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Positive Dog Training vs. Compulsion

Many people believe that there are two theories of thinking when it comes to dog training, simply by their name, but in essence the ideas are the same. The first theory is usually referred to as “Positive Training”; many people believe that the definition of Positive means that there is no punishment or correction and that the dogs are trained through praise and rewards only. The second theory is usually referred to as ‘Compulsive Training’, which is training done through the use of force or corrections. Both definitions above are incorrect and if you speak with trainers who define themselves as being of one or the other ‘religion’, you will understand what I mean.

Passé Dog Training:

There was a time many years ago that trainers and owners believed that dogs can be pulled, prodded and forced into obeying. These dogs did not work happily and willingly and they were not reliable when they did work. It is hard for a dog to work reliably when they are nervous or worried about any mistake they make and not rewarded properly for obedience.

There are three phases of dog training: (1) The Teaching Phase; (B) the Correction Phase and (C) The proofing phase.

1. The Teaching Phase consists of creating the association between a command and an action on the dog's part. This is the positive part. The dog must be rewarded with his most favorite treat or possession immediately upon responding to a command.
2. The Correction Phase consists of the removal of an immediate reward for a dog's reaction to a command and the introduction of a correction for disobedience. Most of the time the reward is now given intermittently so the dog does not know when the reward is coming but must respond anyway.
3. The Proofing Phase consists of the use of distractions and different environments to ensure your dog's obedience at any time or place. This phase consists of both rewarding the dog and correcting for disobedience.

Dogs that are pulled, prodded and forced into positions, do not properly go through the Teaching phase of training. The most important step of training is to be 100% certain that your dog understands what you want from him, if your dog is confused or stressed, he is almost certainly going to make mistakes and it is not disobedience.

Present Day Dog Training:

Most trainers consider their training methods to be positive. A dog is taught commands and rewarded for compliance to commands, once the trainer believes that the dog understands what is expected from him, rewards are given intermittently or sporadically to proof the dog's obedience to commands without an immediate reward. If the dog chooses to disobey a command, a punishment of some type is used to 'encourage' the dog to respond. The amount of punishment or compulsion depends upon the dog's personality. Some dogs will respond to a voice correction or the withholding of a reward or treat. Some dogs need a slight tug on the leash with a corrective collar, others dogs require a correction from a prong or pinch collar or even an electronic collar. Yelling or using your hands by grabbing or hitting the dog should never be employed.

The training is still positive because in essence the dog is offered two choices when he receives a command (1) obey the command and increase your chance of receiving a reward or (2) ignore the command and not only lose the chance of receiving the reward but receive a form of correction.

In order to be 100% certain that your dog understands what you want from him you must acknowledge or mark good behavior; this reassures your dog and does not leave him wondering if he is doing a good job. You can acknowledge his good behavior with praise and a reward of some type, (food or a ball or toys). Your dog's reward should be his most favorite thing. The reward should be worth your dog's effort.

Once you are 100% certain that your dog understands what you want from him you must introduce a correction of some type when he misbehaves or is disobedient. For disobedience, you must immediately reprimand your dog, verbally and with some type of compulsion if necessary. The correction should immediately stop the disobedience. If your dog returns to this behavior, then your correction was not meaningful enough. If a verbal correction is enough and your dog does not return to the disobedient behavior, then there is no reason to physically correct. But, if your dog does return to being disobedient you didn't make a big enough impression on him. It doesn't matter what method of compulsion you use as long as your dog responds, respects and learns from the correction.

Conclusion:

In my opinion, no training can be 100% positive because, like humans, all dogs test to see how much they can get away with. Testing is their best display of intelligence, instead of blindly following your every command; they are looking to see if there is a better option.

The difference in your dog's attitude and obedience to commands is going to come from his desire for the reward you offer him and the compulsion used. Hard corrections only are not going to make your dog perfect or obedient and all rewards are not going to do it either. You must find the correct balance of the two for your dog to have him working happily and consistently for you.

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