

Things to know:

Management vs. training: What is the most practical answer for you and your family? Do you want to spend time training or do you simply want the behavior to stop. We all lead busy lives and even though we have the best of intentions often training our dogs takes a back seat to just trying to muddle through our daily responsibilities.

Sometimes using a tool to manage your dog's behavior is the most expeditious way to accomplish your goals. Have a dog that pulls on leash? Use a gentle leader or EZ Walk harness. Does your dog jump on people when he greets them at the door? Have a leash handy and put it on your jumpy pooch when guests arrive so that he cannot make contact. Begging at the dinner table? Tether or crate the dog until your meal is over. Honestly assess how much time you are willing to put into your dog's training.

Remember that there is nothing wrong in admitting that the chances are good that you will not be spending much time engaged with training your dog. While management doesn't teach the dog not to pull, jump or beg; it can often mitigate the problem.

If however you do decide that you want to put the time and effort into training your dog here are a few things to remember.

1. Motivate: You have to be able to motivate your dog. If your dog isn't motivated to learn, no learning will take place. Although we would like to believe that we are the center of our dogs' universe, often we are not. You have to use the right kind of reward to motivate the animal. Figure out what your dog will work for in each particular training situation. Switch to pieces of cheese or hot dogs if you have been using kibble or try a squeaky toy. Humans are not much different in this regard; try getting your child to clean their room for a piece of hot dog. Good luck with that!
2. Rewards can be many things: Food, touch and even play. The most important thing to remember is that you should see an increase in the desired behavior if it is being rewarded. If you don't, whatever you are using to reward the dog, while pleasant, is not rewarding enough.
3. Premack Principal or Grandma's Law: Eat your vegetables before you get your desert. Using a higher probability behavior to reward a lower probability behavior; for example, asking your dog for a sit and then allowing him to rush off to play with his doggie friends.

4. Dogs (and humans) work for two reasons; to get things and to avoid things. Teach your dog that their behavior has consequences. Reward good behavior and punish (with time outs) inappropriate behavior.
5. Dogs are contextual learners: Dogs don't grasp concepts like we do. If a dog learns to sit in the living room, often that behavior won't translate to sitting outdoors. Usually it takes training the dog in three different venues before the dog begins to understand "oh, sit means sit no matter where I am asked to do it". This is called generalization. Before you arrive at "my dog is doing it because he's stubborn, or dominant, or....." ask yourself if you have taken the time to teach the dog to perform in that venue.
6. When your dog is learning a new skill, practice as often as you can. Short training sessions with breaks in between are best. If you were learning to ski, you wouldn't expect to be any good at it if you only went twice during ski season.
7. Continuous vs. Variable schedules of Reinforcement: When teaching a new skill you must reward every time. This is called a continuous schedule of reinforcement. Once you have reliability (80% of the time) switch to rewarding the dog periodically and vary what it is that you are using as a reward. For example, the first time the dog gets a piece of kibble, the fifth time he gets 5 pieces of roast beef. If you do this, the dog will not be able to predict when the reward will happen so he will continue to work in the hopes that the next time could be the time. This is the same principle that keeps those gamblers sitting at the slot machines; they simply don't know when the payoff will happen and how much it will be.
8. Set your dog up to be successful: For example, if your dog is learning to come when called, don't allow him off leash and expect to have any success. There are simply too many distractions. Work with him on a leash and then a long line (20-30 foot leash) first. If you find that your dog is having difficulty, make it easier. If you are trying to get the dog to come to you with other dogs around and he isn't, move him farther away. Remember the closer the distraction is the more difficult it will be for the dog to respond.
9. Set yourself up to be successful. Even those with the best of intentions can't train for long periods of time. Frequent short training sessions are best but do as much as you can do. Manage behavior in between sessions. Use a head halter or no pull harness in between leash work training sessions. Lastly, try to work training your dog into your routine; for example, work on a down stay while watching t.v.

10. Don't repeat commands: Since dogs don't speak English, they learn to recognize words that have significance to them and filter out the rest. My dogs recognize and respond to the words cookie, Frisbee, ball, go to the park, dinner and breakfast to name a few. If you nag your dog, you run the risk of teaching them to tune you out. If you must repeat a command; count to five in between. "Sit" (one, two, three, four, five)..."sit". See how hard that is! Additionally, make sure that everyone in the family is using the same commands for behavior. If one family member is using a hand signal and the word "down" and another is using no hand signal and telling the dog to "lie down" you can imagine how confusing that might be.

11. Problem behaviors: Manage and teach an incompatible behavior. No is not a complete sentence. Best way to teach a dog not to do something is to teach them to do something else. Instead of saying I don't want my dog to do this, start to think in terms of what you would like your dog to do. For example, instead of jumping on house guests wouldn't it be nice if the dog sat when he greeted people coming into the house?

To teach the dog to do this you must set him up to be successful as was discussed earlier. Have him on a leash so that he cannot make contact with people when they approach and simultaneously reward for sitting. If you are consistent about doing this, you will get a dog who learns that sitting is more rewarding than jumping and consequently sitting when new people arrive will become his default behavior.

12. Be proactive rather than reactive: If you have a dog that jumps on people and you know it, have the dog managed so that he cannot ever have the opportunity to practice jumping. A lot of people ask me how to teach the dog to get off of a person once the dog has made contact. Playing the devils advocate I ask them why the dog is able to make contact in the first place. Jumping is a very reinforcing behavior. It is a way to meet and greet. If the dog wants your attention, jumping on you is a surefire way to do it. If it's a puppy or small dog, we doubly reinforce the behavior by cooing at them when they have their paws up. If it's a larger dog and it's not so cute, we still reinforce the behavior by turning our attention to the dog even if it's just to utter a disgusted "get down". Don't allow it to happen in the first place.

13. All behavior that isn't rewarded will extinguish. If you can prevent problem behaviors from being rewarded, you should see the problem behavior disappear, this is called extinction. A word of caution: before behavior extinguishes, it will get worse. This is called an extinction burst. Here is an example of extinction and an extinction burst. A young dog has learned to bark at the door to get let out. Initially this behavior seemed like a good idea because it solved the problem of figuring out when the dog

needed to go out and potty. The problem was that the dog began to spend all of the time at the door. He barked when he wanted to go outside to potty, he barked when he saw a squirrel and he barked if he heard a noise and he wanted to investigate. The dogs' owners decided that they no longer wanted the barking at the door so that day they stopped letting the dog out when he barked. The first few times the dog went to the door, he let out a few woofs to let his owners know it was time for them to open the door to let him out. When no one came to open the door he let out a few more woofs. Still no one appeared to let him out so he began to bark furiously. Over time the barking began to diminish until finally, exhausted, the dog fell asleep at the door. It was then that his owners let him out. This scene repeated itself over the course of the next couple of days but each time the dog spent less time barking and finally on day three he was waiting quietly at the door to be let outside.