

PHILOSOPHY FOR GENERAL OBEDIENCE AND BEHAVIOR TRAINING

This article is intended to help you understand how to 'approach' training/teaching or modifying behaviors and general obedience with your Westies. It is important that you realize WHO your dog is and WHERE they came from. All dogs have many years of INSTINCTS and INNATE BEHAVIORS in them. The dogs lived amongst themselves in their PACKS...respecting other packs for thousands of years. Much like our species, they have brought forward self preservation and survival instincts...and, inborn/innate behaviors that are dictated by PACK behavior...dog/dog pack behavior.

WE are the ones that bring them into the human/dog pack scenario. It is important to recognize that dog/dog pack behaviors are different than acceptable human/dog pack requirements...rules. Unfortunately, we 'expect' the pups/dogs to just KNOW what we want and expect of them. We do not give the pups/dogs the latitude of learning that we do infants....and yet, it is precisely the same situation. The difference is, with an infant you will repeat, repeat, repeat...for example, 'da, da...or ma, ma'...so they will learn it. However, with a pup...after two weeks many people loose their patience with the housetraining!!!! Now, consider that a pup will potty when 'nature calls'. They have NO concept of one place is correct and another place is incorrect. They just do what their body & Mother Nature dictate!!!!

How do most of us housetrain a pup/dog? We expect that IF we take them outside a few times...they must understand. This is just not true....no more so than an infant being potty trained at 6 months of age. Further, when they do it RIGHT one time....we assume the pups/dogs must understand the concept. This is not the case. It may have been an accident that happened 'just right'. This is the perfect opportunity to reinforce and reward the CORRECT behavior...even IF it was an accident!!! Each of these opportunities brings them one step closer to understanding exactly what it was they did that made you so happy, what pleased you so much.

Or, they could just be getting a 'glimmer of the idea'...but, not full understanding. So, thinking we are home free with the housetraining...we get lax and do not let them out (give them the access to the potty area that we SELECT) as often as they need. The result is.... they have a potty accident. And, this is entirely OUR fault!!!!

This is the most crucial stage in the learning process....regardless of the behavior you are training (not just housetraining). The 'light is flickering!' You have to provide more 'juice' to keep that light on...to get it to turn on permanently. This is the time to INCREASE your efforts, really REINFORCE, and increase the REWARDS. At this stage, the pup/dog is truly at the 'threshold of understanding'. You can help them over the threshold OR you can close the door in their face. Know that this is YOUR decision...not theirs.

When you are training any behavior or skill, your efforts will be directly reflected in the results you get. This means IF you are only 80% in your efforts, your consistency, and your fairness.... your dogs' resultant behavior can only attain the same 80%!!!!!!!

When pups are DESTRUCTIVE, this is natural for them. The only way pups/dogs KNOW to interact in their environment is to use their MOUTHS....unless or until they are taught otherwise (our rules). In the initial stages of their lives, pups interact with their Mom and littermates with their MOUTH. If they lived in the wild, their mouths would be essential to their ability and need to communicate. This very likely could make the difference in their surviving or not....and, their instincts tell them this. So, you have to teach them that they can communicate and interact in their human/dog environment and survive without using their mouths or, at least, using their mouths appropriately' for the human dog pack environment. You have brought them into YOUR world with rules that 'go completely AGAINST their natural instincts'. Fortunately, the dogs DO ADAPT ...much more so than we of the human species would be capable of doing.

When you are teaching OR training your pup/dog ANY behavior, recognize that it is YOUR responsibility to get them to understand what you want. Realize that it is YOUR responsibility to help them grasp WHAT it is that you want! Recognize that it takes many, many repetitions with much CONSISTENCY to help them fully LEARN the behaviors you want from them. Their learning capacity is no greater than that of an infant or child. Grant them a modicum of the same patience and the same focus of teaching as you do an infant or young child. Even IF you get an older dog, they will NOT know the things you want, UNTIL you teach them.

