

Make Training Egg-citing

Fun and Fellowship at a Chapter Meeting

I recently had the opportunity to host a quarterly meeting for my local chapter. Gathering with my fellow Canines for Christ teams is always an encouragement, a blessing and fun! We snacked, shared success stories from the field, and listened as my husband led us in prayer and devotion.

The majority of our time, however, was dedicated to training. During our meetings, we practice various skills from our "training bank," which is comprised of the test items for Canine Good Citizen and Advanced Canine Good Citizen, Temperament/Socialization Protocols (Example: appropriate response to the sudden appearance of a hat-wearing, umbrella-opening, bearded man), and Therapy Specific Tasks (Example: how a big dog and how a tiny one should approach a patient in a hospital bed. They are different!). As a trainer, I avoid practicing skills in a repetitive and monotonous way. Instead, I seek ways to make our sessions effective, worthwhile, and fun. Here is an example.

Two of AKC's Community Canine Test Items require a dog to "walk on a loose leash" and to "not pull the owner" as if the handler has "the leash in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other." I combined these skills and threw in a little "egg-stra" to make it a thrilling game for handlers and dogs.

Remember the old, familiar Egg-And-Spoon Race? I followed the usual rules with two exceptions. I made it a team relay and the folded arm behind the back became the preferred handling hand holding a leash with a dog attached! Here is the how-to from our recent meeting:

- I marked a starting line and a far line about twenty feet apart using bright blue painter's tape.
- The handlers waited at the starting line with a plastic egg balancing on a plastic spoon in one hand. With their other hand, they held their dog on leash.
- At "GO!" handlers walked as quickly as possible to the far line without rolling the egg off the spoon, turned, and returned to start. The spoon and egg were given to the next handler in line.

The race continued until everyone had a turn. Small prizes were awarded to the victorious team.

Rules If the egg fell to the floor, the handler was allowed to pause, pick it up, put it back on the spoon and continue towards the far line. If the egg dropped and spilled its yolk (Small plastic yolks nestle inside the eggs in this set.), the handler was required to pick up the egg, replace the yolk, return to the start line, and begin again.

Goals Finish quickly without dropping the egg. Maintain a U-shaped, loose leash down the racing lane. Make a smooth left or right hand turn at the far line.

So, what exactly did we gain from this training game? We laughed, enjoyed the companionship of our fellow dog lovers, and worked together towards common goals. "Don't lose your yolk" and "Don't lose your U!" were common exclamations. Some handlers and their dogs performed perfectly! Making it look "over easy".... A few handlers "scrambled" to keep up as their overly excited dogs pulled them down the racing lane.... Others made slow progress as their dogs lagged in the lane and during turns. When the U between handler and dog was lost, a handling issue was evident. Thus, the Egg-And-Spoon Race revealed that our leash skills can always improve. A dog that strains against his leash is a danger to himself, his handler, and others around him. A Canines for Christ team should be an in-sync, in-step, harmonious pair. Neither handler nor dog should be dragged through a facility during a therapy visit!

I encourage you to try this updated classic at your next chapter meeting, on a play date with other teams, or even by yourself! By playing, you, too, will gain valuable insights about your leash skills. If you struggle, seek help from an experienced trainer. For your chapter, for our ministry, and for the glory of God, aim for an egg-cellent partnership.