



Training Your Dog for Service

Welcome to a different and exciting kind of service dog training. Here, the emphasis is on creating a team—person and dog working together with respect and understanding. Your dog will learn to understand and obey your commands, and you will learn how to express those commands and to understand your dog's behavior and attitude. As you bond together and learn to work as a team, your dog will respect your leadership and you will respect your dog's needs and wants. Through the training, you will earn your dog's respect as leader, and your dog will become well-trained, thoroughly reliable and under excellent control. That's not to say that he should be expected to perform as a robot. You will become a team, working together and understanding each other. You have a responsibility to your dog to understand him as much as is humanly possible. Your dog will be there for you for years, to work with you, to help you in your daily life, to love you unconditionally. He deserves your understanding. This is a partnership, not a dictatorship. And your dog is not a machine.

Dogs (and people too) learn at different rates, and they learn some things easier than others. By taking your time and building a solid foundation on the basic obedience exercises, you will find it is much easier when you come to the more advanced skills. You will avoid teaching bad habits, and both you and your dog will learn how to learn in a positive manner. Remember, the most important aspect of this program is that you are doing all the training. So you must learn to do it correctly, and then your dog will too.

TRAINING TOOLS

Training tools are just that—tools. They are the means for you to communicate with your dog and teach him what you want him to learn. There are many different kinds of training collars and you must find the one that works right for you and your dog. Whatever training collar you choose, remember that it is for training only. It should never be left on the dog unattended. It might catch on something and choke him as he struggles to free himself. Your dog should always wear some kind of a buckle collar with his ID tags on it. You can use this to help control your dog, and your dog will learn to work for you whether he has a training collar on or not. But in the early stages of training, it is often necessary to use either a choke collar or head halter for better control. Talk to your instructor if you feel you need a better tool to help you train your dog.

Play isn't just play, it's a learning time. So it's important that you and your whole family play with your dog in ways that will help his training. Some games are excellent. Playing fetch will help in teaching "retrieve" later on. If you can't actually throw the ball, then just be there while others are playing with him. Join in the laughter and give commands to your dog. He'll know you're part of the fun. Some games are not appropriate and you should never play them or allow others to play them. These are generally games that involve too much roughhousing. Dogs play these games with each other as they test their strength and their place in the pack. You don't want your dog testing his place with you; he must always know that you're the leader. Tug-of-war, pushing, shoving, and wrestling may kindle feelings of aggression and dominance that he may not be able to shut down easily. Make sure your family and friends, especially teenage boys, understand that this kind of play is unacceptable. Give them some fun games to play instead, like fetching, hide and seek, and learning tricks.

To make this training successful, you must develop a strong bond with your dog. A bond is a trust between the two of you. By learning how to train your own dog, you learn to create that trust. This will show up in all aspects of your living together, not just in training. As you come to understand how he thinks and he comes to understand what you expect from him, that bond will be strengthened. He will learn to trust you as a fair leader; he'll know that you'll take care of him in all situations. At the same time, you'll learn to trust your dog and count on him as a helper and a friend.

HAVE FUN

Training your dog is a serious matter. You want an obedient, confident partner. This is true whether your goal is a well behaved friend at home or a certified service dog—one who will accompany you to work or school, into restaurants and theaters, on airplanes.

But dog training should also be fun. It's a wonderful sharing time with your dog, and while it should be approached as serious that doesn't mean you can't enjoy the experience. It will be hard work, but it should also be a pleasure.

A sense of humor is a valuable tool in dog training. So relax, enjoy, get to know your dog and let him get to know you. And have fun.