

The Vision of a Dog

We, as humans, have better eyesight than our dog friends. A dog sees 20/75, which means what we see at 75 feet, a dog can only see when it is 20 feet away. But because of this loss, a dog can see much better at night than we can see. Contrary to popular belief, a dog can see color, as humans we have 4 colors that stand out for us, a dog only has two, blue and green. Yet a dog can see contrast and detail much better than their human counterparts. A dog can walk into a room and see a chain swinging but unless he saw the piece of kibble drop to the floor, he will have a hard time finding it on the ground. With this in mind, I want to talk about how contrast and color can affect the training of our dogs.

Contrast:

In the past, whenever I hear complaints of a dog not wanting to climb stairs, walk on linoleum or jump a wall, I would assume the issue was that the object was a novel object or new to a dog. Once the dog was lead by the Alpha into that situation in a calm and assertive manner, the problem would cease to exist. Though, I have found that the problem does dissipate, the underlying fear is always there, especially if the dog is left by himself to confront this 'fear'. Dogs see contrast. A white jump on a dark surface, a staircase that leads into a dark basement, the shiny new tile or wood floor in a home will cause the dog to 'hit the brakes'. Some dogs are more sensitive and not as secure; therefore these things affect them more so than another. Then, if you add a fall, or stumble into the equation, the dog is now totally in fear and frazzled.

How to solve the problem:

The best way to solve the problem is to allow the dog to investigate the object with out your interference. For example, set the jump up in your yard. The dog will have to run and walk around the jump, play in your yard with the jump set up and just be out and about the jump without your interference. Once the jump is no longer novel to the dog, then you must move the jump to a different area. Dogs can't generalize, so if they see it in one place and you move it, it now becomes a whole new object.

Once you have moved the jump and the dog is used to seeing the jump all over, now you can start training him on the jump. I would recommend painting the jump or covering the jump with a blanket or sheet so that the jump blends in with the environment. Remember, a bright white jump is going to be hard for some dogs in contrast to a green lawn. At this point, I would put the dog on leash, a tight leash only about 2 or 3 feet long, and walk over the jump with the dog. The handler should look forward and not at the dog, his head should be held high and he should move toward and over the jump as if he was on a mission. The dog, being a follower, will see that the Alpha is going over the jump and will not have any choice

but to follow. I caution the handler not to praise or talk to your dog. We want your dog to believe that it is not a big deal and if you praise and make him think it is a big deal, he is going to believe his first assumption that the jump is dangerous was correct.

The next step would be to remove the blanket or sheet and allow the dog to see the contrast and realize that the jump still is not a big deal. Gradually uncover the jump as you see him becoming more comfortable with it. Once the dog is no longer stressed by the act of jumping, then you can put a command to the act of jumping. Talking and commanding while a dog is under stress only stresses him more and he can not concentrate on what he is doing. That is the reason why we wait to command, once the dog's mind is free from stress, a command is not distracting. I always use the example of driving in traffic; you're in your car, the radio's playing loudly, traffic is very heavy and all of these factors are adding stress to you since you cannot concentrate and focus.

If it's a brightness contrast, you may want to make sure your basement is well lit and that the light going from the top floor to the basement is the same. If the problem is the light dancing on the linoleum or wood floor, again, if at all possible, adjust the light so there is not a large contrast and continue as I recommended above for the jump

Your Role as Alpha:

It is the Alpha's job to move the pack, protect the pack and set boundaries and limitations. If an Alpha wolf needs to jump a fallen tree, if a pack member doesn't follow, he is left behind; so the pack member must 'suck it up' and jump the fallen tree. Dogs do not communicate through their voice and touch like we humans do; make sure you do not speak until the stress is gone. This is the same reason why we do not touch and pet the dog while he is doing something stressful. First, you are intentionally teaching the dog that he is correct in being stressed and second, it is distracting to the dog so all of his senses are not focused on the job at hand.

Conclusion:

Most times it is difficult for us, as humans, to see the world as our dogs see it. Though our dogs have the same range of emotions as we do, they do not have the language and reasoning skills that humans do. This is the reason why, as humans, we must stop humanizing our dogs and treating them as humans, instead of dogs. If you relate to your dog the same way the Alpha dog will, small problems will fall by the wayside. Fear will kill a wild dog, the pack will not wait for him to overcome his fears, the pack will just move on without him. We can not explain to our dogs why they shouldn't be afraid but the way in which we handle ourselves, with confidence and determination will be what motivates the dog to move forward and overcome his fears.