

Discovering and Acquiring Handler Capital®



By Neal B. Kauder
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Overview & Introduction

"After years of observation, we believe most dog training problems are handler problems, not dog problems. Now the data proves it—to fix the dog, we train the handler."

NK9Training, LLC (NK9), a company specializing in dog training, has conducted a comprehensive study to determine which factors contribute to successful dog training.¹ The study period spans roughly four years, starting in late 2019, and involved dogs trained in various settings, including group sessions, private or in-home lessons, and training while boarding. The study included capturing data on 64 dog breeds owned by 540 clients who were training companions or bird dogs.

NK9Training methods are handler-centric focused; we assume that each dog has at least some natural capacity to be trained and can learn through capable mentoring by a handler/owner. There are always exceptions; however, a dog's training success is heavily influenced by the handler's demonstrated leadership, skill level, diligence, and

consistency. After years of observation, we believe most dog training problems are handler problems, not dog problems. Now the data proves it...to fix the dog, we train the handler.²

This is where the idea of Handler Capital[®] becomes an important concept. This approach assesses a handler's ability to give their dog the training opportunities needed to be a capable companion, sporting, or hunting dog. The factors proven to be relevant in predicting Handler Capital[®] are the outcome of proprietary predictive analytics. Explained in general terms, Handler Capital[®] is defined as the ability to meet dog and handler training needs decisively, as related to puppy development, environmental soundness, socialization, completing formal training, and following through with tasks at home. For bird dogs, we also assess the dog's exposure to different types of cover (forest, field, and stream) and the exposure to game birds and bird hunting.

We fully recognize other factors may contribute to Handler Capital[®], but these were factors that our training staff could collect reliably and validly. Our staff platform is also relatively small, so assigned trainers are personally involved with all past and current clients. We narrowed data collection to those items that

¹ NK9Training is owned by Neal B. Kauder. Mr. Kauder is a pro-dog trainer and, along with his wife Jane, owns Orapax Hunting Preserve in Goochland, Virginia. Along with several assistant dog trainers, Neal conducts private and group dog training sessions at Orapax and makes home visits to train and alleviate more serious dog problems. Rick Smith and the Silent Command System heavily inspire his Handler CapitalTM training method. Neal has also learned a great deal from Sonny Piekarz, Hay Creek Kennel, Jordan Wells, and J. Wells Kennels, who created "The Method Dog Training" system. We also ascribe to selected techniques from Mo Lindley, Lindley's Kennels. Taking knowledge from these dog men and studying animal cognition more generally, our training approach is dynamic, it continually evolves with new and proven dog training

techniques. Neal is also co-owner of *Punto Blanco Gun Dogs*, a company that breeds and sells started Llewellyn Setters. Before becoming a dog trainer, Mr. Kauder spent 25 years as the owner of VisualResearch, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in data analytics and information design. The unique combination of experience in quantitative research design and dog training inspired this 4-year study.

² The training methods employed by NK9Training, which serve as the basis for Handler CapitalTM, are more fully reviewed at <https://www.orapax.com/train-your-dog>. In addition, an explanation of training methods can be found in *The Virginia Sportsman*, "It All Starts on The Tailgate."

not only made intuitive sense but were also found to be significant across all mainstream dog training methods. It also proved too difficult to get past clients, who either unsuccessfully or successfully participated in the training, to answer further questions that may or may not play a role.

After identifying the factors that make a good, or even a great dog handler/owner, it was also necessary to find a way to objectively measure if a dog/trainer "team" had succeeded. As discussed above, this training system recognizes humans, not dogs, as more likely to influence the ability to build a mannerly and obedient dog. However, we look at the resultant dog to assess the human's ability to succeed. We look at two objectively defined criteria that we feel are reasonably attained. First, we determine whether the dog can stay entirely still (they may sit or stand) once given an assigned place, walk at heel on a loose lead, and come when recalled. Under our conceptual training framework, these three foundational behaviors must be consistently exhibited. If the owner desires, a second criterion for success is transference from an on-leash slip lead to an E-collar. E-collars allow dogs to move around under control and safely off-leash, even at long distances, an essential attribute for bird dogs.

In this study we closely examined the level of Handler Capital® compared to the ability to succeed in our training system. We found a very strong relationship between high levels of Handler Capital® and effectively and efficiently reaching the training goals required by a dog owner. There are exceptions, of course. There are those with low handler capital who manage to succeed and those with high levels who will fail, but these cases are irregular compared to the vast majority of cases studied.

Quantitative and Qualitative Study Approach

Using quantitative and qualitative research methods provides a more complete understanding of this research. Quantitative research is useful for providing statistical data and measuring the factors associated with dog training outcomes on a large scale. Our data helps to identify patterns, trends, and correlations in the data and provides an objective view of the research topic. On the other hand, qualitative research provides a deeper understanding of the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of dog training outcomes on more individual dog, handler, and owner levels.

To this end, several clients contributed experiences related to training within our system and are included to help give broader context to the analytical findings. Having real-life examples helps validate and enrich the findings and provides a well-rounded view of the Handler Capital® topic.

Additionally, there is no reason why an individual's Handler Capital® level cannot change over time. Handler Capital® is all about a dog owner's ideals, such as how much they dedicate themselves to following through at home, socializing their dogs, and continuing to shape their dog's behavior through formal training sessions. As one practices proven dog training techniques they naturally become better at handling; it then stands to reason that improvements in a dog's behavior naturally follow.

Training Methods Used

We utilize the Silent Command System, developed by Delmar Smith, as a core framework for our dog training. This system is widely recognized as one of the world's most popular bird-dog training systems and can also be applied to companion dogs. The system recognizes three points of contact on the dog that are used to control or communicate commands. We borrow from other systems and have created our training methods as well, which are all merged to create our unique system of dog training (*see endnote i*)

Most often, we use a command lead as the initial tool, to establish the contact point on the neck. That is eventually replaced by an e-collar to use low-level cues to accomplish the same training goals as the command lead – to stay still, to "go with" (at heel or at a distance), and to recall. We also employ an obstacle course to build a strong foundation for on-lead obedience. This helps us to transfer dogs to e-collars, teach them to fetch, and resolve problematic behaviors such as timidity, lack of recall, aggressiveness, lack of confidence, and failure to pay attention. There are many different dog training methods for working and companion dogs. However, reputable systems all share the same goal: to create a well-behaved dog that willingly accepts reasonable restrictions, such as a walking on a loose lead, consistently recalling, or willingly kennelling. After getting through foundational training dogs can participate in off-lead activities with their handler, including walking, hiking, or more challenging activities like agility contests, dock diving, bird hunting, or livestock work. Although the methods used to train a dog may differ, the goal for most dog owners remains the same: to have a well-mannered canine partner who behaves regardless of where the dog accompanies their human pack.

