

Dog Training Articles
By Beth Bradley

Instantaneous Obedience

Our world is a world of *Instants*: Instant Coffee, Instant Messages, Instant Relationships, Minute Meals, 10 minute Oil Changes, etc. One thing I can guarantee, there are no instant training tips for the training of dogs. So often, new clients will see my own dogs and state, "I want my dog to listen like that!" Well, training my dogs to the level they are at took years, not weeks or months. If you put in the time, you will have the results you desire.

Not Just Basic:

So many people sign their dogs up for Basic Obedience and/or Puppy Kindergarten and figure, that's it, I'm done. Basic obedience is just that, the basics; it takes a lot more training and time to get dogs to the level of my dogs. Not that everyone must own a competition dog but I think everyone wants a dog they know will obey both on and off the leash, come when called and not jump on the neighbors. That's advanced training, not basic. We teach the skills to enforce the rules in Basic but the habit is not formed completely once a basic class is complete and the habit is definitely not formed 'off the leash'.

How Much Training:

I believe it takes a good year of on leash training before you can expect your dog to obey off of the leash consistently no matter what the distraction or where you are. Dogs are constantly testing their owners and if proven that maybe they can get away with it they will try and disobey. The leash is your way of controlling your dog's behavior, take it off and you lose control (its like driving without a steering wheel). Off leash problems occur when owners test their dogs to see if they will listen. While still a pup the owner will tell the dog to come, the dog will look at them like they are crazy and understand that when he is off the leash there is no correction and their master cannot control the dog's behavior.

Off leash training should not begin until the dog is responding on leash in a consistent manner, without a correction. It's actually basic common sense, if the dog's is not responding perfectly on leash he is not going to respond off leash at all.

Problem Solving:

When I teach private lessons I try to find solutions to solve the dog problems and issues immediately. Now, the solutions usually work instantaneously but the residual habit is still not formed, so the dog will resort back to the old/bad habit the next time. For example, jumping on people, I find the best solution for that behavior is to show the owners how to implement the correction when I leave. But

that doesn't mean the dog is never going to jump again; that requires practice and repetition. What I want to see is small improvements over a few weeks and no regression; to me that is success. The problems are not going to go away immediately, the problems were not developed over night; it is going to take a lot of time and practice to eradicate them permanently.

There is no Magic Wand:

I am firm believer in laying a strong foundation when training and the only way to do that is to repeat segments over and over before putting the whole exercise together. I break down exercises into small segments; I work on the segments and then put them together until the complete exercise is done. I will work on one segment a training session.

Once the dog performs that segment flawlessly, during my next training session I will introduce the second segment and add it to the first, once again when the dog is flawless, I add the third segment to the first two. It is easier mentally on the dog to work in segments, because each success is a quick win for him. If you do the complete exercise, and your dog makes many mistakes; the corrections for each mistake will discourage your dog because he never has success.

It may take a little longer to get where you want to go but I will guarantee that you will never have to start from step one when a problem arises and I guarantee that your dog will overcome problems, distractions and obstacles easily if he has a strong foundation for the training for that particular exercise.

If your dog's training program does not have a strong foundation, you will see problems develop as you continue to work with your dog. You cannot skip steps, when training. How can you teach a dog to heel if he has never even been on a leash? How can you expect your dog to come when called at the dog park when you have never worked his off leash recall without major distractions?

Conclusion:

Instead of hoping for a quick and easy solution, give your dog credit for the small successes he or she has every day you train and work with him. Problems do not come up instantaneously so do not expect the solutions to immediately stop the problems. Look for small improvements over a longer period of time rather than quick solutions. If you work step by step, the small improvements will snowball into a permanent solution.

