

TRAINING IS PERISHABLE...AND HOW TO PRESERVE IT

Have you ever tried to start a new habit? Or break an old one? Ever try to perform a life style change like a diet or exercise program only to fail over and over?

Yeah, me too! Studies show it can sometimes take a human doing something 300 times before it becomes a habit or established behavior. How about what you learned in High School? Do you remember everything you learned in class?

Yeah, me neither!

Then why do we expect so much more from our dogs??

The truth is that training never ends. If you dont "remind" your dog occasionally with some positive reinforcements, then the behaviors you worked so hard to instill in your dog may start to fade. Every so often even the well trained dog will enjoy a lighthearted fun time going through the basics with you. Have a "refresher" course and make it the most fun thing your dog has ever done. We get so used to our dogs doing basic behaviors (like sit) all the time, that it no longer impresses us. When was the last time you said "Wow! That was a great sit! what a good doggie!" and rewarded them? Yes I agree you need to phase out food rewards when training. But that doesnt mean you should give them up 100%. Once in a while you should still reward with something your dog LOVES (treat, toy, playtime, petting and praise).

Ever tell your dog to sit and he does, but then after a bit he starts walking around? Or how about a "stay"? How long will your dog stay in place before he starts to wander? One tip to help these skills from perishing and make them rock solid is to teach and use a "release word". When you put your dog in a sit or stay they should not move until you release them. Training for a release word keeps your dog from deciding to release himself. The release word should be trained using positive methods and made to be the most exciting thing ever so they learn that its the waiting that gets them the big rewards.

One of the biggest hurdles to successful training is consistency. One of the best "preservatives" to keep your training strong and healthy is consistency. One of the fastest ways to ruin training is a LACK of...you guessed it...consistency.

Command or cue words should not have dual meanings. Your dog should not be allowed to jump on some people and not others, instead teach them to keep all paws on the floor and teach them a "paws up" for those times a "jump up" is allowed. You need to make things very clear to your dog. They do not learn in "grey" areas but only when its black or white.



Learn to see every situation as an opportunity to teach your dog something.

If SOMETIMES you train, then SOMETIMES your dog behaves.

Another way that your training can be hindered or weakened is when you forget to look at the world and situations through your dog's eyes. Our dogs need understanding and compassion from us. Science has shown that mentally and emotionally our dogs are similar to, on average, a 2 to 3 year old human child. Now we have all been to a restaurant where there are families with young kids. Some of those kids may be well behaved and then some are jumping on the seats and screaming. What's the difference? The "training" they have received from the parents. Our dogs are no different. Remember too that our dogs will ALWAYS be that 2 or 3 year old child, just their level of training and experience helps them to behave and cope better.

Trauma can also affect training. Going back to the comparison with children. Think about how a 2 year old losing a favorite teddy bear will be affected compared to an adult losing a teddy bear. We will get over it easier and not be

devastated whereas the child feels like its the end of the world. Losing his or her teddy is maybe comparable to our house burning down. Have a fear of snakes or spiders? What would it take for you to get over it? Now think about your dog. When they have ANY experience, they dont see it the same way you do. To them it may be frightening, but you dont see it the same way. It can take years for a human to get over trauma, if they ever do, how long should it take your dog?

I bring these things up because when you learn to look at life through the eyes of your dog, you will better understand your dog, and your efforts in training will be better for both of you.

Written by Chaplain Jill Marie Chambers, June 2024

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