



Debi Davis in Death Valley

THE DEBI DAVIS COLLECTION

Common Sense by a Smart Person

**Compiled by Lynn Shrove
with Sue Ailsby**

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but please respect the author who has graciously chosen to pay
forward, free of charge, the mentoring and assistance she has received
from others.

ISBN 978-0-9869119-3-4

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A NOTE FROM LYNN

*Debi Davis writes: "The internet leads the way."
It certainly did for me. I discovered Clicker Training on the internet.
And in the process, I discovered clicker training Groups and operant
assistance dog training groups and Clicker Solutions and soon I began
recognizing a few names. Debi Davis' posts and articles answered
questions that I wasn't smart enough to ask.*

*Debi's words spoke to me. Who is this wonderful woman in the Arizona
desert? I asked. And so it began.*

*I began to look for Debi Davis everywhere on the internet. Debi has
taken me on my magical crossover journey. I began saving everything that
she wrote.*

*Eventually I had amassed a huge collection of material that Debi had
so freely and generously shared with the world. And it was a highlight
of my life to meet Debi in Las Vegas a few years ago. I cherish the
friendship that has formed.*

*Debi believes in "paying forward". This collection of articles does that
in spades.*

*With the help of my hardy band of editors, we have attempted to
categorize these articles into general topics, but the subject matter and the
training tips often blend together.*

*The collection includes many emails that Debi wrote in response to
specific questions from others. We think you'll be able to figure them out,
though.*

Those of us who are interested in these questions and answers use operant conditioning to train dogs and other animals, but one topic Debi writes about frequently is using operant conditioning to defuse potentially unpleasant situations with other humans - situations, in particular, where a person ignorant of the Americans With Disabilities Act in the United States might challenge the right of a disabled person to enter, say, a restaurant, with their Service Dog

If you know nothing about Debi, have never read anything she's written - indeed, if you know nothing at all about operant conditioning or clicker training - and even if you do - you'd be blown away watching Debi handle such a challenge. With unstoppable enthusiasm and apparently overwhelming innocence she explains and demonstrates the amazing abilities of her Service Dog. The former challenger finds himself firmly and cheerfully on her side and ready to explain her presence to everyone he meets.

Her ability is legendary. All over the world disabled people with service dogs, when entering into a potential "situation", centre themselves by quietly saying "What Would Debi Do?"

Read these letters, then, for their enthusiasm, for their common sense, for their positive outlook. I have never met a more positive person than Debi Davis. Spending a minute with her makes me feel that I can overcome any obstacle as long as I remember that life is good, so are dogs, and so are humans.

And the collection will, I hope, remain fluid. As Debi continues writing her training thoughts and philosophies, we hope to periodically add to this collection.

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THE ART OF TRAINING

10 Hot Behaviors To Train In The Loo!

There are so many wonderful things you can teach a dog while heeding nature's call. Let's face it: we all have to visit the loo regularly, so it's a built-in opportunity to use the time to teach or refine wanted behaviors. It's an ideal environment: small, quiet, you're the most interesting thing in the room, and of course, it comes with a built in seat!

Here's a few things I've taught my dogs in the bathroom. I'm a clicker trainer, so I tend to use a clicker, but it's not necessary. Use a verbal "marker" like "YES!" said crisply and quickly to "mark" that exact moment when the dog did something you want to see repeated. Follow up with a treat.

You can keep treats on your bathroom counter - I have used soft cat food like Pounce which comes in a cardboard can with a plastic lid. Others come in foil resealable packages. I do vary the treats, but always keep some "stable" there all the time.

1. The "Eye Contact" Game

Teaching your dog to "check in" with you without asking! This develops "muscle memory" in the dog, and reinforces that "making eye contact" with you is a good thing to do, because good things happen when the dog does this.

Soon, it becomes a habit, and the dog will automatically "Check in" and give you eye contact consistently.

