

ESSENTIAL TRAINING PRINCIPLES



Vader and me 2017

What are essential training principles?

Essential training principles are basic principles that are very important to successfully train your dog. These principles were documented by the pioneers in animal training, like B.F. Skinner, Marian Breland and Bob Bailey. I recommend reading this section over at least twice to ensure you're not wasting your time training incorrectly. Following these guidelines will ensure your success! And DON'T listen to Caesar Milan. He's a reality TV star, not a dog trainer.

Here's *why* we teach essential training principles:

It's really like algebra; you have to know the order of operations. Certain actions happen before others and certain actions happen after others. It has to be that way to get the right answer, or in this case the right outcome. The good news is that they are far easier than algebra! Please review these important points below and don't hesitate to reach out to me with questions.

- **Start training and socializing your dog at 8 weeks old** or sooner if possible. Eight to 16 weeks is a key learning period for puppies. It's when they are most impressionable and their curiosity outweighs their fear. It's not that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, it just takes longer to learn new skills. Changing an anxiety based behavior will take even longer. **It's far more simple for you and your pup to prevent anxiety by training and socializing your dog early.**
- **If you missed the critical learning and socialization period it's still better to start now than putting it off even longer.** Unwanted behaviors are typically **self-reinforcing** and will continue becoming stronger and more difficult to manage the longer they are practiced. For example a dog that barks at people walking by, barks, sees the people leave and assumes that the barking worked to scare them off, which reinforces the behavior and the dog will be more likely to repeat it.
- You'll get a **stronger response by using treats that are more salient.** [This is my go-to high quality, reasonably priced treat.](#) I love them because I can carry one or two jerky sticks in my pocket and break off little pieces as needed...and they don't leave my pockets too greasy.
- **Put two beef jerky treats in your pocket every morning.** Don't go to the cupboard to retrieve a treat for your dog as a reward or show your dog a treat and then ask it to perform a skill. If you do this he will learn to listen to you only when you're near the cupboard or have a treat in your hand. **You want your dog to think you're a magical treat dispenser and that he should listen to you always so as not to miss out on a chance to earn a reward.**

- **Timing and sequence are extremely important.** Here's a review of the sequence or order of operations:

Scenario 1

- You give the physical cue for the behavior you want
- Your dog executes the behavior
- You mark the behavior with verbal praise the split second your dog executes the skill (good boy or yes)
- You deliver the treat within 2 – 5 seconds. The quicker you can deliver the treat, the faster your dog will learn.

Scenario 2

- You give the physical cue for the behavior you want
- Your dog **DOES NOT** execute the behavior
- Turn your face away from your dog for 2 seconds and then turn back and try again. If your dog continues to fail, make the skill easier or less distracting before your dog loses interest.

- **Whatever skill you're trying to teach your dog, start in the least distracting environment and with the simplest form of the skill.** Usually this will be inside your home. Train your dog in every room in your house. After they understand the skill inside, take it outside. Continue to add more distractions or difficulty as your dog becomes more proficient at the skill by taking it to environments that are **progressively higher in distraction**. If you do this you'll also be socializing your dog while you're training it.
- **Begin training new skills without a verbal cue.** Start by using a physical cue (hand signal). Dogs don't understand English no matter how often you repeat the word or how loudly you say it. You may think they understand because they offer behaviors and sometimes get it right, but if you use a word to elicit a behavior before your dog knows what it means, he will eventually learn to ignore it...known as habituation. Once the behavior is strong and generalized to different environments we can insert a verbal cue, which **should always come immediately before the physical cue** that you've already been using. The process would look like this:
 - New verbal cue
 - ½ second pause
 - Old physical cue
 - Dog shows behavior
 - You praise and reward
- **We will use the following framework when training your dog.** I like and follow the training [framework used by Jean Donaldson](#) in her book and video, Train Your Dog Like a Pro. Her framework is simple and easy to remember. Once you know it, you can use it to teach your dog anything.
- **Repetition and consistency are EXTREMELY important.** This is especially true when using negative punishment to modify an unwanted behavior. For example, if you turn your back each time your dog jumps on you, but then one day you make happy cooing sounds and bend over to lavish your dog with affection, the jumping behavior will actually become stronger and more difficult to permanently modify because your dog has learned that persistence pays off. **The unwanted behavior becomes stronger in fact, than if you had never attempted to change the behavior in the first place.**
- **Help your dog win** during training so he doesn't become frustrated and want to give up. If you start off by requesting a behavior that your dog can't grasp she may quickly lose interest. Take baby steps and reward her often by breaking more complicated skills into smaller pieces.
- **Generalize your training in different environments and with different people.** You may think your dog knows a skill, and just refuses to execute it outside because they're stubborn. In reality dog behaviors need to be

taught in different environments, with various levels of distraction and with different people if you want them to perform the skill everywhere, no matter who delivers the cue. This is called generalization and you should start **with the least distracting environment**, usually in your home when it's just you and your dog. **This is one of the keys to successful training.**

- **Reward in position.** If you've cued your dog to sit, don't release the treat reward if she sits and then lifts her butt to get the treat as you begin to deliver it. This is known as a sit-pop. Hold on to the treat and only release it once her butt hits the ground or reset and start over. **Feeding for position should be adhered to with other training skills as well.**
- **Positive punishment has the potential to teach your dog to fear you and weaken the bond you have with it.** Examples of positive punishment include yelling at your dog, spanking, spraying him with a water bottle, throwing a can of penny's near it, or using a prong, shock or choke collar. Dogs *can* learn from positive punishment, but its use can result in negative side effects. Best to leave this to professionals. I won't even use it. Partly because I haven't found a need and partly because I feel better about myself if I have patience for my dog instead of inflicting pain on him.
- **Learn "how to speak dog" so you can acknowledge what your dog is saying and reduce his frustration level.** You would quickly become frustrated too if no one ever understood what you were saying. Our dogs use their body's to talk to us and each other all the time – get in on the conversation! It's not only fun, but useful for your everyday interaction with your dog and it will strengthen the bond you have with each other. These are two of the best books you can read to gain an understanding into dog language and behavior. Both are easy and fun reading. [Barking The Sound of a Language](#) and [The Other End of the Leash](#).
- **A well exercised dog is a happy dog that is less likely to resort to behaviors caused by boredom.** These are typically behaviors we don't appreciate, like digging, play biting, chewing up your table legs, not coming when called, etc. Remember that a dog (especially a puppy) has 10 fold the energy most adults do. Even an hour walk may not be enough for your dog, depending on your dog's age and breed. Ask me about ideas to expend their energy that don't require you to expend as much of yours.
- **A variable reward schedule will actually make your dog's desirable behaviors even stronger.** A variable reward schedule means that you don't give a treat reward every time your dog does what you ask. The inconsistency causes your dog to think, "I know I got a treat for this before, I'll just keep trying". **When you've generalized a skill so that your dog can successfully execute it anywhere, start a variable reward schedule.** This means that you will transition from rewarding with treats 100% of the time to 75% of the time. Continue to cut back on the treats over the course of a few weeks until you are rewarding 10 – 20% of the time. Congrats, you've reached the maintenance phase.
- There are a lot of things to DO in that list. Here's one piece of advice to **NOT DO**; don't give treats to your dog because they're incredibly cute. Make them earn them. All you're asking for are a few simple behaviors that allow you to control your dog, which will help to keep him and others safe. Imagine your children if you told them they never have to work for money.