Consider what would happen to you, IF you were corrected, punished, or banished for incorrect behaviors that you did NOT UNDERSTAND were wrong. If you only went with what you instinctually know...and, were corrected or punished for doing those very innate behaviors. Talk about confusion, stress, anxiety....a true NO WIN scenario! This is the situation that so many of us relegate our dogs to.

Moreover, I will tell you that our pups/dogs WANT to please us. If they do something that causes us great happiness, they will repeat that behavior and many variations of that behavior....because they want to please us!!!! They live and thrive on our praise and our happiness. However, just like people....they will develop reactions to negative reinforcement. Meaning, if they are unfairly dealt with, if they are punished without understanding, if they are excluded or banished from their pack, they will act out. Acting out can be reactive and stress motivated...OR it can manifest itself in offering different behaviors. When pups/dogs 'offer' behaviors they can only offer behaviors they KNOW. This can mean 'reverting' to their instinctual behaviors such as barking, digging, chewing, using their mouth (by our rules) to be destructive, or pottying excessively in the house (from stress). The worst case scenario is if this continues.... the confusion and the harsh or not understood corrections from their pack leaders... this can break them...their 'spirit'.

Understand that even persons who know how to train the dogs make these same mistakes. When you are training your dog for home or for competition, IF and WHEN the pups/dogs mess up....the root cause is YOU!!! Meaning either the behavior was NOT fully trained, you moved 'too fast', OR you did something that changed/skewed their perception or tentative understanding of what you want. Never 'assume' your dog understands, rather KNOW that YOU have not fully taught/trained them to what you are wanting...OR you changed the rules without telling/retraining the dog.

How can you correct or punish a pup/dog for trying. If you do, they will eventually stop trying...because it is the trying that gets them punished. This can put the dog in what I call STRESS AVOIDANCE mode. (Note: There are other circumstances and situations that can cause this stress avoidance behavior.) They will want to avoid anything that will cause them to be punished and since they obviously 'don't understand' what you want...they are safer not trying!!!! It is this 'stress avoidance' that many people misinterpret as stubborn and difficulty training Terriers & other breeds.

I do not believe in the jerk/pop correction method of training...even when it is disguised as 'motivational pops'. What is 'motivational' about having your neck jerked/popped?! What would your reaction be if you were trying to learn something & received a "motivational slap" every time you did not provide the correct response?? Even IF everything was happy & up after the "slap", you would only remember the slap or at the very least be negatively affected by it!! Why would we think the pups/dogs would react any differently? After all, we at least would semi-understand that this was 'intended' to help us learn, even though it very much upset us. How can the pups/dogs reason that these 'motivational' corrections are to 'help' them learn??

Dogs are so smart, really want to please, and have an uncanny sense of fairness. The biggest challenge to training some dogs, especially terriers, is that they get bored very easily. This means you have to be very creative and innovative in your training. If your dog's attention is NOT on you...then, YOU are not interesting enough. Especially for pups, the world is their oyster and you really have to be the most fun and interesting stimulus in their immediate environment.

All dogs love to play games and they always want to WIN! This means make your training FUN, INTERESTING, and UNPREDICTABLE. If you do this, they will stay intrigued, interested, and have fun. As a result, they will LOVE training. If you are always exciting, fun, and unpredictable, they will never know what to expect and they will relish the 'game' of learning! This will challenge them and keep their mind working overtime. The best part is, they will have to RIVET their attention on you. They want to win the game and they will have to keep their attention riveted on you...OR you could win the game!!!! Remember, when training your dog...if you are NOT having fun, they are NOT having fun!!!

Training with food/treats is great. You can guide/coax the pups/dogs to a particular behavior. Then, you reward that behavior. Initially, they don't have a clue what they did right (any more than they know what they did wrong). After many repetitions, they will connect a particular behavior with the reward and reinforcement. Then, they will connect that behavior with the commands...then, they will UNDERSTAND!!!! During the learning phase, if the dogs make an error or offer an incorrect behavior, IGNORE IT!!!! There is a valid, proven philosophy that any behavior NOT reinforced 'positively or negatively' will extinguish itself. Let the incorrect response extinguish itself naturally.