The current study is not a deep dive or a review of the training system described above. It is focused on what factors contribute to being a successful handler. However, it is important to recognize that different training systems will have different acceptance and success levels. This bias needs to be acknowledged; dogs and handlers trained under one system could have had better or worse experiences if trained under a different system. On the other hand, all dogs and handlers in this study utilized the same training system, allowing everyone to be assessed with a training framework and ideology that was the same for each dog and handler pairing. Results will differ across dogs and handlers with any training system, and some natural attrition always occurs. Some handlers and dogs will have less success; some will drop out after an initial session due to an unwillingness to do the work or simply a wish to try a different training method. Some will have great success under our system, a good number have even written to us about positive life-changing experiences, and others go on to place in various sporting competitions or field trials. Most fall somewhere in between, and those folks have dogs trained to a level that matches the owner's training goals--most often being well-behaved in the home and calm enough to take into any public space.

My Changed View of Dog Training

Contributed by Jenna Johnson

Over the course of a couple of years, I came to the hunt preserve training facility with three dogs, including a reactive pit bull/retriever mix (Ava) that was a companion dog, and two pointing dogs, French Brittany's, one older (Gilly) that was given to me by a relative, and a new puppy (Tanzy). I went in with the mindset that I could have a great dog with kindness and a few simple commands. I came out with a better understanding of the nature of dogs as pack animals, with powerful instincts and the desire to find a leader. I improved my dog training skills by attending private and group lessons and embracing a training system that focused less on the dog's capability

and more on my ability to execute as a leader. Accepting these ideas was an incredible transformation in my thinking about animal behavior. Every success I saw in my dog, every time she figured something out, gave me the confidence to continue. My reactive retriever mix became calmer, and my puppy received proper training and exposure to birds, hunting, and open spaces. My dogs have passed AKC testing and competed in field trials, with the puppy even placing in U.S. Complete Shooting Dog trials. I did this by just showing up every day for my dogs. I hope my story inspires others who wish to provide their dogs with greater companionship and sporting life opportunities.

Descriptive vs. Multivariate Results

This analysis presents both descriptive and multivariate research results. Considering our dog and handler training data, descriptive results refer to simple summaries of our results. These summaries provide a basic understanding of relevant dog and handler behaviors and help identify patterns or trends. For example, we can show the most common breeds trained and whether handlers successfully completed training.

In contrast, multivariate analysis is more complex than descriptive analysis, but it is invaluable in helping us understand how different factors work together to influence dog training outcomes. Multivariate analysis reveals the effect of each independent variable (e.g., dog breed or age) on the outcome variable (e.g., obedience achieved, or e-collar transferred), keeping all other factors constant. This is extremely powerful because it allows us to determine what factors contribute to success and the strength and direction of the

relationship between many independent variables and one outcome variable. This methodology also allows us to accurately predict who will have dog training success based on the relationships identified. For example, which is more influential- puppy development, homework completion, or breed type- for predicting whether handlers will produce a mannerly and obedient dog?

It is instructive and logical to start on the descriptive side, using our data to describe how the various factors we collected are distributed. For example, what breeds are most common? At what age are dogs when they begin training? Are dogs mainly in the companion or working dog category? What problems are dogs having? How many handlers were successful in training their dogs?

Describing The Dogs

Dog Breeds

Out of 64 breeds observed, most can be grouped into just a few categories. In fact, half of the dogs in the study belong to only three breeds - GSPs, English Setters, and Labrador Retrievers. Moreover, ten breeds represent 80% of all the dogs in the study.³ The entire distribution of breeds in our study is shown in the adjacent bar chart. The top 10 include the GSP, Labrador Retriever, English (including Llewellyn) Setter, Brittany, Vizsla, Boykin

³ The types of dogs in this study are biased toward hunting breeds (especially bird dog breeds). They are, therefore, over-represented, especially when considering dogs that fall under the companion dog category. As a result, other common types of companion dogs, such as toy breeds or herding dogs, would be naturally under-represented. In fact, the most popular dog breed reported by the American

Kennel Club (AKC) in 2023 was the French Bulldog (followed by the Labrador Retriever). This means our findings concerning companion dogs should not be attributed to companion dogs in general, and only further research would determine if these findings could be generalized to other companion breeds.

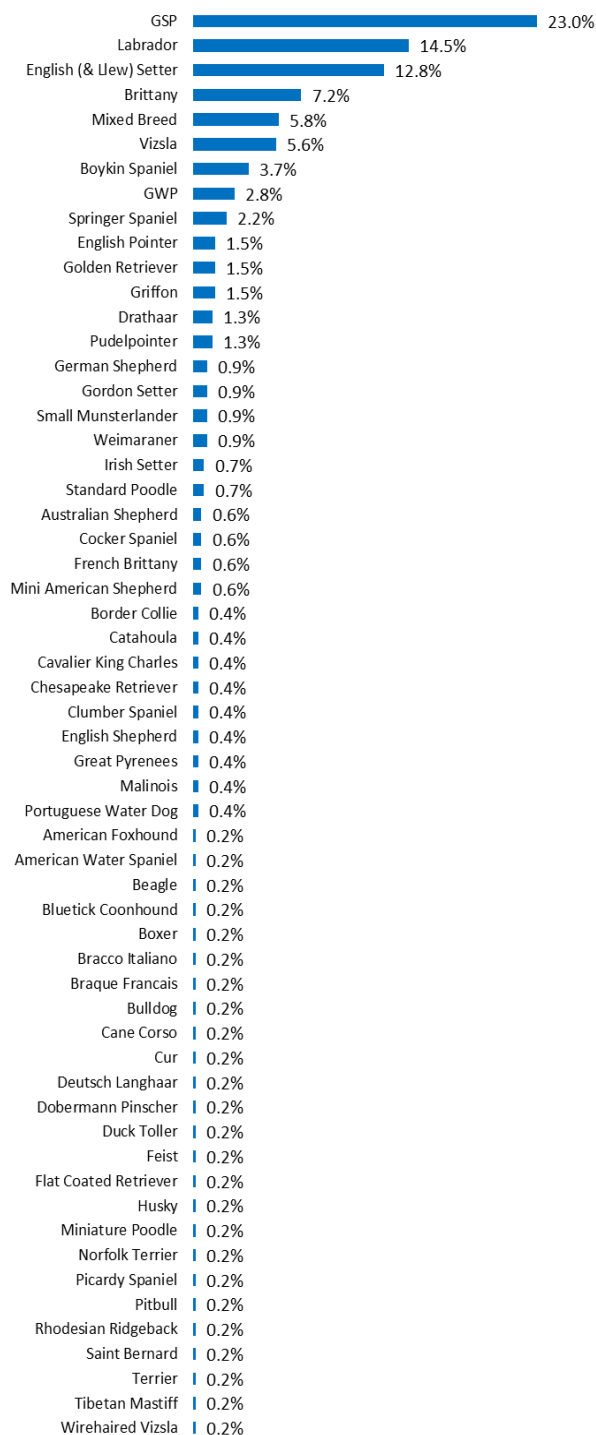
Spaniel, Mixed Breed, German Wirehaired Pointer, Springer Spaniel, and English Pointer. Each breed has unique characteristics that make them well-suited for hunting birds.

