

## Dog Training – The Basic Steps

### Part XII

Whenever I give a public lecture on dog training, I always allocate plenty of time for the audience to ask questions. I believe this is a good way to find out what people really want to know. Most of the questions relate to difficulties and problems dog owners have with their dogs. Then they wait eagerly for advice and solutions on how to iron out the faults and problems. Correcting a problem is one thing; it is far more important to take all necessary steps to prevent the problem starting in the first place.

Sooner or later someone will ask how one should play with a dog and what sorts of games can be introduced. To make things very simple, I tell the audience, just as I would anyone who brings their dog to me for private training, that there are three games one should never play with a dog, and give sound reasons why!

1. Never have a wild romp around the floor by having a wrestling match with the puppy or dog. True, the animal will like it and consider it to be great fun, BUT this can incite the youngster to mouth you, which can often lead to biting harder later on, jumping up at people and generally making a nuisance of itself.
2. Never have a game of tug-o-war. True, the dog will enjoy it, BUT this can incite the dog to pull the object, whatever it might be, away from you and run off with it. The dog has then become the boss and won't let you have the object.
3. Never play chasey around a table in the house or a tree in the back yard. Once again, your dog will thoroughly enjoy the game and in doing so he would be having his own way as much as to say, 'You can't catch me!' This sort of game obviously leads to the dog not respecting you whenever you recall it.

On rather a funny note, I must say that I am always amused to watch the body language of many in the audience when I explain all the points. It is easy to detect those who have the problems and those who are guilty of playing such games with their dogs. With my dog trainer's sense of humour, I might say, "You have that problem, sir? And you too, madam! And the two young couples over here and over there!" They all give honest nods and I can tell how puzzled they are in wondering how on earth I know! Naturally, I know that they have meant well when they have played those inappropriate games, but most, if not all, are quick to recognise where and when they have gone wrong in the past. Yes, it's unfortunate, but all is not lost!

Now for the good news! There are two games that you can play with your dog which will, if anything, enhance the dog's training. One is to retrieve, which I wrote about last month and the other is to play *Hide and Seek*. Two members of a family can set this up. While one holds the dog by the collar, the other person walks away to hide behind something like a thick tree trunk or garden shed. Watching intently the dog has a reasonable idea where that person is hiding. Then the person holding the dog, gestures with the right hand low to the ground in the direction to where the hidden person is, and enthusiastically says, "Find!" As soon as the dog tries to surge forward it is released. For the first few yards the dog is likely to run straight, and then slow up as it puts its nose to the ground to track exactly where the hidden person has trod. As soon as the dog has made his find, both members of the family should praise it sincerely. Now please everyone, do not reward the dog with a food treat of any kind! Handlers should reward their dogs with sincere genuine praise. That is the key to success.

### Seek forward

The next game you can play is to leave your dog in the sit stay position and walk down wind with a small article, like a rolled up sock, in your hand of which the dog is fully aware. Place it carefully behind something while you have your dog's full attention. Return to your dog, place your right hand lightly over his nose for one second for him to quickly take in your natural scent, then gesture to him to follow your track with an enthusiastic, "Find!" The moment your dog finds the hidden article, praise him and recall him to you. The actual track your dog has followed has been impregnated twice: once on your outward walk to hide the article and again on your return.

### Seek back

When your dog understands what is required in the Seek forward, go to a fresh piece of grass land. With your dog at heel walk into the wind if there is any. As you walk discretely drop an article. Continue walking for about another thirty yards, right-about turn and halt. Give your dog your scent, say, "Find!" and gesture in the usual way for him to track along the ground down wind. As soon as your dog finds the article praise and recall him as you did in the seek forward exercise.

### Scent discrimination

When your dog knows how to do a seek forward and a seek back, you can take a further step and teach it very simple scent discrimination. Ask a few people to place a few articles bearing their individual scents on the ground in a straight line about two feet apart. Then have your article placed at the far end down wind. The articles might include a wallet, a purse, bunch of keys, a shoe, piece of wood, etc. With your dog on the leash, give your hand scent for one second, say, "Find" and walk along beside the row of articles so that your dog walks slowly over and sniffs each one. The moment he reaches and sniffs your article give praise and recall by walking backwards well past the articles, sit, praise, take the article, finish, praise and finally dismiss. Very soon you will be able to do this exercise without the leash. As your dog walks forward and sniffs each article, he is discriminating amongst all the different scents present. Now for a word of advice about articles: It is most unwise for you to keep using the same article for your dog to find. If you do your dog will also be seeking an article bearing his own scent from his own saliva. Use an article which only bears your scent. Once used and found, destroy it! Use something different every time.

Last month I mentioned a few obedience exercises in the UK, NZ and South Africa. In Test A the dog has to find its handlers article amongst nine other articles bearing different human scents. In Test B the dog has find the article, provided by the judge some minutes before, bearing the handler's scent. All the articles are the same shape and texture, e.g. two inch square pieces of carpet. In Test C the dog is given the scent of the judge from a piece of cloth the handler holds in front of the dog's nose. Then the dog has to go out to seek the piece of cloth bearing the judge's scent. Amongst the other nine pieces of cloth are two decoys. This really tests the dog's scenting ability. Personally, I would very much like to see this system introduced to Australia. I feel it would be fairer and more challenging for the dogs. Perhaps that will be more food for thought when obedience trial exercises are discussed in future reviews. Anyway, I hope readers will try these things. Scent work is a fascinating subject and it all comes under basic obedience. What we all need to acknowledge is that the dog knows more about scent work than we will ever know. We certainly know more now than we did half a century ago. Great credit must go to the dedicated men and women in Dog Training Centres of the Police, Customs and other Law Enforcement Agencies for their great studies into how scent is conveyed. But fundamentally, it has been the dog that has shown us. So enjoy your dog training and always reward with sincere praise, not food treats! More next month! Cheers!

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