NOTE: The behaviors you DO want will also extinguish themselves...IF they are NOT reinforced, rewarded!!!!!!!!!!

When you are training your pup/dog, when you mess up....neglect to take them out in

time, leave them too long, get lax on your part, give them a wrong signal or command...WHO corrects YOU??? When 'you' make these errors...HOW MANY TIMES has your pup/dog paid the price??? They messed up and were corrected....but, whose fault was it!!! How many times have they forgiven you....no matter what the situation? We must give them the same latitude and the same respect. The next time you correct or punish your dog, make sure you are being fair. Make sure it was not your error....do they understand??? Imagine trying to please and do what is right...when you just can't/ don't get the right or complete information to understand. I can only imagine the confusion and the heartbreak....when we punish the pups/dogs for OUR inconsistencies, our missteps, or our incomplete raining. Unfortunately, our pups/dogs pay the price!!!!

So, the next time you have an issue with your pup/dog....look at the situation as a WHOLE. Were you fair, are being you fair, do they truly understand, have you fully and completely trained them, what is it that caused this situation...what was different or incomplete on YOUR PART. I believe the dogs have more complex thought processes than others give them credit for. However, there are many behaviors that they cannot mimic as an infant would to learn what we want them to learn. You do have to teach them/show them with all due patience and consistency WHAT you want. Anything less than this is cruel to the dogs who give their heart and soul to us.

I CANNOT bring myself to correct a dog TO LEARN a behavior or skill!!!! Let me be perfectly honest, if you correct or punish a dog to get a behavior, you are using 'aversion training'. No matter 'what' anyone calls it...this is 'aversion training'! The pups/dogs are starting with a clean slate. They have a gamut of natural, instinctual behaviors, reactions, and reflexes to draw from. Initially, they haven't a clue what you want....so, they are just reacting to the stimuli around them...being pups/dogs. When you do something, trying to elicit a particular behavior...at first, there is a language/communication barrier. If they get corrected/punished for all their natural/instinctual/reactive behaviors, these will be eliminated one by one through the corrections/punishment (aversion) ...UNTIL, they are left with only the behavior YOU desire. They do only reach the desired behavior through a process of elimination. This type of learning environment is exceedingly stressful and the learning curve/capacity is dramatically diminished. So, while your pup/dog is being trained with the aversive method...you are by the stressful nature of the method making it more difficult for the pup/dog to learn. In essence, you are prolonging the agony.

Please know that whatever behavior(s) you get (good or bad) from your dog ARE propagated by you and the environment and learning situations you present to your dog!!!! So, when there is a training problem or behavior issues...look to yourself first. This means, find a different and better way to COMMUNICATE to your dog what you are wanting. Try to see the situations through their eyes and their thought processes. Remember, they WANT/NEED TO PLEASE YOU!!!!!!

THE DOGS CANNOT LEARN THE BEHAVIORS WE 'WANT & DEMAND'.... UNLESS WE TEACH THEM! When they fall short of our expectations.....WE have fallen short of teaching them completely! The difference is...they forgive us completely....Unfortunately and unfairly, WE tend to 'keep a running tab' of their indiscretions!! Give your pup/dog a chance...search your soul....find the GAP in the training/learning process. Find the way/the key to effectively communicate with your

pup/dog. Find a way to allow them to succeed, to please you!!

Consider that every time the pups/dogs don't give you the behavior you desire, this provides you with a wonderful OPPORTUNITY to 'show them' again...to better explain, to reinforce, to reward the correct (desired) behavior. You can use these opportunities to reinforce the negative or you can use them to BUILD a positive, rewarding 'foundation'!!!!!! You can build your pup/dog's learning and behavior foundation on sinking sand....or make it strong, solid, and rewarding. Know that whatever approach you choose will serve you and them for years to come!!!! Make those the best, most wonderful years possible for you and for your 'best friend'!!!!

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