

Instilling Doggone Confidence in Yourself and Your Dog

Or

“How to Reduce Mutual Frustration”

By

Warren G. Patitz/Doggone Connection

Copyright 11/02

Revised 06/29/03

Many dog behavior problems stem from our successful ability to send *confusing* messages to our dogs. Consequently they respond with behaviors that reflect that confusion. Dogs, like us, learn from their environment and we are responsible for controlling the environment that influences their learning. Our *own* behavior is part of the environment they experience, so consciously being aware of how we interface with our dog is a key element in our/their training and learning. It's kind of like interacting with a mirror.

The biggest mistake people make when bringing a dog into our home is giving it *too much freedom!* The dog experiences almost unlimited boundaries. These boundaries include both physical *and* behavioral boundaries. Often this comes from the thinking, “Oh, this poor dog has had such a tough time, just let him jump on the furniture and sleep on my bed. When too much or unlimited freedom is experienced, the dog will know no limits! Knowing such the dog develops what is called, “self-acquired random behaviors”. The most common of these behaviors are the distasteful and obnoxious behaviors that makes life miserable for both owner and their dog and usually results in the dog being punished, relinquished to the basement, garage or backyard, surrendered to the shelter, or killed. If these boundaries are clearly established for dog as a puppy, these unpleasant behaviors will be minimized. When these boundaries are patiently and consistently established and communicated to an older dog that has already developed distasteful behaviors, then these unpleasant behaviors can be modified.

If you want to be a good leader for a dog and instill confidence in both of you, then *you* need to know that *you* are in charge of the things (resources) that the dog wants and values and not the dog! *You* let the dog know that these things *they* want can be acquired and are provided (by you) when the dog's behavior is accommodating.. Turning this around we might say that *the dog* determines when they are rewarded! The timely provision of “rewards” or “reinforcements” to the dog encourages them to repeat that desirable behavior or response! The secret is to identify the behaviors you want, and reward that behavior. This occurs moment by moment. Over a period of time the behavior you have been rewarding will be the behavior you are seeing repeated and practiced by the dog.

People who are loud, abusive or bully do not gain a dog's trust and respect. People who are sincere, honest, respectful and reinforce or reward the dog for desirable behaviors become the “leader” in the eyes of the dog. You cannot fool a dog.

There are several simple “games” or exercises that you can rehearse as a part of your lifestyle that will help eliminate much pushy or undesirable behavior and at the same time communicate to the dog that you are their friend and worthy of their trust and respect. These games are not something that is practiced once or twice, they are practiced all the time and as the dog gets better at them the game becomes more refined.

The “Games”

Doorway:

Door only opens when dog does not barge or push to get through. Door closes if he does.
Not being pushy = access across the threshold

Taking Food from Your Hand/Soft Mouth (Bite Inhibition)

Holding treat between thumb and index and middle finger, offer to dog. If not taken gently, shout “Ow! And withdraw treat. Offer again. If gentler, dog may have treat. Repeat immediately when taken too harshly. This should be practiced the rest of the life with the dog. *Gentle mouth = access to treat*

Food Bowl:

As you lower the food bowl to the ground, as soon as your dog takes the first step to approach, raise the food bowl away, repeat. Continue this routine until you can lower the food bowl to the ground without the dog approaching. When you can put it on the ground without the dog moving forward, give the approval cue for the dog to approach and enjoy the food. *Not pushing = access to the food.*

Watch Me:

This is one of my most favorites and a powerful one, at that. Silently “hang out” with your dog. Without prompting, when he makes eye contact with you, say “good boy/girl” and reward with several treats in a row (to make this a “moment to remember”). Continue with this, each time waiting for a microsecond longer eye contact commitment.
Looking at you = great things can happen for me.

Relinquishment (Object Exchange):

For Safety, we want our dogs to relinquish from their possession anything that is valuable to them. Start this by offering them a low, next to nothing - level valued item, take it away and replace with a treat of a little higher value. Repeat and march up the value ladder, *slowly*. In this way, the dog comes to recognize, “Hey a zillion times when a hands comes to take away, something better is forthcoming!” (Tip: do not bribe or dangle the treat in front of the dog’s nose to preempt the exchange). *Relinquishing stuff = good things for me.*

Collar Grab:

Slowly reach and touch your dog's collar and say, "Gotch ya!" Reward with a "good boy" and a treat. Continue to repeat until you can grab the collar with a quick motion without the dog being startled. Practice this collar-grab when the dog comes to you. By conditioning your dog to tolerate this as a "non-startling experience" you can grab him in an emergency without a problem. *Hand coming fast at my collar = no problem.*

Stranger Greeting from a Distance - Stranger Greeting Up Close:

If your dog is nervous with people coming into their radar, be sure to negotiate the dog's distance so that his response is "sub-arousal" when practicing this. If the dog is already aroused, the window for learning a good association is closing. *Person appears = favorite food or toy and jolliness happens.*

4 On the Floor:

Be sure that when greeting people, if all four feet remain on the floor, reward is provided. If dog jumps up, everyone turns away. *Jumping up = access for interaction disappears. All four feet on the ground = access for interaction is available and experienced!*

Body Part Handling:

Get your dog accustomed to all body parts being handled, especially feet and toes. Start touching areas of which the dog is tolerant move slowly to more sensitive areas. Pair with a good food treat. *Tolerating this touching = good things for me.*

Leave It:

Whenever your dog wants something, be sure he does not have access to it, leash restraint, or treat in hand, as the dog turns away from the object of desire, say, "leave it" and reward with either a higher level reinforcement or allow/provide the object that was denied. *Leaving it = I get it or something just as good.*

Waiting:

As dog is controlling self at the door, say, "wait", if the dog has maintained their self control, allow to proceed. You can use this command for any self-control cue. *Wait = I'll get to proceed shortly.*

"The only time dogs are punished,
is in the company of humans"

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"A dog cannot be bad,
He can only be a dog."

