

Dog Training Methods

I prefer a middle of the road, common sense approach

by June Mintchell
Riju (rye-jew) Dawg Skool

In the 30+ years I have been training dogs, I have seen methods go from one extreme to the other. In the 1970's the prevailing method was overly harsh and one-size-fits-all negative reinforcement. The punishment frequently didn't seem to fit the 'crime' which I strongly objected to. Training with treats or toys or play as motivators was frowned on. Jerk and praise was the extent of what most trainers did back then. A 6 foot leash was standard because that's how much slack you were supposed to give the dog so you could get in a good yank.

The newest fad, called 'purely positive', is at the opposite end of the spectrum. Theoretically, PP techniques mean the trainer never verbally or physically corrects the dog. The word 'no' is not used. In PP, clickers are used. A click means a treat is coming soon. We have always known that dogs learn best by instant feed back on their actions which is why PP trainers click when the dog is doing a desired behavior. (This is called marking a behavior.)

I object to using ONLY positive reinforcement because it doesn't make sense. Giving a dog a correction (physical or verbal, whichever is appropriate), simply tells him when he is wrong. It's feedback that tells him which behaviors are incorrect and not desired. How well would you learn by only being praised/rewarded when you did something right but never told when you did something wrong? Are you happy to make the same mistake over and over again? Is your boss happy about the mistakes? Letting the dog know what NOT to do at the correct time is just as important as giving positive reinforcement at the correct time.

My objections to using a clicker are many. I prefer to use my voice to mark and therefore encourage a desired behavior - and always have. (PP trainers did not invent positive reinforcement, they just added a clicker when they came on the scene). You won't always have a clicker on hand when you need it, but you will always have your own unique voice. (Clickers sound alike.) Have two people train at the same time and click away. Very confusing to a dog!

There are lots of different training methods just as there are lots of different dogs and people and differing personalities. I prefer what I consider to be an overall more effective, and intelligent approach. A common sense, middle of the road combination using both positive and negative reinforcement. I use food, praise, petting, play, and toys for positive reinforcement along with leash, collar, and/or verbal corrections for negative reinforcement. My goal is a happy, well-adjusted pet who responds with reasonable reliability. I want to get people to train their pets to be good canine citizens, not canine delinquents. I want to see good manners and control. I want people to be responsible pet owners who keep and take good care of their dogs for life. I want dogs to have long and happy lives full of love.

Although my first goal is to produce a well mannered pet that is easy to live with, my passion is to show dogs. I have titled a LOT of dogs. Most made their top ten national breed rankings. In addition, I have trained and shown 9 dogs of 4 different breeds to the *ultimate top win* of High In Trial. 5 Borzoi, 2 Weimaraners, 1 Labrador Retriever, and 1 Pomeranian. You don't repeatedly win top honors with lousy training techniques. Training for competition is much more demanding and difficult than just training for every day good manners. I would love to help you achieve your goals with your dog, whatever they may be, for everyday living or the show ring.