The German Shorthaired Pointer (GSP) comprises 23% of the entire sample. Clearly, GSPs are one of the most popular bird dogs in the United States. In our training grounds, they are everywhere...in private and group lessons, on many professional guide-strings, and even at-home visits involving companion-only family dogs. No other breed has the genetic variability that produces more differences in these dogs—GSPs range greatly in size, color, temperament, range, quickness, and rank prey drive.

Although Labrador Retrievers (the 2nd most frequent dog in our analysis) are known for their waterfowl retrieving skills, they are also very popular companion dogs and are frequently used as flushers in the uplands. Locating a hunt-bred Labrador is also not difficult, making them popular choices over some of the more hard-to-find flushing breeds, such as Golden Retrievers or Springer Spaniels. The Boykin Spaniel (7th most popular dog in the study) and the Cocker Spaniel are among the flushing breeds that have produced good hunting lines lately.⁴

English Setters are the third most popular dog in the study. This includes the non-AKC recognized Llewellyn Setters (which far outnumber field-bred English setters in this study). English Setters are known for their elegance and grace in the field, but they also have a strong but still sleek build that makes them popular among varying types of bird hunters. Fourth most frequently occurring, Brittanys are also competent bird hunters with

Breeds Represented in Study



⁴ Craig Koshyk, Winnepeg, CA (at www.dogwilling.ca) is the author of several best-selling books on hunting dogs; he has provided information that breaks all breeds in this study into

two categories: breeds that are “easy to find hunt bred lines”, and breeds that are “hard or impossible to find hunt bred lines”. We are thankful for his effort in creating several typologies using the specific

an instinct for pointing and retrieving. Brittanys are also popular companion breeds. The 5th largest category shown is "Mixed Breed," which mostly holds dogs that are not hunting and instead are companion dogs who come for foundational training that is no less demanding than what purebred dogs receive. These include many of the "Doodles" (e.g., Labradoodles, Goldendoodles, and Bernedoodles) as well as mixes of many dogs that appear high on our list; for example, Labradors are seen mixed with many popular hunting breeds (GSPs, Setters, Hounds, etc.).

Fully Embracing Formal Training and Drilling at Home

Contributed by Robb Moore

The two most important factors that have helped in acquiring Handler Capital® while training Lincoln were keeping a beginner mindset and having an insatiable drive to succeed. Having never had a bird dog before, succeeding intuitively meant hunkering down and attending countless private, group, and other special invites by pro-trainers, followed by lots of drilling what I learned at home. I think because I had no prior experience with dogs or bird hunting and no ego to check, I could absorb teaching like a sponge and learn from some of the best teachers in the field. I also knew it was easy to become overconfident with experience. One of my earliest mentors summed that up best: "You'll do just fine with Lincoln, it'll be your second dog you need to worry about." When I asked why, she replied, "Because with your second, you'll think you know what you're doing." Now, with Lincoln's pup, Rooster, I'm reminding myself of that daily so that I never

breeds in this study; our analysis has benefited greatly from his work. [In our study, 74% of dogs were classified in the "easy" group and 26% in the "hard" group. This is primarily because the GSP,

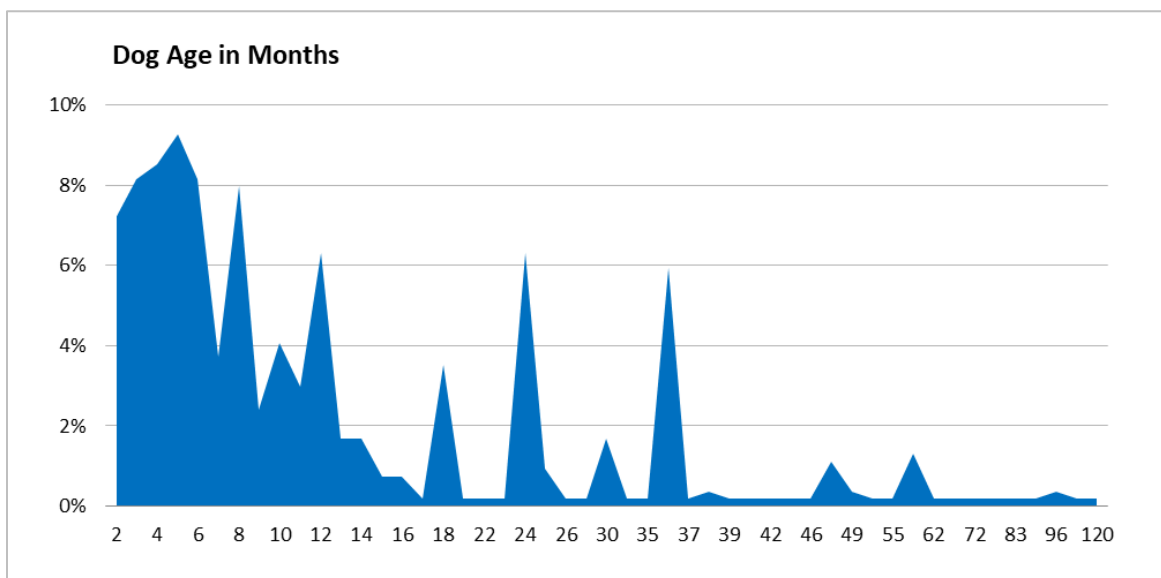
fail to keep a beginner's mind and never miss any opportunities to learn from the best teachers in the field and drill what we're taught

Age of Dogs

Just over half (53%) of dogs in the sample are eight months old or less. Clearly, dog owners see a need to start dogs early in their formal foundational training. This is important since we know that learning windows open and shut at discreet periods in a dog's early development. Critical puppy development occurs between 2-5 months in our training system. We want dogs to be crate-trained, learn basic manners and obedience, and, if they are bird dogs, have had exposure to live game birds (or homing pigeons, if needed) during this phase.

