

## **Where to Start?**

Start in an area where your dog can focus on learning, with little to no distractions. Learning happens in a mind that is still engaged, so we need to begin teaching your dog new behaviors and skills when he is still under threshold. Training sessions become counterproductive if we attempt to train while our dog is under stress. How to avoid doing so, is by teaching skills only when we can control the environment – perhaps you begin training in your living room, then, once the skill is learned and you are willing to place your \$50 bet, you move to your back yard. Keeping distractions and potential triggers at bay.

Did you know that it takes a full 9 months for dogs to move a new behavior from their short-term memory into their long-term memory? As you will read below, the majority of our work will entail consistency and a dedication of time.

## **Teach the Skills First**

Skills have to be learned before they can be used, which is why learning the foundations of behaviors becomes our most important step towards success. At times, this can be a long process if the behavior is one that is harder to break for your dog; however, stick with it - remain consistent and calm. Frustration from parents goes right through the leash, resulting in frustration or confusion for the dog, as well.

If you are struggling with the commands you are using, seeing that your dog is not responding or notice that you are attempting to get your overly excited dog to listen to your requests with little success, , and perhaps beginning to become frustrated, using physical control to aide in obtaining the desired behavior (ie: pushing on the rear and pulling up on the leash to obtain a sit; tugging the leash in the direction of your intended placement etc.) we ask that you please stop, take a breather and start your session again from the beginning. Allowing your dog to do a simple ten rep serious of “look” or “touch” can reset their analytical mind to a better baseline for a more productive session.

When struggling, we encourage our clients to send videos of their sessions along to us so that we can review methods and offer suggestions to aide in a more successful session. This will ensure seamless integration and consistency once you are working on your own with your dog outside of our facility.

## **The \$50 Bet!!**

We use this to judge how well our dog has progressed; as well as for you to have a means to self-evaluation, as well. Once you have been working a command, ask yourself if you are willing to bet us \$50 that your dog will perform that command/the desired behavior on the first try. If you can bet that and make the behavior happen on your first request, you are then ready to progress to a new step. Of which, depending on what we’re working on, may be one of the following:

1. You are ready to add a verbal cue into our physical cue! If you are only willing to bet \$5, you are not yet ready to add the verbal cue. Continue working on the physical behavior. (ie: using your hand to ask for a sit without using words, marking the behavior and rewarding it). By the way.. A cue is the green light for the behavior that will earn reinforcement.
2. Starting to train the behavior in your next location.

3. Adding distractions while training the behavior.
4. Adding another command to chain two commands together (ie: Fido Sit! Yes! Down. Yes!)
5. Changing your reward schedule so that you are treating only intermittently and sporadically.

## **Here's Where the Work Begins..**

### **TARGETING**

#### Teaching the Touch Command

This is one of our favorite commands - one that we recommend using throughout your dogs lifetime.

#### **When to use Touch:**

Use this command when you need your dog to pay attention or to chain commands together.

It is an easy command to teach which builds trust and is the first step towards analytical thinking. They must move their nose towards the target to make the treat happen. This is also a great tool to use when working with a reactive dog. You can use either an open palm or two fingers.

**Time needed for this training:** 30-90 seconds per sequence – Resist the urge to push the session longer when doing well, as resisting to do so prevents mistakes from happening. No use of a command until the \$50 bet is something you are willing to wager (described below).

#### **Evaluating Progress:**

When you dog really understands this behavior, you should be completing 15 repetitions per minute.

#### **Treat Delivery:**

Very often, I will toss the treat to one side or another for treat delivery. There are several reasons for this; most important is that this is all about making it work for us and keeping them coming back for more. Also, movement helps to relieve stress, so walking or trotting between treats, helps to manage any stress like behaviors.

#### **Training Touch – Step One:**

Present your target at nose height or lower to your dog -without forcing the hand into your dogs space. Almost every dog will approach the target to inspect what it is, as this is the hand that pays!

If your dog is grabby for treats, toss the treat on the ground for them to eat from there. Don't try to train two things at once while working on targeting (being treat manners and targeting). We are only concerned with targeting at this stage.

When your dog makes contact with the target, pull your hand back and retract it towards your side or stomach. Use your marker word (YES!!) the moment his nose touches your fingers or palm and present him with a treat immediately afterwards.

After your dog has finished the treat, return your hand to the desired targeting position and repeat the process again. There should be a clear start and end to each repetition.

See how many times he can perform this successfully in 60 seconds.

### **Pearls:**

-Be sure that your hand is still, your dog should move to the target; not the other way around.

-Anxious dogs may get stuck and freeze in place when they are unsure of what you are asking. The longer they remain there, the harder it is to dislodge them and get them moving again. The freeze also can add to mental anxiety. Tossing a treat after they perform the touch to your target, ensures they are moving and lessens chances for confusion and freezing where anxiety can build.

-If your dog takes the treat from the ground and whips back towards you, you know that he is in training mode. If he takes the treat and sniffs around afterwards, chances are that he is a bit nervous. Destress him and start again.

-Try this in different areas of the room, tossing the treat a little bit further away or at an angle, even, to encourage movement while training. The important thing to watch for is if it is close enough that he still returns for the targeting after he gets the treat from the ground. If he doesn't, try throwing it closer to you.

-Once you have mastered the touch by your side, move your hand to different sides or heights and request the behavior from that angle, as well.

### **Adding the TOUCH Cue:**

When your dog is watching for the target and you can present it high or low, left or right and you can easily achieve 15 target touches in one minute, you are ready to add the verbal cue.

*Why are we waiting to add a cue?* Just like toddlers who tune out their parent's requests, dogs do the same thing. Learned Irrelevance, is the act of tuning out data that has no real meaning. If the noise we make has no meaning, a dog will see it as irrelevant and ignore a meaningless noise that is not yet attached to a clear concept. We also want good reliable responses to our cues. If we teach the word before the behavior is solid, we will have a much more difficult time teaching the behavior itself.

### **How to add the Verbal Cue:**

With your hand neutral and still, say your verbal cue and THEN present your target. Your dog will touch it and you will use your bridge word (YES!) and treat. If there is a delay, that means he is still having to think about what you are asking for and you have moved to the verbal cue too quickly. Repeat until you can see him look for your hand when you say touch.

Practice randomly throughout the day, asking your dog for a "touch", at random moments. Remember that if you are in a new environment, your \$50 bet may not apply. Start over with your "**hand-only**" targeting training exercises in the new environment and only add the verbal command when you are willing to put your money where your mouth is.

**Time for your \$50 Bet!?!?** If you are willing to bet \$50 that your dog will perform the desired behavior on the first try without a physical cue, you are ready to add a verbal cue in! If you are only willing to bet \$5, you are not yet ready to add the verbal cue.