walk. In my opinion, that is the correct way of doing it.

Unfortunately, many handlers do this only once on a walk. Being very pleased with a good result, they often breathe a sigh of relief that the recall was successful. Then, not wishing to test providence too far, the dog is put on the leash and taken home. It is not long before the dog gets wise to this sequence of events and then the handler wonders why his or her dog refuses to come when called! Why?

First of all, let's have a look at what is going on in the dog's mind. Dogs are very clever at working out what will be the next thing to happen. This is not only seen in the training of the dog, but in our daily lives as well. We tend to be creatures of habit and our dogs are quick to notice our routine. They watch and listen to what we do far more than we would realize at times. They also develop an incredible sense of time. In this case, where the dog is having much fun with its canine friends, it is called, put on the leash and taken home. Its enjoyable playtime has come to an abrupt end. What a shame! The recall spells all this out quite simply to the dog that that is the end of playtime short as it might be. Therefore, it should be of no surprise that the wise dog refuses to obey the command to come.

The minds of those dogs which are trained correctly think in a different way. Their walks include recalls and playtimes. Therefore, when they obey the word to 'come', they don't associate it with having their playtime curtailed and being taken home. Now I would like to invite you to accompany me, in your imagination, into the dog's mind for a few moments: the dog would possibly think, 'I'm taken out daily to a variety of places by my handler, who tells me to have a play, calls me, praises me and dismisses me to have another great romp around. This happens quite a few times. It's a great life! What more could a dog want?' Studying the dog's mind is a most important aspect in dog training. We have to really work out how the dog's mind ticks, and when we do and truly understand it, it makes training so much easier for owner and dog.

[Finish to the recall](#)

I strongly advise people not to include the finish, whereby the dog is commanded to come around to heel to sit, until this straight line recall is well established in the dog's mind. If the finish is introduced too early, then it is highly likely that the dog will anticipate this

extra exercise and so avoid, skip or refuse (whatever you like to call it), the sit in front of you. As mentioned before, dogs are very smart in getting to know what follows next! We must keep them guessing and prevent them anticipating.

There are two ways you can conclude the recall in the early days: you can either dismiss the dog as I have spoken about before, or you could stand beside your dog and command it to heel forwards for a few yards, sit it, praise and dismiss it. By doing it that way, the dog's line of recall has been continued in heelwork along the same straight line.

I encourage handlers to use both methods— keep your dogs guessing as to what you have in mind next. I shall, of course, explain how to do the two finishes to the recall in a future article. In the meantime, if any readers would like me to write about any particular items in dog training or canine behaviour, I would welcome their interest and possibly include them in future articles. Have fun and enjoy your dogs!

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