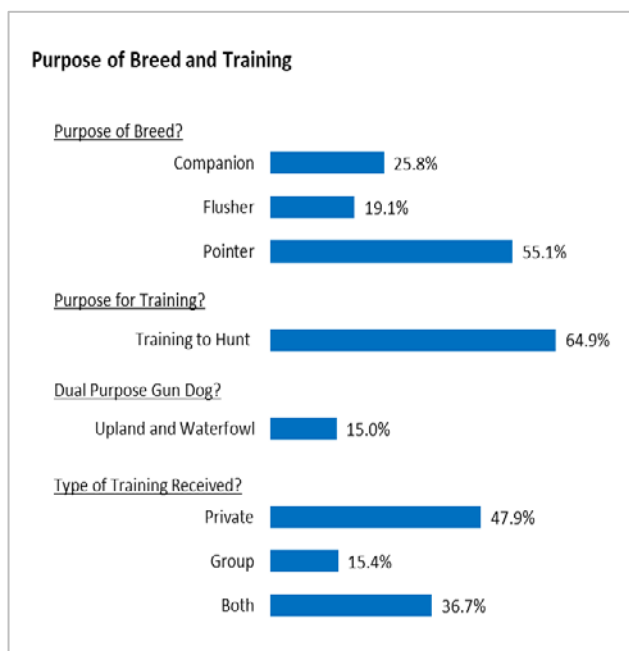
During young dog development—roughly 6-11 months, we are expecting a dog to join up with a pack of older dogs in a stable and environmentally sound manner, and if they are bird dogs, to understand rank prey-drive order and to start showing noticeable signs of hunting—chasing the bird, beginning to show caution around birds or before flushing by pointing or slowing down before pouncing. We also expect the dog to be able to stay still, walk on a loose lead, and recall, either on-lead and perhaps starting to show signs of accomplishing this off-lead or on an e-collar if mentally ready.

Labrador, English Setter, and Brittany are all classified in the "Easy" group, and they make up such a large portion of our sample].



Approximately 5% of the dogs we train are four years or older, while around one-third are between 1 and 3 years old. Dogs in the latter group tend to display the basic personality traits they will carry into adulthood. It's essential to remember that training a dog to be well-mannered, obedient, and less reactive towards humans or other dogs, or to be steady while hunting birds, becomes more challenging as the

dog ages. However, regardless of age, it's not impossible; any dog can be trained. It just means more effort may be required since the most malleable periods for us to shape (or reshape) the mindset of a dog have already passed. From a pro-trainer's perspective, nothing is more professionally satisfying than reducing anxiety, curing resource guarding, or otherwise solving an older dog's behavior problems. But if we are honest, nothing is more promising than taking a call from a potential new client with a 5-6 six-month-old pup. In fact, many pro-trainers limit their clientele to puppies or at least young dogs to ensure the chances of success for both trainer and owner.



Purpose of Breed and Training

The study categorizes dogs based on a general breed assessment into three "Purpose" categories. More than half of the dogs (55%) fall into the Pointer category, where their purpose is to quest, stalk, hold point, and retrieve. About 19% of the dogs are categorized as Flushers, with the purpose of questing, stalking, [sitting], pouncing, and retrieving. The remaining 26% are companion dogs with various non-hunting

purposes, such as sporting, working, herding, or being a mannerly and obedient family pet.

The study also distinguishes between dogs being trained for bird hunting and dogs that receive manners and obedience training at home or our facility. Two-thirds of the dogs attend the training program for hunting purposes. If the dog is attending for hunting, the study measures whether the owner wants to train the dog for both upland and waterfowl work.

Why Breed Matters Less than Being a Proficient Trainer

Contributed by John Neblett

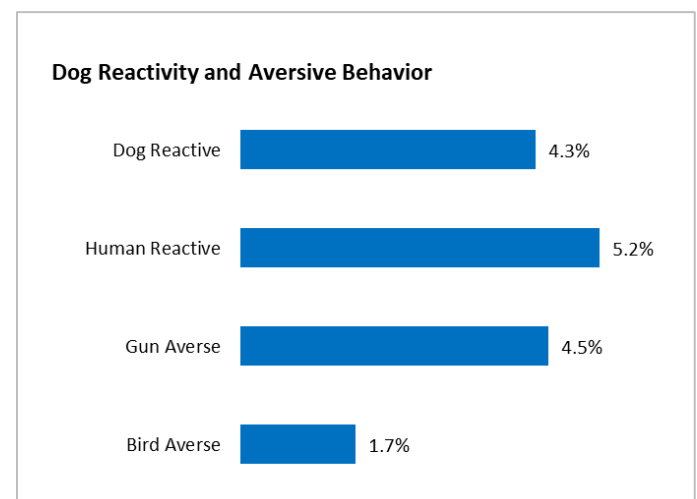
Not too long ago, we were asked to adopt a Goldendoodle puppy from farmers we knew in a small NC town. Although technically a mutt, I thought Lucy was naturally predisposed to retrieving and hunting birds, which piqued my interest in possibly training her as a bird dog. Our trainer was initially skeptical of Lucy's potential due to her mixed breed, but after a few training sessions, we recognized the potential to have a successful bird dog. For several months, Lucy underwent rigorous training, which included obedience, socialization, and exposure to different types of upland cover and game birds. We did our homework as assigned, and patience and persistence paid off as Lucy began successfully hunting wild and preserve birds. My experience is a testament to the power of belief, dedication, and perseverance in bringing out the best in dogs and their owners. It highlights the importance of proper training and guidance in nurturing a dog's natural ability. It shows how the sporting-dog bond can develop between the canine and the owner when all the pieces are combined and executed to achieve a common goal.

