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Are you willing to Bet?

You have been training religiously at home and your dog is a 'pro' at his basic obedience commands...now comes the test, FIELD TRIP! It is important that your dog will behave under all conditions, in all settings and under stress but make sure you have matched the dog's training level with the stress/distraction level. With that said, it's important that your dog knows what you want from him before you add distractions. I always suggest begin with minor distractions and then work your way up. If your dog is distracted by other dogs, don't go to a dog park and expect him to be obedient, but you can train in front of your house while dogs are passing by. Or in front of your neighbor's home while their dog is at the front door or in the yard. As your dog demonstrates his ability to respond under new stimuli, push the envelope, by adding more and more distractions. Very soon you will have a plethora of places you can take your dog and train and you are sure he will respond.

When do you know your dog is ready for new distractions?

Answer: When you are willing to bet money on the fact that your dog knows the exercise and will respond. If you are not willing to lose the \$100, make sure you are in a position to assist the dog in accomplishing the task. For example: First you teach the down stay. 2nd: make sure your dog will do the down stay on command, with a hand signal or without, with a treat or without. 3rd: Add the stay command 4th: Add distractions slowly, i.e. toss a toy while your dog is in a down/stay, step over him, walk past him, pet him and walk away, practice in front of your house, at a quiet shopping center, at a busy shopping center, in the pet store, at your Veterinarians office. When you add distractions anticipate that your dog may need help; so stay close, remind your dog to stay, step on the leash or hold the leash in your hands. Rule of thumb: If your dog keeps breaking the down, stay in close until your dog maintains the down-stay. Then and only then add more distance between you and the dog; slowly backing away depending on success and think to yourself, am I willing to bet \$100 that my dog will stay?

Clear your mind and your schedule:

You are there to train not window shop or talk to passerbies. That means, 100% focus on your dog, especially if you have an issue that you are working on. You know how your Mom always said 'she had eyes in the back of her head'; you must be like Mom.

Jack of all trades master of none:

Whenever I train, I pick one exercise to work on and will continually work on that exercise before I move on to another exercise. Once my dog is fluent at down/stay, then I add distractions, first minor distractions then larger distractions. Once my dog is responding to Down/stay with major distractions, I add heel, or come. This gives the dog time to understand one exercise before you add another just to confuse him. This not only will help your dog master the command but you don't have to spend hours working a lot of commands. Keep your training sessions short (10-20 minutes) but successful.

Conclusion:

If your dog is right 80% of the time when training at home, he is never going to be 100% when you add distractions. Your practice needs to be perfect all of the time at home before you add distractions. How do you know you are ready for distractions? Practice is perfect at home.