

Dog Training Articles By Beth Bradley

Demanding More Obedience

For the last 9 months I have a very nice German shepherd in my Intermediate class. A nice young couple that thinks the world of her owns this dog. This dog does have a great temperament and is also class clown. Typically, the wife handles the dog in class and puts her through her paces. Everyone in class has passed her by and progressed at a nice pace. This dog is still having problems staying when commanded and breaks position in the heel much too often. She runs around class trying to antagonize everyone into a chase.

For 9 months I have instructed her owner to correct her for this behavior and with a chuckle in her throat, she does. I am not the type of person to harp on something. I feel that I will give instruction a few times and then if it's not too important to the owner, why should I care as long as the owner is happy with his or her dog. Part of the problem is the owner laughs as the dog acts up. The laugh, I am sure, is interpreted by the dog as reinforcement or better yet praise for being the class clown. When the owner does correct, the correction is halfhearted and without meaning, as the dog will continue the behavior almost immediately. This dog is the *ham* of the class and we all get a laugh out of it when she runs around antagonizing all those who are behaving.

This past week this German shepherd and her owner were in attendance again. There was something different in the manner in which the owner was training. She was giving meaningful corrections and using a harsh tone for misbehavior. No longer did she smile when the dog misbehaved and she never gave her a chance to run around class. There was such a marked improvement in her training that others in the class remarked how much better she behaved. I figured that my teaching finally struck a cord and the owner was just determined to catch up with her classmates. Well I was wrong.

At the end of class the couple approached me, and related how when they were out for a walk with both their dogs, their other dog snapped at a young child and marked her arm. Though there were no punctures, there still was a scratch made by the tooth. Neither dog was in 'true obedience' mode during a neighborhood walk, the dog that is in my class was jumping and barking in excitement to say hello to the child, and there by encouraged the other dog. One was happy and wanted to play and the other was overly excited and saw this child as some type of a threat; hence the reason for the bite.

The husband was giving all types of excuses and the wife simply said she will not excuse the behavior and she was going to make sure both of them were truly obedient at all times. Sounds good but a child should not have had to be bitten for this to happen.

Worse Case Scenario

Yes, I just gave you the worse case scenario of what could happen if you do not truly make your dog obedient. I always give the worse case scenario; fortunately, it doesn't always turn out like this. Really, I'm not a nag; I just know what dogs are capable of; good and bad.

Why did it take a bite for this woman to start taking training serious? This is not only a problem with big dogs; I see it more often with small breeds except they are easier to control.

Consistency

Now this client has raised her demands that she places on her dogs. She no longer accepts disobedience even for the simplest command. Unfortunately, the dogs do not know why she is being so demanding and are taken back from it and upset.

Consistency in your home and during training is very important. If you allow your dog to get away with disobedience in your home but are tough during training class, your dog will become confused. You cannot baby him in the house but then be tough on the field. Your dog will begin to dislike training and his drive will be reduced or he may become skittish or afraid during training. Dog's like black and white, make it simple for him, he should always respond immediately to commands whether he is in your home or on the training field.

Consistency in corrections is important also. A physical or verbal correction should immediately stop the bad behavior. If you are consistently effective with your corrections your dog will never believe he can disobey. A dog that receives light corrections at times and harder corrections other times is willing to gamble in order to self-reward.

Perfection

You cannot expect perfection in one exercise and less than perfection in another; for instance, expecting a perfect recall all the time, under any circumstance but a less than perfect heel. Maybe a perfect heel is not important but 'come' is very important to you. Your dog cannot prioritize your commands. Response to commands depends upon your dog's attention not that one command is more important than the other. Your dog must learn that he must respond to the command immediately and precisely otherwise you are teaching your dog that he can decide when and with what accuracy he can respond.

Boundaries

Setting boundaries means two things (a) making sure your dog realizes that his obedience to a command is mandatory and (b) that he is not allowed to make decisions on his own. You are Pack Leader and he must wait for your command to proceed in a certain way. Make sure that you are consistent with the way you command and handle your dog. Dogs are much happier when there are no gray areas in their lives and their handling. Make sure your dog understands that 'heel' is 'heel' and 'down' is 'down' and

misbehavior to any command is going to get the same correction and reaction from you no matter what the situation and circumstance.

Conclusion:

Make sure you are consistent with your dog and correct misbehavior no matter how simply the command is. It may be simple to you but if your dog is allowed to be disobedient, he is going to always push the envelope. I have been asking myself for a week, maybe if I was more of a nag, I could have made this client more demanding and this situation could have been avoided.

But on the other hand, I could have driven her away from training and the situation could have been horrible. Each person must find a happy medium in his or her training program of correction and reward. Too much correction or too much reward is not going to achieve the goal of a well-mannered dog. I hope no one has to go through what this couple is going through right now but there is no reason why we all can't benefit from this story and start asking our dogs to step up to the challenge of obedience and be happy doing it.

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Beth Bradley began studying animal behavior and dog training at 12 years of age. She became a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer in 1986. Beth graduated Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice. Throughout her schooling, Beth worked and studied under many well-renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. Beth formed her own company in 1989 and has made dog training her full time career since 1995. Beth is also a writer for the *Animal Companion*, she has produced CD-ROMs and DVD's on training and is author of a training book titled *Real World Dog Training*.

Beth is a member of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America, the German Shepherd Dog Club of America – Working Dog Association, the United Schutzhund Clubs of America, and she is Secretary and Training Director of the Greater Philadelphia Schutzhund Club. Beth actively competes in both American Kennel Club and Schutzhund Trials both in the United States of America and Europe. Beth is a certified Canine Good Citizen Evaluator for the American Kennel Club. Beth can be contacted via the web at www.dog-trainer.biz or her business (201) 247-8472.