Owners can also choose between private and group lessons or may elect to attend both. Almost half (48%) of lessons are held in a private one-on-one style for 1 hour (on occasion, 1.5 hours is scheduled for those traveling long distances to attend or if more than one dog is being trained). Group Lessons range from 1 hour to 1.5 hours. 37% of the sample attended both private and group lessons.

Owners can also elect to board and train their dogs in residence at our facility. Dogs in residence receive no less than one hour of private training daily; some receive more. Each day at a board-and-train stay is counted as one private lesson. The typical stay for in-residence training is 3-4 weeks.

Dog Reactivity and Gun or Bird Aversion

Dogs with any level of growling, barking, lunging, or snarling towards other dogs are considered reactive or perhaps aggressive. This applies even if they haven't bitten other dogs but have shown unhealthy interest or behavior towards them. In our study, only 4.3% of dogs were classified as reactive. This includes dogs



that continued in training and where reactivity was eventually managed. Any mounting behavior may also be considered reactive, as it indicates unacceptable dominant behavior. Reactive dogs may be unable to socialize with other dogs healthily or safely, making it difficult for them to run with a stable pack.

Human reactivity or aggression includes growling, barking, lunging, or snarling at people. We classified 5.2% of dogs as human reactive, also very uncommon. It also includes dogs that exhibit discomfort around people, which may lead to unhealthy reactions. This includes child reactivity, gender reactivity, and so on. A bite is not necessary for a dog to be classified as human-reactive.

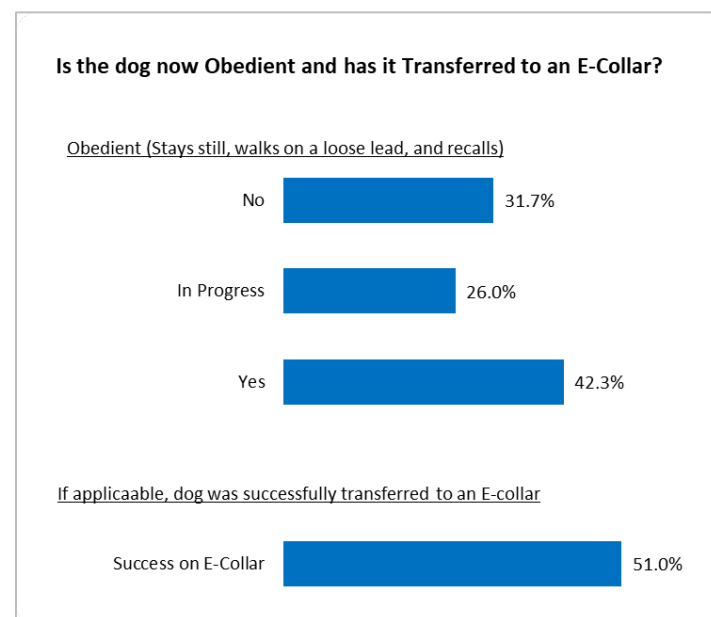
A gun-averse dog is any dog that displays any level of distractibility due to a gunshot. Gun-shy dogs represented 4.5% of dogs in the sample. A bird-averse dog is any dog that shows averting, ignoring, or lack of interest in birds. Only 1.7% of dogs were categorized as bird averse. Both gun and bird aversion occur on a spectrum, with some dogs being highly gun-shy and others showing only subtle signs. Every bird-shy dog was also gun-shy, and one-third of gun-shy dogs were also bird-shy. Companion dogs were excluded from counting when considering both gun and bird aversion.

The reasons for dogs being gun-shy or bird-averse are varied, and the solutions to this problem are handled individually based on each dog's circumstances. However, to quote long-time Pro-Trainer Rick Smith, "To fix gun-shyness, you first need to assess and may need to overcome bird shyness, because most gun-shy dogs are at least somewhat bird averse." This has also been our experience, and it is why we don't address gun-shy issues until we are confident the dog is obsessed with loving the bird.

Obedience and Off-Lead Transference (to E-Collar) as Outcomes

As discussed earlier, our dog training system is human-centered. However, to evaluate a human's ability to train a dog, we assess the dog's behavior based on two clearly defined criteria. Firstly, we observe if the dog can remain motionless (sitting or standing) after being given a designated place, walk calmly at heel without pulling on the leash, and come back when called. These three behaviors are foundational and must be consistently demonstrated to have a successfully trained dog.

As seen in the chart, 68% of dogs either achieve obedience or are currently working towards it; if we just look at bird dogs, 80% achieve obedience. On the other hand, the chart shows that 32% of dogs fail to reach the obedience threshold and are likely to drop out of private or group classes quickly (20% for bird dogs). Our observation suggests that most dogs, in the process of achieving obedience, will eventually succeed if attending lessons and doing homework.



Secondly, if the owner desires, we evaluate the dog's ability to transition from being on a leash to wearing an e-collar. E-collars provide safety for dogs when they're off-lead, even at a distance, which is particularly important for bird dogs. Just over half of dogs that receive training transfer to an e-collar. It is important to note that this is across all dogs in the data set, even those who drop from training. In addition, if we just look at bird dogs, 67% successfully transferred to e-collars.

From Descriptive Analysis to Predicting & Measuring Success

By using Handler Capital® scores and training methods, owners and handlers can identify specific areas for improvement and tailor training methods accordingly. If dog handlers can better understand their dog's mindset using the results of this study, they can leverage this information to build stronger relationships between humans and dogs. The saying "we can't change what we can't measure" is markedly relevant for dog training.

We will not know if we improve a dog's behavior or positively impact a handler's training competence if we cannot measure growth in these areas. Handlers must monitor their dog's training performance using the factors that predict success and determine if the dog is moving forward or slipping backward. Measuring also includes identifying and accurately describing any barriers to progress.

The most crucial consideration in correctly measuring dog training success goes well

beyond describing the breed, age, level of environmental soundness, or the number of training classes attended. It relates to identifying the factors causally associated with successful dog training while all other factors are equal. For example, if we want to train a dog to come when called, we will need to ensure that the location, the distance between the dog and the handler, and the distractions in the environment are the same for each training session. By holding these factors constant, we can accurately measure the dog's progress and determine if our training methods are effective.⁵

Handler Capital® Influence on Successful Training (Achieved Obedience & Transferred to E-Collar)

We must perform two steps to identify the factors about dogs or handlers that determine whether there will be a successful training outcome. First, we add every single factor into a model to predict the outcome we care about (Obedience and E-collar transference). This step shows us all the relevant factors in predicting that outcome. However, we can't use the model in this first step to tell us precisely how important each factor is because we must remove the irrelevant factors. So, as a second step, we remove all the unimportant factors and use just the ones identified in the first step in a revised model. This new analysis shows us the relative impact of each factor on the outcome we care about—successfully training the dog.

