

Tips to Help Make Dog Training Easier

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- **Socialize your puppy.**

Don't just get a pup and put them in a kennel or put them in a stall in a barn and expect them to come out a year later and have someone be able to train your dog. Let a puppy be a puppy. Lots of contact with the family, and in my personal opinion, there is nothing better than having a puppy grow up with kids.

- **Teach your dog the “basics” early on.**

Teaching the “basics” means spending time with your pup. Teach your puppy it's name. Teach it to come when called. Teach what NO means along with ‘down’ and ‘stay’. Those are basic things that if you don't teach, your trainer is going to have to address at a cost to you. It is always more fun to start with a well-behaved dog.

- **Don't let a young dog run loose.**

I know of a lot of people just let their dogs run loose. This is not acceptable for a working dog. The number one reason of mortality for working dogs is being run over by a vehicle. That speaks for itself. I don't know how often someone will bring in their young dog, we put it on the stock and it looks like it is afraid of the stock or it looks back at the owner afraid to go to the stock. Almost always you find out that the dog was out running loose and was chasing the horses, cattle, sheep or even chasing cars and was disciplined for doing that. That translates into punishment for working. To an untrained dog, what might be chasing to you is working to the dog. Many of these dogs, when you get them on the stock and encourage them, will work again but many will not reach their full potential. This is a mistake that can easily be avoided by putting the young dog in a kennel and not letting these problems occur. But you are going to say, “Heck, I don't want my young dog in a kennel all the time—but I also don't want them chasing after the horses or running down the lane after a car.” That is true, but the way to stop them is to have control of your dog and once you start getting your dog broke, you will be able to have a ‘down’ and whatever it is chasing, you will be able to ‘down’ it, stop it and call it back to you. That is the best way of controlling the situation.

- **Introducing your dog to stock.**

When you go in to introduce your dog to stock, make it a really good, fun experience for the dog. Use dog broke stock. Don't let your dog get driven into the ground by the stock that is not broke or too spoiled. Help your young dog. Use your voice to praise him. Get your dog excited about the stock. I don't think there is anything a dog can do wrong the first time you take it to stock. Regardless of what happens, the first time a young dog goes to stock, I am not disappointed. It's not the way to start....it's the way they finish that counts. For young dogs, keep the training sessions short. 10 minutes or less at two times a day is much better than once a day for 20 to 30 minutes.

- **Timing is everything.**

Ultimately, for quick results training dogs, you need to give correction when the dog is thinking about doing something wrong...not after it is done. Stop thinking like a human and start thinking like a dog. When you start thinking like your dog, training will be easier for you and your dog.

- **Dogs are creatures of habit.**

If a dog does something wrong and does it once, it is no big deal. But if it is allowed to do it over and over again, it becomes a bad habit. Anytime a dog does something 15 or 20 times....it has become a habit. The good news is that if it does something right 15 or 20 times, it becomes a good habit. The lesson to be learned here is—don't let them do it wrong in the first place because it is a habit you are going to have to change. It takes a long time to make a bad habit into a good one. If your dog did something wrong once, you are going to have to do it again 5 or 6 times correctly before you are back to where you started when he did it wrong just that one time. When training your pup, you need to make use of every opportunity for good habits.

- **Shorten back up.**

'Shorten back up' may be something you already know. That is, no matter where you are in training—whether it is a very young puppy learning to come to you or you are working on your dogs 'outrun' or just trying to get your dog to stop—if you are having difficulty with these steps, you need to get closer to the dog...basically, shorten things up. Again, don't let your pup get the opportunity to do something wrong. Don't expect your puppy to come when he is in hot pursuit of the neighborhood cat. Instead, get into a control situation, where you are fairly close, where you know he is going to obey and set it up where you can say "That will do" and he will come to you. If you are having 'outrun' trouble, don't try to fix it at 200 or 300 yards. Fix it at 75 yards or 50 yards and then slowly make your 'outrun' longer and longer.

If you have failure...back it up. Do half the distance again and work your way back out. This is the golden rule of dog training. Whenever you are in trouble—just cut everything in half. Get control and slowly work your way out again.

- **A carrot and a stick.**

It is really simple. Your dog needs to know when he has been good or bad. Dogs can't really understand what we are saying but they can understand the inflection in our voice. In other words, when your dog is doing something good, you need to almost "sing" with praise. "Good Boy!" And when your dog is doing something bad that you don't want him to do, you need to be able to get loud, to growl, like "what are you doing?" or "no!". People that have a monotone voice make poor dog trainers. Generally, I think men need to work on their voice giving praise and I think women need to practice their growling, being loud and making their voices deeper.

