

## **“Smile for the Good Dogs”**

I hemmed and hawed a bit as I searched for interesting dog training tips to discuss this month. I reflected on my busy training day, traveling to my client's homes to train dog with their owners: a clumber spaniel for whistle commands and bird work at 10am; a seven month old yellow lab puppy at 1pm for manners and obedience; a two year old happy-go-lucky obnoxious lab for more obedience at 2pm; and finally a bright-eyed, intelligent three year old standard poodle for electric collar training at 3:30pm.

Different dogs and different training goals, yet I had success with each one. The dogs had good eye contact, enthusiasm, and cooperation. I was truly the dog's leader, drilling them through a series of commands with patience, persistence, and repetition. How much fun could it possibly be to sit, heel, stay, come or lay down 30 to 50 times in the course of one hour? How about when I brought out another dog to serve as a distraction while I enforced control and respect with the lesson dog? However, if you were able to watch the dog in training, you would see that quick timing, praise, and body language command the dog's undivided attention. These dogs stare at me with ears forward, tails wagging, and an attitude that asks, “What can I do to please you?”

For the past two years I have been studying a method of natural horsemanship to train my horse. This method simulates how horses communicate with each other and is based on a series of games that horses play with one another. It utilizes a series of four warning phases followed by an instantaneous reward upon achieving the desired behavior. That reward- a big smile! I quickly saw how effective this method worked with horses, and I began to incorporate these techniques into my dog training program. The results have been outstanding!

I enforce a series of correction phases with either a choke chain and leash or an electric collar and leash. Upon asking a command, if the dog does not respond right away, I begin a light jerk on the choke chain or a #1 momentary buzz with the electric collar. If the dog refuses, I increase my intensity or correction, while at the same time projecting phases of body language. My happy phase is standing tall and relaxed with a big smile. I may even throw my arms up in the air and clap my hands with exuberance.

If the dog refuses my command, I begin the series of body language phases that serve to intimidate the dog. My phases include subtle changes: clenched fists, furrowed eye brow, a slight bend at the waist, a finger pointed

at the dog, stomping my feet, and even charging towards the dog with stomping feet. As soon as the dog attempts to comply with my initial commands, I go back to my smiling happy phase in a flash. This “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” takes practice to master, as you must learn to exude positive and negative energy and be able to go from one extreme to the other in an instant.

To be fair to the dogs, you should begin this training while the dog is leashed and preferably on a choke chain. When confined on the leash, the dog will never have the opportunity to retreat or run off if he is distracted, confused, or intimidated.

Begin with a simple task such as sit. Command your dog to “sit” then begin with your phases until he complies. Be fair and start with gentle pressure. Continue to repeat the commands verbally and apply phases with the leash pressure (tug the dog’s neck up as you slightly pinch at the base of his tail to get his rear to go down.) Remember to quickly quit all pressure and smile as soon as he begins to comply.

This gets monotonous pretty fast, so next make a game of it. Walk briskly, then slowly, skip, run, and stop quickly between all your changes in gait to enforce the sit command. Praise and smile when he cooperates, glare at him with intensity when he refuses. With each new command, begin to use the phases to gain quicker responses, overcome distractions, and later gain control off leash.

To intimidate the off leash dog, step towards him and begin those negative attitude phases. Quickly step backwards with smiles and gusto to reward cooperation!

This training technique is sure to be fun and rewarding for both dog and owner. If you are at all skeptical about this theory, begin observing the subtle cues that dogs show each other when interacting. Scruff up on the neck, topline, quivering lip, ear poses, tail poses, gait changes, and overall body carriage show exactly how secure or insecure your dog is feeling. Begin to execute your own cues with body language, and you will be amazed with the new level of communication- and your dog will love you for it!