⁵ Our analytical approach for determining causation uses widely accepted inferential statistical methods, including multivariate linear regression and ordinal logistic regression modeling. By holding factors constant, we can accurately measure the dog's progress and determine if our training methods are

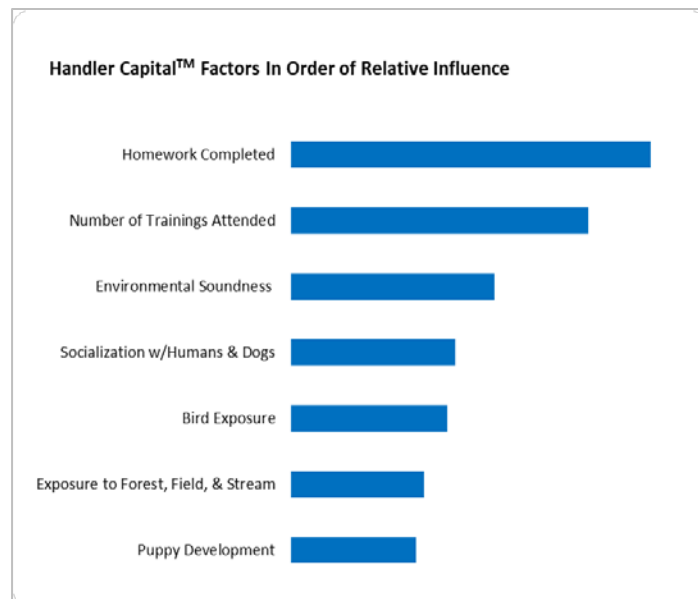
effective. Similarly, in a regression model, holding factors constant allows us to isolate the effect of a specific variable on the outcome, so we can accurately determine its impact.

What factors comprise Handler Capital®, and how influential are each of them?

To measure handler performance, we first see what factors most relate to the competence and strength of the companion or gun dog handler/owner. These factors make up Handler Capital® and are shown in the bar chart in order of their influence. These factors are evident regardless of the dog's breed, age, and gender.

They are also equally influential irrespective of the handler's gender or whether the dog is used for hunting.

The most important factor in determining handler success was whether homework assignments⁶ were completed. For example, did handlers repeat the drills they learned at home after learning how to move dogs around with a slip lead in a private or group lesson?⁷ In addition, handlers who did home assignments were more frequently observed as having added success the next time they attended a lesson.



The next most important factor related to how often they attended training. Not surprisingly, those who attended more lessons were more likely to have higher Handler Capital® scores and, thus, more likely to have successful training outcomes.⁸ In order of influence, the following factors were also important: Environmental Soundness⁹, Socialization with

⁶ Completion of homework is tied to the repetition of dog training tasks anywhere outside of private or group lessons and is assessed across three levels. None = no home work completed or counter-productive activities. Moderate level = An inconsistent and spotty effort was made, with less than 50% of recommendations followed. As recommended = The handle/owner completed tasks as recommended, or went above and beyond recommended levels (many handlers do more than what is recommended, since many dogs learn quickly and are willing and enthusiastic to work harder).

⁷ The slip lead used in all private and group training is called a Command Lead. This lead is central to our dog training; it cements the point-of-contact on the neck when transitioning from the tie-out and before transferring to the e-collar. It was developed by Delmar Smith, for his *Silent Command System*. It got its original name *The Wonder Lead* from another

trainer, Ed Rader, who had commented, "You'll wonder how you ever got along without it."

⁸ The number of training sessions attended is assessed as low, moderate, or frequent. In order, that equates to attending 2 or fewer private lessons (or dropped from group), 3 to 6 private sessions (attending some group classes), or 7 or more lessons (or who came to most or all group sessions). A dog/handler team that attends 7 or more training sessions is in training for 2 or more months and is much more likely to have a positive training outcome.

⁹ Environmental Soundness was assessed across three levels. Very little = very little exposure to different or novel environments, situations, distractions, noises, children, other dogs. Car rides are often negative associations (to vet or groomer, etc.). There may be no crate training or kenneling familiarity, and dog is often timid or nervous with sudden sounds or movements while on a stake-out or on the tie-out with other dogs. Moderate =

Humans and Dogs¹⁰, Bird Exposure¹¹, Exposure to Forest, Field, and Stream,¹² and Puppy Development¹³. If we only look at bird-dog training, the model remains similar except for one notable change: Bird Exposure moves up from ranked 5th to ranked 3rd.

Dog Breeds and Training Success

It is not uncommon for pro-trainers to be asked what breed of dog a prospective dog owner

somewhat sound, for example, the dog is walked (or pulls while walking) only on the same route each day and is kept in quiet, calm, and routine environments. There is infrequent off-lead movement, few car rides uncrated/crated, limited exposure to different environments, situations, distractions, other dogs, and diverse people. Frequent = Frequent and structured activities to expose dog to varied and novel environmental stimuli. Puppies move around freely and get healthy mentorship/corrections from older dogs to learn rank prey drive order. Frequent exposure to different environments, diverse human populations/situations, heavy distractions, other dogs, loud or unfamiliar noises, blank guns or shotgun shot. Learned or learning “on/off” switch on the tie-out, tailgate, and at home.

¹⁰ Socialization with humans or dogs includes: None to little = there is little to no external socialization with humans or dogs, movement or contact is largely limited to outdoor kennels or in-house with humans and dogs. There may be little or no gender, racial, or age diversity among humans or with non-household dogs/animals. Medium = there is some external socialization with humans and other dogs outside the home. There is some gender, racial, or age diversity in human contact with non-household dogs/animals. Frequent = Intentional exposure to other dogs, meeting diverse humans, frequent retail or dog friendly public places (dog park, malls, outdoor retail stores). Adequately hunts or runs with other dogs/working in a pack. Regular attendance at group training gets coded at this level.

