

Dog Training Articles
By Beth Bradley
Clear Communication

Too often I watch owners handling their dogs in a class or training sessions and after one or two corrections the dog's tail is down, the wag is gone, and the dog is sulking through the exercises. As a trainer, I know the reason for the sulking. However, someone with minimal experiences immediately states that the dog is upset with the owner or that he doesn't like to train. Sometimes, I can actually see the conflict between owner and dog and not dog and trainer as the owner sees.

When a dog is trained using clear communication, the training excels. The idea of clear communication is a phrase of confusion for most people. Ivan Bablanov created a video series based on teaching clear communication to dogs and their handlers; everyone talks about training becoming 'black and white' or 'night and day' but the concept is rarely used correctly.

What is Clear Communication?

Clear communication includes being consistent with your commands and the way in which you command your dog. Do not say "down" one day and "lie down" another, this will confuse your dog. Do not allow your dog to pull you when walking in the neighborhood but demand him to heel correctly at your side during training. Do not allow your dog to pull you into class but demand him to heel during class. Do not yell commands one day and whisper commands another day. Do not prioritize commands and become sterner with certain commands over others. Dogs cannot prioritize which commands are more important to you, nor can they show their immediate response to which one YOU think is more critical. In addition, the consistency in corrections is important also. Many handlers are harder on their dogs in a class environment and more lenient at home. The dog then associates the training field or class with harsh corrections and that is why we see the tail drop.

Consistency with your training equipment is equally important. You can't put the training collar and leash on the dog only when he is behaving badly. Then your dog thinks you only require proper behavior at certain times and he can be wild or disobey when the collar is off.

Too often I hear clients say out loud, 'I wish he would listen like this at home'. The reasoning behind this is because you have established clear rules of behavior in your obedience class or on your training field, but you have allowed grey areas to invade your practice time or training sessions at home.

Your dog's drive:

Correcting your dog will not break drive. Breaking the drive of a dog (i.e. sulking to the point the dog does not want to work) comes from inconsistent handling. The dog does not understand when he is allowed to respond in a certain way and when he is going to be allowed to get away with disobedience; therefore, after one or two corrections, he 'shuts down'. If you are consistent with the corrections you give for disobedience, your dog will accept such a correction, bounce back and get back into drive almost immediately.

Many top trainers in various dog sports profess to new handlers that they should not do obedience with their puppy. I know that these top trainers are training their own puppies, because I do! But we advise 'newbie's not to do any harsh obedience because of the inconsistency in their handling. Many top trainers also believe pups should be raised in a kennel and not in a home; and that is for the same reason; handlers/owners allow the pup or young dog to get away with disobedience in the home but then become demanding on the training field.

Conclusion:

Be sure your dog understands the commands and be consistent with the way you command and handle your dog. Dogs are much happier when there are no grey areas in their life and their handling. Make sure your dog understands that 'heel' is 'heel' and 'down' is 'down' and misbehavior to any command is going to get the same correction and reaction from you no matter what the situation and circumstance. Once there are no grey areas in your dog's training program you will see him rise to the occasion and become a much happier dog both off and on the training field.

Our dog's love for us is unconditional but their respect has to be earned. Remember: love does not equal allowing your dog to get away with misbehavior. Once your dog understands that concept, you both will have a very successful training life together.

Beth Bradley

Beth Bradley began studying animal behavior and dog training at 12 years of age. She became a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer in 1986. Beth graduated Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice. Throughout her schooling, Beth worked and studied under many well-renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. Beth formed her own company in 1989 and has made dog training her full time career since 1995. Beth is also a writer for the *Animal Companion*, she has produced CD-Roms and DVD's on training and is author of a training book titled *Real World Dog Training*.

Beth is a member of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America, the German Shepherd Dog Club of America – Working Dog Association, the United Schutzhund Clubs of America, and she is Secretary and Training Director of the Greater Philadelphia Schutzhund Club. Beth actively competes in both American Kennel Club and Schutzhund Trials both in the United States of America and Europe. Beth is a certified Canine Good Citizen Evaluator for the American Kennel Club.

Beth presently owns 3 German Shepherds and a Jack Russel Terrier. If you would like more information on Beth's achievements and qualifications you can view her extensive resume at <http://www.dog-trainer.biz>.