

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR DOG'S RELIABLE RECALL

By Steve DiTullio



Having a reliable recall (the Come command) could possibly save your beloved dog's life, and it will definitely keep her out of trouble. When teaching the recall, it can be frustrating for some dog owners, especially those who own an independent or willful dog. It's a natural instinct or trait for most dogs to have a desire to explore and follow after scents. This is due to their nose possessing their strongest sense - the sense of smell. But there are also visual and sound stimulations that come into play. Some dogs are very difficult to recall when their nose is at work; it is a very strong, competing motivation to the recall.

So how do you make yourself so important that your dog's desire to be with you is more powerful than most anything? It starts when a dog first comes into your life, whether it's a puppy, adolescent or adult dog. We must show our new family member how interesting, fun and rewarding it is to be with us. By having tasty treats or a toy that is interesting to the particular dog, and showing it to them in a fun manner, you can help the dog maintain focus on *you*. Also, by being animated when recalling and always using their name with a happy tone of voice and fun body language (Layla, here!). The moment the dog's eyes look at you, clapping, whistling or even taking a few steps backwards, if necessary, while acting a little silly, are some methods to help encourage the recall. It's been said that if you don't feel silly while doing this, you are probably not being animated enough. I find with clients that women's voices are pitched a little higher and can naturally have a softer tone and that dogs seem to respond better to their voices. Men's voices are deeper and some have problems finding that higher or softer range of tone, so some of us guys have to try a little harder to become more animated while paying attention to our voice intonation.

By having a collar and a leash on a dog, it allows the handler more control, and the dog less opportunity to bolt. A six-foot leash is good to start with. Have your dog in an area she is familiar with and where there are no distractions. Before you start, you want to show the dog you have something that interests this her. High value

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Rudy at 14-weeks-old. I am getting low and recalling Rudy



Encouraging the pup to recall through the distraction of another dog



Getting focus on me by using name and the command for the recall



Recalling enthusiastically for a game with a stick



Drawing the dog in close for food rewards



Lucky; recalling enthusiastically while stepping backwards

treats usually work, also a few toys (squeaky ones are good) in your pocket or you hidden under your arm (they work as good attention getters). Start by offering a few treats, and maybe even asking for a sit. Reward the dog if she knows the command. I then allow the dog to wander a few feet from me or let her focus on something close to us. I might even quietly take a few steps back from her if she is not moving away from me. This is the opportunity to now **use the dog's name with a "Come" or "Here" command** in a bright and happy tone. When she looks at you, get enthusiastic or animated, if necessary. If she recalls to you, offer a treat and draw her in close to your body, giving her the food reward with enthusiastic praise of "Good Here," and also some contact from you by petting her. Most dogs love this triple dose of rewards.

If the dog does not recall, you can use the leash to gently guide the dog to come to you and then reward her. Repeat the process with patience, consistency and voice tone, use the cue word and soft, happy body language. Never get frustrated, angry or take it personal if the dog's responses are slow. When the dog can perform these exercises from three feet away, start adding some distance one foot at a time.

Through out this process, you can hold the leash or drop the leash. If the dog bolts or wanders, you can use your foot to step on the leash to regain control. When she gets to the end of the six-foot leash and she is reliably recalling, I recommend using longer leads of ten-feet or twenty-feet, but up to fifty-feet can be used. In confined areas of the home or in a fenced yard, if the dog is understanding the recall command, you can drop the leash while you are extending these distances. But always remember that the leash is important. It gives you the advantage to reinforce the recall.

As the dog becomes more and more reliable with the recall, you can go to new places where the distractions are more interesting to her, like someone else's home, yard or a park. The distractions in these new environments should be subtle at first. When practicing this in these new environments, I would also recommend to start with short distances and quick repetitions to reinforce to the dog that the same rule applies to the recall wherever she may be.

When the dog has the full understanding of what the recall command means, but still does not comply at times, guiding corrections can now be used with the leash. Any corrections at this stage should be used thoughtfully; you need to be extra careful at these stages. Also, if any guiding-type corrections are going to be used, when the response is positive for the command, you need to be extra encouraging when the dog looks or responds to your cue; a jackpot of treats for reward in these response situations is a great idea when she returns to you. As the dog becomes increasingly reliable, food rewards can be varied (not giving every time, but only for the quickest responses), but enthusiastic praise should always be given ("Good here" with some soft petting), showing the dog how good it is to be with you.

For dogs that show reluctance to come to you, a good trick is to call her name and when you get her attention, act a little silly while laughing and start walking or running in the opposite direction. There is a very good chance that she is going to want to be where the fun is. Sometimes even letting the dog lose sight of you, for a few seconds (ex: you hiding behind a tree, shrub or structure) can make her more anxious to come and find you. Always be sure you don't lose sight of her.

I have witnessed people's frustration and anger while recalling an off-leash dog. When the dog finally came back to them or they caught the dog, the person displayed unhappiness or even harshness. This is a sure-fire way to make your dog even more reluctant to return to you next time. No matter how frustrated or angry you are, the recall or any other command is never the place to display it with your dog. The foundation of the recall is with a leash in the early stages. Encourage-

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ment and reward from the handler is the program for your dog's success at reliable recalls. Always remember: the only way the dog will learn that there is no better place than to be with you, is to show them exactly that. ■

Steve DiTullio grew up in a family of animal lovers, especially dogs. He always had 1 to 3 dogs in his family. They were great pets but never trained well. Due to their misunderstanding of what it actually takes to fulfill a dog's needs, he became involved in training around 1992 with a great dog he had. That dog and the first trainer who trained them started his real understanding of what a dog needs (Structure, Guidance and Alliance). As he has been training and observing behaviors over the years, he met many people and their dogs. It motivates him to help both human and animal to understand each other. It is important to understand individual personalities of dogs and to be resourceful in managing unwanted behaviors and rewarding the good behaviors. The guide must always maintain a relaxed but direct demeanor to accomplish communication. Visit him online: www.forpawzdogtraining.com



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