

House Rules

Many of us live with dogs in our homes. In fact, most of our dogs probably spend more time in the house than in the training fields, bird coverts and kennel combined. In the hunting arena a dog is expected to run and quest with a high energy level. However, while serving as a companion in the home, a different set of behaviors is acceptable—and expected.

In the most basic example, when a dog is in the field it is OK for it to urinate wherever it pleases. The same freedom is not allowed in the home. There are a host

of other unacceptable behaviors that you're probably familiar with, as dogs do not have a high sense of human social protocol and political correctness. A dog that charges to the door barking or growling when the doorbell rings probably is not endearing itself to its owner. By the same token, a dog that jumps up on people or is obsessed with sniffing house-guests can be embarrassing to owners—and irritating to the recipients of the greeting. A dog's insistent begging at the dinner table does not add to the ambiance of a nice meal.

Many dog owners want areas of their homes to be off-limits to their dogs. The kitchen, for example, may become a no-trespassing zone to prevent begging for food. Perhaps a dog is not allowed to get up on a bed or other pieces of furniture. It is easier to train a dog not to shred socks than to train a 6-year-old child to pick up after himself each and every time. And it is an expensive trip to the vet if your dog ingests a chunk of carpet.

A dog that lives in the house needs in-



Training dogs for acceptable behavior around the house can have benefits in the field. The "rope trick" is first used to create boundaries indoors and then can be applied anywhere.

struction in the House Rules. The dog is not born knowing human expectations about drinking from the toilet or chewing furniture. It must be trained.

Before suggesting some how-to tips for preventing unwanted behaviors and encouraging desired ones, I want to review a few basics. A primary training building block is remembering that a dog should never be corrected or rewarded if it does not know why it is being corrected or rewarded. The dog must understand exactly which behavior earned it the particular treatment in order for the reinforcement to work. The trainer must convey to the dog in simple terms which behavior (the cause) resulted in the reward or correction (the effect).

In many articles I have referred to the 1.3-second rule of association. Military canine studies have demonstrated that a dog correctly forms an intended cause-and-effect association much quicker when the effect follows the cause within 1.3 seconds. A longer delay between the cause and effect inhibits the dog

from making the association. (By the way, the studies also have shown that an old dog *can* learn new tricks.) I wish to restate the 1.3-second rule with a slight variation. It is the specific cause, or behavior, that must be identified to the dog in the 1.3-second time frame. If this is done, the positive or negative consequences may follow after a much longer duration and still reinforce the association.

For example: A dog puts its paws on the kitchen table. At the exact moment the paws are on the table, the owner says, "No!" The "No!" sends a clear message

that what the dog is doing at that exact moment is going to warrant correction. The *actual correction* does not have to follow within 1.3 seconds of the verbal identification of the behavior. For practical purposes, however, I would recommend that the effect follow within 30 seconds. This will result in the cause still being identifiable by the dog. By saying, "No!" the trainer has sent a clear and concise identifier to the dog. If the trainer had said, "No!" after the dog returned all four paws to the floor, the dog would not have been able to make the association that putting its paws on the table was the cause of the correction.

Another key is that there needs to be a delay between the time the dog receives the identifier (in this case the verbal reprimand) and the actual correction or reinforcement. The identifier cannot occur simultaneously with the correction or reinforcement. The identifier puts the dog on notice that the particular behavior is going to result in either a punishment or a reward shortly thereafter. It's like the

yellow light on a traffic signal, which serves to notify drivers that the red light will follow shortly. The yellow and red lights do not appear at the same time. I believe that the ideal timeframe between the identifier and the negative or positive effect should be three to five seconds.

Imagine tossing a hat into the air. When the hat reaches its highest point, say, "No." When the hat hits the ground, reward or punish. Practice your timing before implementing it on the dog, as this is key. Keep in mind, too, that the punishment or reward must never precede the identifier. Never discipline first and then say, "No!"

And never bluff. If you say, "No!" (or whatever identifier you wish to use) a disciplinary action must follow. If not, the dog will view you as the little boy who cried, "Wolf!" This will result in challenges and unreliable compliance from the dog.

In November/December I referred to my friend Gary Wilkes. The rolled-up towel Gary uses is called a "bonker" and is a great punishment tool. Let's say a dog is barking. Identify the inappropriate behavior by saying, "No!" and then several seconds later throw the rolled-up towel at the dog. The identifier lets the dog know what behavior is unacceptable, and shortly thereafter it receives the punishment.

From here on I am going to refer to any correction, such as e-collar stimulation, as a bonk. A bonk needs to be immediate, inescapable, identifiable and intolerable if the undesirable behavior is to be eliminated. A bonk meeting these criteria is much more effective than random chastisements.

A top animal behaviorist, Gary has years of experience with dogs and marine animals. Working with him in preparation for the clinics we're going to host together in 2009, he showed me a very effective method of preventing a dog from entering areas of the house that are off-limits. It illustrates the behavior-identifier-correction sequence. Take a window or door alarm that sounds when a magnet connection is broken. Position the alarm about six to eight inches above the floor in the doorframe. Tape a length of sewing thread to the magnet. Tape the other end of the thread to the opposite side of the doorframe. Lay a piece of contrast-colored rope, such as a blue-and-white striped rope, on the floor parallel to the thread and stretching from doorframe to doorframe. Dogs see contrast extremely well, and the dog must be able to clear-

ly see the rope. When the dog crosses the opening, it will hit the thread, which will pull the magnet off of the alarm box. The alarm will sound, and that is the identifier. Then Gary bonks. Because the alarm identifies the exact moment that the unwanted behavior occurs, Gary does not have to be in the room to train the dog. The alarm (identifier) buys time for him to arrive and bonk the dog. After only a few repetitions the dog will not cross the rope. Then the rope can be removed and the dog will not cross the opening.

For a dog that runs to the front door barking when the doorbell rings, try employing the alarm/rope method. Position the rope and trip thread wherever you want to establish an interior boundary. By training the dog with this method, no more closed doors or partitions are required.

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Once the dog is rope-trained and understands not to cross the rope boundary without permission, the rope can travel on road trips to the field or the duck blind. The rope can be used for such things as "Whoa" or "Sit" training as well as line steadiness. Just lay it in a circle and place the dog inside the boundary. Once rope-trained, the dog will stay in the circle. Is that slick or what?

To make any dog a better household companion, identify undesirable behaviors and punish in a timely fashion. To reinforce desirable behaviors, identify the behaviors at the exact moment the dog is doing them and then reward in a timely fashion. Employ the same methods in the field and you will have a better-trained dog inside and out.

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