You can then make the eye contact game become also a "Name Game". If the dog learns that each time he hears his name, it means to stop and look to the person calling that name, then you'll have less worry about him bolting across a busy road and getting hit when he

hears his name called. The calling of his name does not mean "come", but "STOP AND LOOK AT MOM!"

He'll listen for the *next* cue word which will tell him what to do. His name, by then, will mean "Stop, look, listen to human for cue of what to do next." The next cue might be "Sit" or "Down" or "Come" or "Back." His name is his cue to look to you for the next cue. His name only means "give human the attention."

One way to teach the eye contact game I particularly enjoy (I think originated with Chris Bach, but I've been unable to confirm this) is to hold your arm out in front of you, as you sit on the Loo, at shoulder height, with a really good treat in your closed palm.

When the dog stops focusing on the treat in your hand and looks up at you, click and give him a treat. Repeat several times. Move your hand up, down, side to side. Repeat, and each time the dog stops focusing on the hand full of treats, and makes eye contact with you instead, CLICK or give a verbal "YES!" and give him a treat.

Once you can hold out your arm and the dog instantly makes eye contact, you're ready to add his call name just before you click or "mark the moment" with some type of verbal marker. This will pair his name with giving you eye contact in his mind. Be careful not to reward moving toward you, only looking at you. Be very accurate in your clicking or verbal marking and catch him just as the head swings to you and the eyes touch yours.

2. "Touch" or "Target" with nose game

Grab an object close to you. Say, an ink pen. Roll up a wad of masking tape into a little ball, and shove it on the end of the pen. Rub something smelly-good the dog really likes on the end of the tape ball. Hold the object (called the target stick) out in front of you.

Wait for your dog to come sniff it. When he extends his neck to sniff, - while he's moving toward that ball, CLICK or say "YES!" and treat.

Repeat several times, and begin altering the height of the stick randomly. Hold it a few inches higher, lower, to the right, to the left. Turn around, do it in a different direction. Take it into other rooms, and practice getting the dog to touch the tip of the ball in each direction you face.

Broaden your movements, slowly pulling the target stick across the room as your dog follows, as if a magnet were pulling him.

Why this crazy behavior? It's easy! It's fun! Dogs LOOOOOVE it! And it is the base, most important behavior you can teach for quickly learning many advanced behaviors down the road. You're teaching muscle memory now to your puppy.

Teaching him to target and move with the target. This is also really helpful to keep the dog working for the CLICK instead of being lured with the food. Food is great, and it is a great lure, used properly. But, often unskilled handlers tend to over-lure, fade too slowly, and the dog has the real opportunity to become treat-dependent, or overly focused on the food.

You can use this to teach many new behaviors: sit, down, crawl, finish, front, - all behaviors a puppy is perfectly capable of offering. But first, you have to teach him to target that stick. It will take very little time to do this! It's one of the most fun games of all for beginning dogs.

Work on really rapid reinforcement, a phrase you'll read here a lot. This means, right after you click and treat, immediately hold the stick out again and let your dog move to it. Click and treat. Move your body a little bit. Repeat.

3. "The Sit Game"

Go to the bathroom and sit down on the built-in seating. Close the door. Sit looking at a magazine or otherwise just ignoring your dog. Wait for dog to stop pawing at you for attention, to tire out just a bit and put his hind quarters on the floor. The moment that butt hits the

floor, click and give him a treat from the pile you have on the counter. After treating, go back to ignoring dog.

Watch from peripheral vision and as soon as dog starts to sit, - (and he will. You're the most distracting thing in that tiny room and you're pretty boring when you're ignoring him) - **CLICK** while he's on the way down. You want to clearly mark the moment for him to remember that **SITTING** is what is making you click and treat him.

Or you could do the same thing with "Down". Just pick any behavior he offers and start to "shape it", by clicking when it happens. Do it on the couch watching TV, do it in the kitchen making coffee, do it in the bathroom, the bedroom, outside on the porch. Out in the yard.

Extend the time he holds that position by holding off on the click just a second or two at a time. It adds up quickly. Extend the time and add a distraction by taking a step backwards before you click (release) and treat him. Say nothing. Don't coach the dog verbally or with your body language. Let the clicker speak. It will.

If you add body language and verbal or expressive coercion, you are also teaching your dog to watch your body for cues of what to do next, and dog's are masters at reading human body language and verbal tone. You, the teacher, have to become nearly "invisible" and let the clicker be the "bridge", not your raised eyebrows, your leaning shoulders, your wiggling fingers or twitching lips.

This is one of the most effective ways of getting a longer and more reliable behavior (sit-stay, down-stay, stand-stay, etc.) - just neutralizing your body language and letting the click (or verbal marker) speak for you.

4. "Lick Your Chops!" (lick lips on cue)

Get a dab of peanut butter and put just the tiniest bit on your dog's nose. When he licks at it, click and deliver a treat. Repeat.

Once he begins offering the behavior without the peanut butter, you can begin to attach the cue by saying "Lick Your Chops" just before you click, as the behavior is happening.

5. "Leave It" (leave food or any object and look to you for direction)

Start with two piles of treats: one really high-value pile, like liver bits or cheese, and one low-value pile, like dog biscuits or plain cracker bits. Put the HIGH valued treats on the counter or tank top.

Hold the LOW value treats in your hand. Hold out your hand to the dog. Let him mug it and just keep your fingers closed around the treats so the dog can't get any. The moment he backs off, looks away, or ignores the treat even for a moment, click and give a treat from the back of you, the really good high powered treats.

Repeat this until each time you hold your hand out with the low value treats, the dog quickly ignores them and looks to you or steps away or looks away. This is what many clicker trainers call "Doggie Zen", meaning the dog learns to give something up he values to get something of even better value.

Work toward opening your hand up to expose the treats, and having the dog ignore your hand. He turns away, you click and give a GOOD treat.

Move your hand to different heights and repeat the exercise. Put a high valued piece of treat in your hand. Be ready to close your fingers if the dog mugs at your hand. As soon as dog looks away, click and give a couple really high powered treats from the table in back of you.

When the dog is routinely ignoring the treats, add the cue word "leave it" just before you click, just as the head is turning away from the hand full of treats. When the dog is responding to the cue word, start lowering the low value treats to the floor and repeating the exercise.

Add a high powered treat to the pile you are asking the dog to ignore. Build up to all high powered treats.

When this is reliable, put treats on pile on floor and walk dog by it on leash, cueing "leave it" just before you get to the treats. Reinforce the moment the dog looks away with a click and treat.

6. Wave (with paw)

I like to shape this behavior by using a target stick. I hold the target stick out to the dog, down low, and click for any paw action. I gradually move the target stick further and further away from the dog, as I gradually lift the stick up higher and higher. Finally, I fade the stick and use my finger.

This can also be gently coerced by tickling the hairs on one of the dog's feet, and when he moves the foot just a bit, click and treat. Repeat rapidly until the dog starts to pick up his foot without prompting by the tickle. He will.

Keep reinforcing the foot lift, gradually and incrementally clicking at the highest part of every lift. Once dog is lifting paw each time at chest height, add cue word "wave" or "high five" just before clicking, while the paw is in the air.

7. Back Up (move backwards)

When dog is in front of you, lean toward him. Catch the first step he makes backwards, and click and treat. Gradually build up steps, a step at a time. Add cue once dog is reliably quickly moving backwards when you start stepping forward. This is a great behavior to teach just as you are getting up off the throne. <G>

8. Paw Thwack

Teach your dog to touch an object, like the side of the bathtub or the trash can, or some type of object you are holding in your hand -

perhaps a book, a plastic coffee can lid, etc. Hold the object out to the dog and expect that if the dog has been taught nose targeting, he will instantly offer that behavior to earn his reinforcement. Ignore it.

Don't pay for nose touches this time: it's a new game, and the dog needs to learn what the rules of the game are. In a few seconds, not getting reinforced for nose touching will make the dog just a bit frustrated, and he will offer something else interactive with the object - quite often, it's some kind of paw action.

Don't look for complete behaviors, like the dog picking up his paw and actually touching the object. You may well have to back up, reinforce any kind of movement with a paw. You can click and treat for shifting weight from one leg, or the slight lift of a leg, just build slowly anything to do with foot movement.

Once the dog realizes it's PAW ACTION you are paying for, he'll find creative ways to use those paws. If you're holding out an object, most likely he will attempt to touch it with his paw. This is the moment you have been waiting for: be ready for it. You want to "catch" this behavior before the dog offers the raking of the paw and nails, which inevitably comes after the paw thwack.

What you're looking to reinforce is a soft, firm but steady touch, building up in time that the dog holds his paw quietly on the object. This behavior, incidentally, can have lots of practical applications, too! You can teach your dog to close the cupboard doors, to flush the toilet, to alert you to sounds, etc. by touching you with his paw.

9. Down

If you like luring, you can teach your dog to down using a treat quite easily, while you're sitting on the throne. When the dog is in a sit position in front of you, bring a treat towards his chest, and slowly move it downward, allowing the dog's nose to follow the treat. As the treat gets near the floor, pull it toward you just a bit, and the dog will probably automatically stretch out and go into a down position.

This is the moment you have been waiting for! Mark that moment with a click or a verbal marker. Make it really clear to the dog what he did that's earning the marker and the treat: belly to the floor.

One other fun way to teach this is to get down on the floor and cock one knee up into a tunnel. Make it just high enough that the dog can't walk through, but must "belly down" to scooch through the opening. You're waiting for that one moment when the dog's belly hits the floor.

At the exact time that happens, CLICK or say "YES!" and offer a treat on the other side of your leg, so the dog remains in that position while eating the treat.

Once the dog is going belly down each time you sit on the floor and cock up your knee, in anticipation of moving through that tunnel to get his treat, it's time to attach the cue word to it. Say the cue word "DOWN" JUST AS THE DOG BEGINS TO FOLD DOWN - you want to catch it as it's happening, so the dog can clearly connect the word with the behavior. Then add your click or marker immediately after the cue words, and again, deliver the treat while the dog is in the down position.

10. Spin

The loo is usually a tiny space, but normally big enough that a large dog can turn around just fine (think crates, and how easily a dog can bend around inside them). With a small dog, you can teach a spin on the hind legs, and have lots of room for adding creative touches, even. Use a target stick or just a treat to lure the dog's nose upward, and then move it slightly in a circle - just a quarter circle or so, not the whole thing.

As the dog begins to move and follow the treat, click and give him the treat. The click tells him that following the target or lure is what is wanted, and what is being rewarded. Build slowly into a half circle, then 3/4 of a circle, and finally a whole circle. Once the first circle is learned, start backing off on the hand movement, and make it a bit more subtle. Your goal is to have a hand signal that is very unobtrusive,

but one the dog can easily understand. Think stirring your coffee with your finger. You wiggle it in a tiny circle.

Once you have the dog circling, you can add height - getting the dog to do it on back legs only. And you can do it in a different direction. If your circles are always clockwise, start tossing in counter-clockwise circles. Back up on your expectations when you change direction: you may have to teach it all over again, since dogs don't really generalize this sort of thing easily.

Answers To Questions

"I have been working with Spot on the eye contact when I say his name. Well, last night I was doing stuff around his pen and said his name and this little guy just sat, looked at me and wanted his C/T of course. How do I overcome this as I am sure there will be other times I say his name and won't be ready with the clicker or a treat."

The clicker and treats are for training, and you will be fading them out in time. Remember that there are MANY reinforcers you can use besides food. And you can use a verbal "marker" when you don't have your clicker on you. Sherri and Virginia (How of Bow Wow) like the word "YIP!" because it's sharp, crisp and sounds like nothing else we normally say. So when you need to use something, and the clicker isn't handy, use the verbal marker and instantly follow up with something he likes - even petting, loving him - or a chance to play tug for a moment, etc.

"I am going to use the cue 'Come' when I start training him to come to me of course but we want to keep those two cue's separate. Any ideas?"

Would you consider a different word? Paul White of Leashes for Living Service Dogs instructs his students to use "here" instead of "Come" because the word "come" is so harsh, and can - in times of stress - be given in a aversive way. Try it yourself - say "come" loudly, then say "here" loudly and see which one sounds the most neutral. Doesn't "come" sound more commanding and harsh? The word you choose - it could be anything - Broccoli, envelope - whatever - just needs to be one that when you say it loud, it will still come out as neutral as saying, "pass the butter, please" at the table.

As for the name being used to get attention, you do NOT want his name to become a recall cue. His name should come to mean, "Stop whatever you're doing and look at mom." Say you're across the street, and the puppy gets out accidentally, and you say "Spot!" and he comes running across the street when he hears his name. Pancake time. "Spot" should mean "STOP" and look, wait for the next cue. This is an emergency safety cue - his name - so that he knows it means stop and give attention, and that you will then be telling him something else. It may be "here" or "sit" or whatever, but "SPOT!" should never become a word that means "run to mom."

To teach "here" to Spot, just have your husband sit on one side of the room and you on the other. Both of you have a tiny pile of treats. And you can each tap your hand on the floor or by your thigh - whatever - just a sound to get the puppy to come to you and investigate. While the puppy is moving toward you - this is important - NOT when he gets there, but while he's moving - say, "HERE!" then click immediately - again, while he's still moving and deliver the treat when he gets there. In two or three repetitions going between you and your husband, he will quickly learn to pair the "here" with the movement of running toward one of you.

"Now early this morning Spot started to whine in his pen. Around 4 am Dick said it started when he got up. We tried everything. I usually clap my hands instead of saying the word "no" to all my dogs and this has worked great until now. Jenny Dog knew that whenever I clapped my hands she stopped what ever she was doing at that instant and I like

that it is not connected for the dog with your voice saying something negative to him but last night I clapped my hands raw to no avail."

He likely had to go to the bathroom at 4 am, when he woke up. Puppies have to go each time they wake up from a nap, after eating, after playing, etc. So if you don't have a pee pad in the x-pen, then your husband is going to need to take him out when he gets up.

I would really think about the hand clap being an aural reprimand - it can backfire on you big time. What if you're doing demos or someone claps to cheer your puppy? Do you really want a hand clap to become a verbal punisher? Why not teach your puppy what you DO want him to do instead of barking and fussing? You can click him for quiet. But it's very normal for a puppy to cry for attention the first week, so rather than use an aversive sound, why not just get your husband earplugs and ignore it, then have him pick the puppy up and give him attention when he is quiet, for just a few moments? Puppies quickly learn that crying gets them attention, and they will use it for that purpose. Puppies do what WORKS, and if it's worked before - whining and crying - and it got your attention, then he'll keep trying because in essence, every time you give that whining attention - whether it's an aversive or a kindness - it's still attention, and any kind of attention is preferable to being ignored. But be sure the puppy is crying out of frustration and desire for attention, and not because he needs to go out and eliminate. Or that he needs food or water.

On climbing out of the pen - don't wait until you get the netting. Use an old sheet now and pin it to the bars so he can't get over the top.

"Dick finally got Spot out of the pen, took him outside and he did his job then brought him into bed with me. LOL(so much for Dick's rule that the dog will not sleep in the bedroom) Spot then went right back to sleep. He just wanted to be with me and we slept till 8 AM. A much better time for me."

Sounds like he really needed to go out and eliminate. Consider that normal. Dick should take him out when he wakes up, then put him back in his x-pen or crate. If you want him to get used to sleeping with you, then he will quickly pick that up and start to fuss if he is denied sleeping with you. There's no right or wrong, only deciding what you want to do and being consistent. I normally don't let my puppies sleep with me until they are large enough that I don't worry about them falling off the bed and breaking a leg, or until I know they are housetrained and will not accidentally pee in the bed.

"Since I went out yesterday and I have found for me in dealing with my pain level that if I go out every other day to the pool and then errands and such and stay home the next when possible I deal with the pain much better so today I thought it was time to get Spot associated with the normal stuff mom must do in a day. We have done laundry and cleaned the bathrooms a bit and I had to take care of some other business typing on the computer and sending some faxes. Spot slept at my feet while I was on the computer and when I moved he woke, took a few minutes to see if I was coming back and if not then followed me. I left the pen open today and he even went in and got some of his toys. I think I will be doing that now during the day and just be very careful before I move the wheelchair and know where Spot is before I start off. Of course my biggest fear still is running over him and I have to watch for those little signs of needed to pee or poo."

WONDERFUL! The pen soon becomes their quiet place, and it's something they will go to when they need naps, toys, etc.

"I do think that following Debi's suggestion that I start C/T Spot while in the pen when it is closed up when he stops whining might be the way I have to go. As I have learned already, negative actions by me in the clapping are not working with this dog. It may take more time but it will be worth it."

Good for you! It's not that it's bad, it's just ineffective because any attention at all is still better than no attention. And, there's the downside of clapping being conditioned as an aversive - we humans clap for joy all the time!

"I got scared myself this morning. As I have said I feed many birds and a few rabbits in my patio area. Since first seeing them when Spot ran to the door barking he has just ignored them while in the house and even though he will look at them when we are outside and they fly away there hasn't been any running after them at all but what frightened me this morning was that a small hawk came down and tried to grab one of the smaller birds. I have no idea if this size hawk could get Spot but I am not going to take any chances. Spot will never be outside without me or Dick with him for sure. That is the first time I have seen a bird of prey in my yard."

Good for you. There have been incidents of large prey birds taking small puppies. Supervise always now that you know it is a possibility.

"OK, another question. There have been 1-2 little accidents now, my fault for not recognizing the cue's Spot was giving me and not being close to a pad for him to use. What should I do to let him know that this is not the place to go? I did pick him up, didn't say a word and locked him back into his pen for a few minutes to let him know that was not a good thing and fun being outside the pen will stop if that happens. Is there anything else I can do about this? I am of course C/T every time I see him go both on the pads or outside."

He likely had NO idea why he was being shut away. Again, punishing peeing inappropriately is pretty ineffective, and will only get the puppy to start being sly about where he goes, and hiding where he goes also. Urinating is so natural for dogs, and they don't pair it being wrong with your anger. They only know that when they urinate, you get upset. So instead of thinking about how to punish him, think about how you can

be more proactive and set him up for success. In a nutshell, when a puppy piddles someplace he shouldn't it's not his fault. It's a handler management error.

Take him out **OFTEN** and remember how many times he will have to go, and how constantly when he is that tiny that he will have to go. When I have a puppy that young, I just figure he's got about 15 minutes of play time before he has to go, and if quiet, about a half hour. Then he's going to have to go. The more proactive you are, the more you set him up for success and the quicker you can get elimination on cue, too! Just don't blame the puppy for being a puppy when the error was just a normal puppy urge. Establish strongly the right place to go and ignore the mistakes - they are yours, not his. Teach him what you want, what is rewarding to him, and you won't have to use any aversives at all.

"I do think that most of his negative behavior is that he wants to be near me all the time. This will of course be good when I have trained him to help me as a Service Dog and I love the idea as long as I can do what I need without running over him. I this a good or bad thing to allow him to be with me when I am at home? I know I won't take him to the pool when I do my workouts right now but that may come after he is trained as a Service Dog for me."

Of course there's nothing wrong with having him with you!!! Just be sure to give him some quiet time outs in his x-pen for short times each day, so he can get used to being alone not being a horrible thing. