



Training articles

My Dog Knows That

From your dogs point of view

"My dog knows that"

So you think you teach your dog something and then he always does it on command? Let me introduce you to the real world.

Teaching a behavior is an important first step... but there actually is no "last step". Dogs (and everyone else) need a maintenance plan to maintain behaviors between reinforcement... as do you. (How long will you work at a job without pay? is there a limit?) Each dog has a limit of unreinforced behaviors. We see them reach that limit in the obedience ring all the time. The easy one is an automatic sit. Dog does it every time in practice but step in the ring and his "sitter" is broken. Why? because your reinforcement pattern/ maintenance plan isn't matched up to your dogs needs. So I can't give you one pattern that will work for every dog. But the better you are at being random

and unpredictable is the first step. Then slowly having more and more distance (steps) between reinforcements. And a bonus (several treats or a beloved toy toss) at the end.

To maintain your hard work of training the behavior, you will need a plan. Reinforcement must be distributed throughout the behavior. It should be random and unpredictable. But most of all it should be reinforcing to the dog.

Something as simple as the recall can be broken down in to multiple points of reinforcement. Each part reinforced sometimes. There is the "wait", The quick response to the call, the front with a straight sit, and the quick finish again with a straight sit. I think I counted 6 parts to recall that you could reinforce. Try it!

In Linda Ganterts recent attention class, she suggested, once trained, never reinforce the first of a series. Like the automatic sit. You expect 5 or 6 of them during a class (trial or match) so in practice, never feed the first one and your dog will work for the future reinforcement. Great hint!

Happy Heeling -Submitted by Lynn Millar

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