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"Put Your Commands On A Diet"

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Can a dog understand our language? If so, how much of it? The question poses possibly as many answers as there are dogs. Certainly the boundaries of a canine's lexicon vary, according to his age, environment, training and inborn intelligence.

The average house dog is thought to develop a functional vocabulary of close to a dozen-and-a-half different words by the time he reaches five to six years of age. Additional phrases containing up to three key words can boost this total to a potential of about thirty.

While impressive, such a hefty vocabulary brings little to the average dog's trainability. In fact, the more the dog's vocabulary can be pruned, the better. Contradictory? Hardly. Our spoken words, though meaningful to us, are simply sounds to the dog. Heard initially, they express about as much to him as gobbledygook would to us. Only by demonstration and constant repetition can he be made to understand how each word applies to him, in terms of expected behavior response.

Some canine behaviorists compare that process to how a child learns. To a limited extent, the similarity may hold true. Still, there is scant valid basis for real comparison. True, a parent commonly uses phrases and often whole sentences to convey ideas and meaning to a baby. Yet, besides the meaning of words, the infant must also learn the more complicated process of mimicking their sounds for eventual speech. For the child then, speech sound patterns, to be imitated, swiftly vie in importance with word meanings. The dog, however, has neither the human intelligence level nor our need or ability to speak. It follows, then, that phrases and full sentences serve no purpose in enhancing the dog's training. They should in fact, be considered excess baggage. Really, in the early and middle stages of his education, they tend only to create confusion and dilute his ability to absorb training

Unfortunately, too many new owners tend to muddle up their dog's tutoring with surplus verbiage. It's

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human nature for us to speak in whole sentences, but "Come on now, King, big fella, be a good boy and come right in here now when I call you," can't possibly pass muster as a good command to teach a young dog to come to you. Bet you can't repeat that "command" from memory. So, how can you expect a dog to respond to something you can't even remember yourself? Then, when he fails to comply or reacts erratically, the "command" often gets a few angry words added to it, further compounding the poor animal's bewilderment and slowing the learning process..

It's not impossible to train a dog using such excessively wordy commands. After all, most dogs are amazingly adaptable. Sooner or later, they will catch on to what's wanted. But, your goal should be to speed the pace of training using the simplest, most direct orders to teach the young dog what's expected of him.

This means using the basic commands so important to all his future training. These are: his name, "No," "Here," "Sit," "Stay" and "Kennel." Equipped with this fundamental lexicon alone, any pup can become acceptably "civilized" in a matter of four or five weeks.

Choose a short, crisp, distinctive name for your dog that sounds nothing like any of the commands to be used now or later. It serves a two-fold purpose: 1) to give the pup identity, and 2) to get his attention to receive further orders.

"No," is the most direct and practical negative; it interchanges effectively for several otherwise superfluous commands such as "Shame on You," "Quiet," "Get Down," "Bad Dog," "Dirty" (for housebreaking errors).

"Here," of course, is the terse call in order that tells the pup to come to you. It is obviously more concise and effectual than "Come on in to me, now" or "Get in here, right now" and helps to avoid confusion.

"Sit" and/or "Stay" are the crisp directives that set up both the owner's authority and grab the pup's attention. Actually, the "Sit" command should also mean for the dog to "Stay," until released with "OK," or "Alright."

"Kennel," is a short, business-like order that encompasses a variety of meanings and eliminates the need for additional commands. For the dog it means "Get in the house," "Get in your bed," "Get in your kennel run," "Get in your doghouse," "Get in the car," or "Get in the crate in the car," depending on the circumstances of the moment. Obviously, such single-word commands are much more effective and time-saving than all of the above-mentioned separate ones. Thus, his vocabulary has been slimmed, but not his understanding of, or obedience to, your various orders.

His later training will expand his vocabulary with the new directives of "Heel," "Wait" and "Down." Since you've used "No" to stop your dog's various unwanted acts, such as jumping up on people, the word "Down" can now specify only one thing to the dog: lie down.

Eventually, he can be taught still more commands, such as "Off," to tell to get off the furniture or your bed. Always keep in mind that these should be selected on the basis of crispness, simplicity and whenever possible, pertinence to a variety of situations.

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The use of the fewest and shortest commands possible cannot fail to make your job of training and the dog's job of learning much faster and easier. There's just no sense in overloading his vocabulary. Keep it and his body lean and you'll raise an alert, responsive, well-behaved, healthy dog...a pooch you can be proud to own.

John R. Falk has authored many magazine articles and four books on dogs. He is the webmaster of his own website: <http://www.dogs4ever.com> where current and prospective dog owners can find a varied menu of interesting, informative items on our best pals.

My Neighbor Couldn't Believe How Fast I Was Able To Get This Young Dog To Respond

Reliably, Off-leash

By Adam Katz

Please keep the following a secret. Don't tell anyone. I don't want everyone "and their uncle" copying my dog training techniques/concepts and then claiming them as their own.

Anyway...

My neighbor couldn't believe it. I'd just brought this beautiful 9 month-old German Shepherd dog home, only two weeks ago, and already she was responding reliably to off-leash commands. (Or more specifically, coming immediately when I call and responding instantaneously to the word, "No!" from a distance...without yelling or screaming).

"How is it possible, Adam? We've had our dog for over three years, and he never listens to us! You've had your dog for less than two weeks and she's already responding to your commands, off-leash... and you only whisper your commands, once? I'm jealous."

"Look," I replied, "It's all in the book."

[To read more about this book I referred to, please see:

]

"Okay, okay... I need to go back and read the book," he responded. "But at least give me a tip as to how you got such fast results with this dog?"

I replied, "Well, it's definitely easier if you know what you're doing, from Day 1. I never gave this dog an opportunity with me where she could learn that she can run away, or not respond to commands... without there being a negative association with disobedience. And that's the secret. Once you teach the dog to understand what commands mean, the next big step is to let the dog choose to do correct or incorrect behavior... BUT: Be sure that you're always in a position to reinforce the desired outcome."

"She learned quickly that it was okay if she wanted to try to run off, like she did with her previous

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owner, but if I called her then every time, she's going to have the opportunity to make a choice: Do it my way and get lots of love and praise. Or do it any other way and get a correction, and then the chance to make the choice again," I instructed.

"You need to let the dog know that every time she does a behavior, she's going to get the exact same outcome. And that 'outcome' is going to have a meaningful reaction, be it positive or negative," I explained. "Once you've done this, then the dog very quickly learns that it's best to respond to ALL COMMANDS quickly because she's going to avoid a negative association and obtain a positive association, that much quicker."

In this sense, dogs are a lot like humans: We go through life trying to minimize negative experiences and maximize positive experiences. If your dog understands how to do this... because you've used my "Three Keys To Behavior Modification" (also in the book, on page 21)... then you will be astounded as to how lightening fast you will achieve results with your dog.

That's all for now, folks! Adam Dogproblems.com

Adam G. Katz is the author of the book, "Secrets of a Professional Dog Trainer: An Insider's Guide To The Most Jealously Guarded Dog Training Secrets In History." Get a free copy of his report "Games To Play With Your Dog" when you sign up for his free weekly dog training tips e-zine at:



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