¹¹ Bird exposure was assessed across three levels for gun dogs only. No gamebirds = No live gamebird contact. Moderate = exposure with few (1-3) gamebirds; may include a 1-2 times hunting as a

should purchase. Most trainers agree that the breed should match your lifestyle and personality when choosing a dog. For example, a sporting breed may be a good fit if you enjoy outdoor activities such as hunting, hiking, or running. However, these breeds require a lot of physical and mental exercise and can end up causing problems if their needs are unmet. On the other hand, if one has a more laid-back lifestyle, a breed with lower energy levels may be a better fit.

puppy or young dog with bird contact, or limited experience running with older dogs with gamebird contact. Frequent = contact with more than just a few gamebirds during hunting, birds may have been shot for warm gamebirds contact, pups may experience chasing launched or thrown homing pigeons, with blank guns.

¹² Assessed for gun dogs only across three levels. Never = No exposure to forest, field, and stream (FFS), or large open outdoor spaces. Some = limited exposure to FFS, or FFS exposure with no structured questing/hunting focus, dog attached to lead/check cord, more focus on recall than quartering or running in open spaces (not promoting independence). Intentional exposure = intentional and structured exposure to quest and hunt in large areas of FFS; no leads, little focus on recall, independent running and roaming with another dog or pack.

¹³ Puppy development is assessed on three levels. Older dogs that were rescued from shelters or from foster situations were frequently coded at the lower levels. None = little or no puppy development. Moderate = some exposure to birds (if gun dog), other dogs, adults and children, minimum amount of appropriate stimuli introduced at early ages (noise, tactile stimulation, and play). Some limited exploration/free run, inconsistent restriction or crate training. Frequent = frequent and intentional puppy development includes everything above moderate, frequent FFS exposure, all sensory perceptions have been tested and exercised, tie-out experience (teathering), unfamiliar noises and physical interruptions, water introduction, retail visits, gun introduction, if applicable.

But we strongly feel that all dogs, regardless of group (sporting, working, toy, etc.), need something to do, a job, to maintain a stable and predictable mindset when with their owners or when they encounter other dogs and people. Young dogs that are calm and pleasant in the house have been worked and are tired from mental or physical exertion. They also exhibit fewer neurotic traits, like excessive barking, chewing, jumping, nipping, marking, or most other annoying behaviors. Dogs traditionally bred for hunting purposes, for example, a Labrador, English Setter, Brittany, or GSP, especially if from high prey drive lines, if not hunted, are going to need some level of mental exhaustion as a replacement for a lack of questing, running, chasing, and pouncing.

One of the most unexpected findings from our data analysis is that there is no significant relationship between any specific dog breed and successful training outcomes. This suggests that competent handlers are more likely to be successful regardless of the breed they own, and conversely, less competent handlers are less likely to end up with a well-trained dog, regardless of the breed they choose.¹⁴

It's Never Too Late to Start—And a Bonus to Excel!
Contributed by Jennifer Cirincione

I started with formal private and group training to develop a good obedience foundation for my female Springer Spaniel puppy, Perla. I initially had no plan to hunt but wanted more discipline than what less demanding "pet store" training systems offered. I also wanted to learn how to use an e-collar to move my dogs around off-lead securely. Training went well; eventually, a bird was introduced, and she loved it. That set a fire in me, and I decided to bring my then five-year-old male Springer Spaniel, Gus, to training to see how he would do. He was

instantly a natural and just needed some fine-tuning. They both transitioned to an E-collar exceptionally well and can now be trusted entirely off-leash. I was also already competing in Dock Dogs with Gus, and I introduced Perla to the sport. She caught on nicely, and there's no doubt all the work to stay steady helped with her "sit-stay" on the dock and the many distractions accompanying the sport. Almost five years later, we hunt regularly, and both dogs excel at both sports.

The Probability of Becoming a Successful Handler

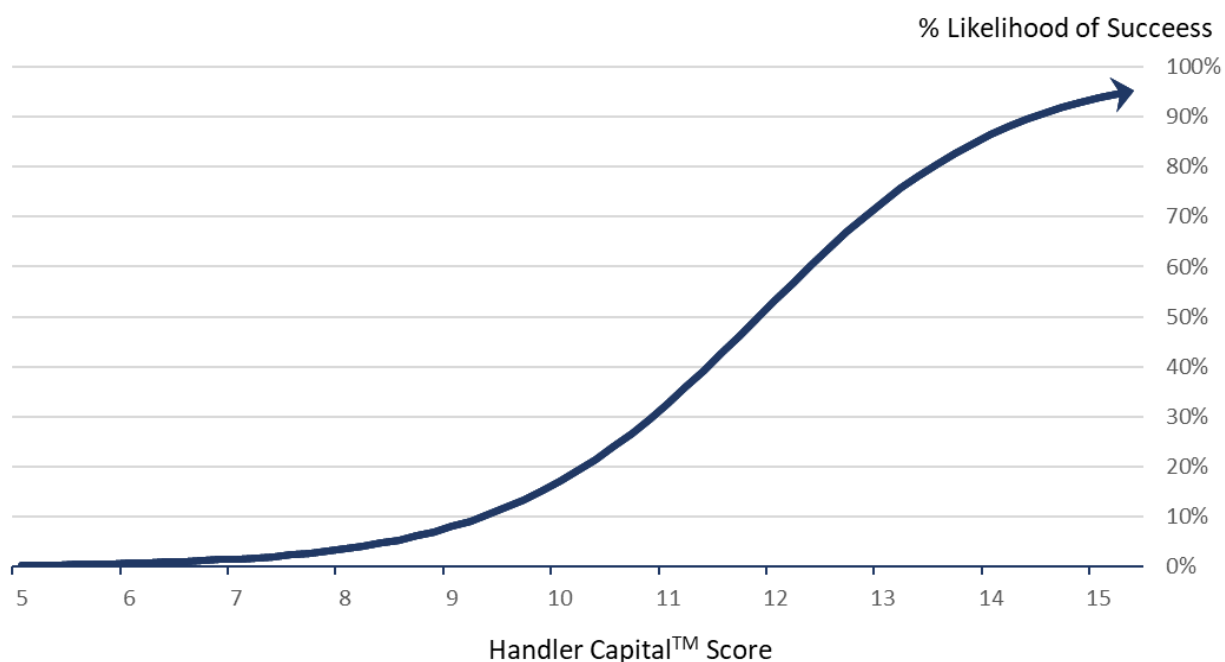
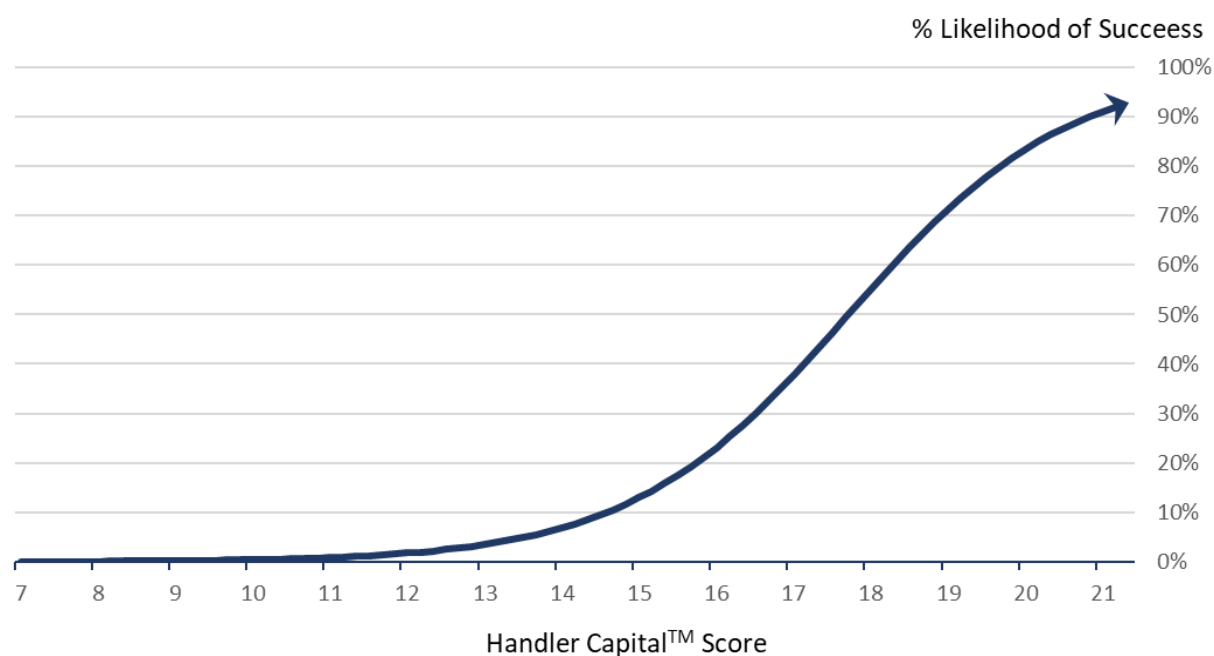
Our findings are more useful if we translate our results into a format that allows trainers (both professional and amateur) to understand the probability of success directly based on the Handler Capital® score. For example, the graphic below shows that someone training a non-hunting/companion dog who receives a Handler Capital® score of 13 out of 15, has a roughly 75% chance of successfully training their dog to be obedient.

Likewise, we can predict the probability of successfully training a bird dog (Obedience and E-collar transference) using the Handler Capital® score. For example, the second trend line shows that if one receives a Handler Capital® score of 17 out of 21, they have a roughly 35% chance of successfully training their bird dog to be obedient and to transfer to an e-collar.

However, adding two more points to obtain a total score of 19 increases the chance of success to 70%, and success rates jump to 85% when a Handler Capital® score of 20 is obtained.

¹⁴ The one exception in our data set was the Wirehaired Pointing Griffon, with a very subtle but still significant propensity to have a successful training outcome regardless of the Handler Capital® score (p=.063). This suggests that genetics may help

push Griffons toward success, even if some handlers may be less than ideal trainers. Again, the relationship was very slight, but it did show up, nonetheless.

What is the Probability of Successfully Training a Non-Hunting/Companion Dog?**What is the Probability of Successfully Training a Hunting Dog?**

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine if the training components comprising Handler Capital® are valid and, if so, can they help predict if handlers/owners will successfully train their dogs. We found that they are important and they outweigh practically all other factors examined, such as breed, the purpose of training (companion vs. gun dog), the dog's age, or the handler's gender. Although some of these factors may be correlated with dog training success, those correlations disappear when we examine handlers with similar Handler Capital® Scores.

The research does not show that the training methods used for this cohort of dogs are better or worse than other training methods or approaches. It also does not indicate the best way to measure success or failure in dog training. The research does show that if you attend formal training, do your homework, adequately socialize your dog with people and other dogs, expose your dog to novel environmental stimuli, and engage your dog in puppy development, you have a much greater likelihood of succeeding with your rescued or purpose-bred dog. In this context, succeeding means having a reliably obedient dog that can participate in sporting, leisure, or other outdoor activities in a mannerly way.

NK9Training Guiding Principles

Handler Capital® is an empirically based approach to measuring a handler's ability to give their dog the training opportunities needed to be a capable companion, sporting, or hunting dog. The factors proven to be statistically relevant in predicting Handler Capital® are the outcome of proprietary predictive analytics. *For hunting dogs*, Handler Capital® = Environmental Soundness + Bird Exposure + Socialization + Exposure to Field, Forest, and Stream + Homework Completed + Puppy Development + Number of training sessions attended. *For companion dogs*, handler Capital® = Number of training sessions attended + Environmental Soundness + Socialization + Homework Completed + Puppy Development.

NK9Training methods are grounded in these principles:

Handler-Centric—We trust a dog's natural ability to be trained effectively through capable mentorship. Therefore, a dog's success or failure is influenced most heavily by the handler's demonstrated leadership, skill level, diligence, and consistency. A dog training problem is almost always a handler problem—not a dog problem. To fix the dog, we train the handler.

Consistency—We urge complete consistency from handlers when working their dogs. Consistency relates to all tasks, drills, and homework that require increasing or loosening restrictions. It includes reliable "touch" and timing, which means applying predictable cues or corrections.

Neutrality – We treat all dogs as if they are capable. Dogs are viewed neutrally regardless of their past experiences; few external factors are valid excuses for failed learning. We require the handler to honestly assess the dog's obedience and environmental soundness

status. No weight is given to what one may feel or wish upon the dog for any human-defined love or need (anthropomorphism is strongly discouraged).

Proportionality—The frequency of cues and behavioral corrections is proportionate to how a dog responds and progresses. Training pressure is applied at the lowest level possible to achieve the desired response or to change behavior. As distractions increase, the amount of training pressure increases proportionally. Training pressure is never more than necessary when a dog is trying to comply with a training request. Moreover, a dog that is trying but failing will not receive a correction, since failure is a natural component of animal learning advancement.