- **The 'down'.**

I'll teach the 'down' to a dog when he is off of stock, and make the dog lie down. But all the 'down' actually means is stop. That is all it means. It doesn't mean lie on your belly. Most dogs even when you teach them 'down', then you go to the stock, they forget all about it anyway. I have found the best way actually to teach the 'stop' is to give that command to the dog when he pulls up on the balance point. When you are in a small area, you can use your body to block the dog and when you do that and the dog comes to a 'stop'...you just tell them to "lie down" and this way most dogs learn to stop on their feet. I can't stress how important a 'stop' is on your dog. If you can stop a dog anytime, you can stop unwanted behavior. If you have a young dog that will stop when you tell it to, already you have a useful dog around your ranch.

- **Don't nag at the dog.**

If you find yourself giving the command over and over again and the dog not changing his behavior (for example, if you are yelling "comeby, comeby" and the dog continues going straight)—you've got a problem. What you are actually teaching the dog to do is to disobey you. I actually learned this principle from my wife and my kid. My wife would tell my kid to do something about five times. The kid got to know that on the sixth time he was gonna get disciplined ! Plus, he would usually take the full five times before he would change what he was doing. Typically, I will give a command twice. I'll take time to stop and enforce the command so the dog is listening to me. Again, if you find yourself giving the same command over and over again, get into a small area, a round pen or up against a fence where you can enforce your commands both with your voice and with your body language.

- **Work on good habits only.**

I know some ranchers that will run a young dog with an older dog expecting the young dog to pick up on the job. My opinion is that they hardly ever learn any of the good habits of the old dog—and most generally they develop their own bad ones. When you are doing a lot of hollering at your young dog to change the unwanted behavior, you need to understand that your old dog is actually hearing that correction too and thinking it is intended for him. I don't doubt that you can eventually train dogs this way but it is the slow way to do it and definitely not the best method.

- **Be consistent.**

Give the command in a calm voice, not too loud....just loud enough for the dog to hear you. If he doesn't obey, give the correction in a loud voice—then go back to giving the command again and drop back down to the normal voice. Again, whatever it takes to get the job done. If you find yourself hollering all the time, your training area is in trouble. Get back into a smaller area and get things in control again.

- **Know when to quit.**

Always leave with your dog when the dog is still wanting to do more. If you are working your dog and all of a sudden it leaves the stock to go get water or goes to lie down in the shade, understand you had a monumental failure. Understand it is YOUR failure....not the dogs. Some dogs can take more work than others. And you can actually train a dog so that it won't work at all or be alert of the signs that your dog has had enough training. It will start looking away from the stock, running too wide or you find yourself calling it back onto the stock. Call it back on the stock, get it excited one last time and then quit when you want to quit.....not when the dog does.

- **Don't sour your dog.**

There is an old saying "dogs don't get any better in Kennels" but actually sometimes they do. If things are going bad and particularly if you don't know what to do about fixing it, consider putting the dog up for a week or maybe even two weeks. This may be a positive approach especially if your dog is starting to 'turn off' or you've got a dog that is starting to do something that you think might be a problem in the future. When you take it back out again, it may forget that unwanted behavior and sometimes the break will do you both good.

- **One at a time.**

Teach one or two things at a time. What we mean here is, if you are working on your dog to get back, then basically work on the get back. It doesn't mean that you can't tell your dog to lie down or work more on balancing. It just means what your emphasis is on. Put your emphasis on one or two things—don't try to teach eight things at once. Basically teach one thing and get it right before going on to something else. You will be done faster than trying to teach a bunch of things at once.

- **Top dog.**

You are the top dog in your kennel. Whether you have one dog or twenty—remember that you are top dog. You are 'number 1' in the pecking order. And you, above all else, are to be respected. All dogs in the kennel have a pecking order. Dog fights can be very expensive and physically damaging to the dogs and financially to you. And unhappy dogs don't work up to their full potential. Dogs that growl or show their teeth to another dog or walk around with their hair up and their tail high are really just a dog fight looking for a place to happen. You must make it perfectly clear to the dog that is exhibiting this kind of behavior that you don't allow it.

- **Magic and mystery.**

There ain't no such thing as a magic wand that we can wave over a problem and it will change just like that. If you are having troubles...just back up. Get in a smaller pen and let your dog know how important it is to stop when you tell them to stop, and where you tell them to stop. Use your body and the pressure of the fence to be able to help stop your dog. It is always easier to start with these basic training principles—like your dog stopping when you tell it to—than it is to go back and fix a problem later when a dog has been allowed to develop a bad habit such as not stopping at all or taking 5 or 6 steps after you tell him to stop. There is not a dog that can't be stopped. I don't care how hard you think your dog is. If you are consistent and your dog believes you can make him stop....he will.