

Kelly Krager

From: Aidan, Positive Petzine [editor@positivepetzine.com]
Sent: Saturday, September 22, 2007 12:10 PM
To: Kelly Krager
Subject: [positivepetzine] Getting Sophie to listen to you

Hi Kelly, do you ever find yourself repeating yourself to Sophie? This article explains how to train Sophie to listen to you first time, every time.

Many dog or puppy owners find themselves blaming their dog for not listening. When you have invested time and effort into training, it can seem like a bit of a disappointment when your dog suddenly decides to stop listening to you, or that something else in his world is more exciting or interesting than you are.

The truth is, **dogs just do what works for them**. It is up to you, as a puppy or dog owner to teach your pet to listen to you by making 'listening to you' work for them. Many dog owners inadvertently **teach** their dog to ignore them!

So how do we teach a dog to listen to us?

Dog owners frequently repeat commands over and over. If your dog didn't respond the first time, repetition isn't going to help. **Repeating commands teaches a dog that either the command is meaningless or that it's ok to respond in their own sweet time!**

We should never ask for a behavior that we aren't at least 80% sure we will get after asking the first time. If there are too many distractions, we're in a new situation, or the behavior just isn't very well learned; then we probably won't get the behavior we want.

Train quietly. It's a hang-over from the old military-style dog training that we bellow commands at our dogs. Dogs actually have a powerful sense of hearing, and can hear our tiniest whispers. That's not to say that a command shouldn't be clear and audible, but if you only ever bellow commands during training, don't expect your dog to learn to pay attention to you unless you are bellowing. A dog who has learned to listen carefully will tend to pay more attention.

A bit of meaningless chitter-chatter is ok every so often, but dogs don't speak our language and we don't want our cues to become lost amongst the noise. When training, try not to talk too much. **Effective communication comes through quality and clarity, not quantity.**

If you find yourself in a situation where your dog won't respond to a cue, and you're sure he knows it in other situations then **ask yourself "what is different about this situation?"** It could be that there are too many **distractions** for your dog to focus. It could be that the situation is vastly different from any that you have trained in.

Go back to basics when this happens. Remove distractions if you can, and re-introduce them slowly. **Start at the beginning in a new situation**, even if it means using a food lure briefly to 'get the behavior'. If there's too much going on, move away from the action a bit.

Remember to always set your dog up for success. If your dog can't succeed, you can't reinforce. If you can't reinforce, nothing useful has been learned.

While we're on the topic of reinforcement - make sure your rewards are meaningful. By definition, **reinforcement is only reinforcement if it increases or maintains behavior**. A full-up dog being offered lousy treats, or a dog-tired dog being offered a chance to chase a ball is probably not going to be too interested in training.

Quit while you are ahead. Don't try to train for too long. If you train too long you start getting sub-standard behavior. Reinforcing sub-standard behavior will only give you more sub-standard behavior in the future.

Don't feel like you have to reinforce every behavior you ask for and get. Once the behavior is well learned, **stop reinforcing the worst offerings**. e.g If your dog is trained to come when called, don't reinforce if he takes too long to respond. Set him up for success, and reinforce the faster responses only.

You can find out more about the effective use of reinforcement by investing in [The Positive Petzine Collection](#).

Train often. Dogs need to learn to learn, and by training often and training consistently, your dog will learn how to play the training game with you. It should be a **game**, too. If training isn't like playing a game with your dog, it stops being fun for both of you.

Be worth listening to. Be someone your dog trusts and respects. Be predictable, confident, calm, and decisive. When you make a decision, stick with it. If you decide that your dog can't sit on the couch, lead him onto his mat every time he sits on the couch. Don't give in just because he's giving you "those eyes". It's another matter altogether if you decide to *invite* your dog onto the couch as a reward for giving you some other behaviour you asked for, though.

Until next time...

Regards,
Aidan
Editor

Positive Petzine
PO Box 87
Moonah TAS 7009
Australia

If you no longer wish to receive communication from us:
[Cancel](#)

To update your contact information:
[Update](#)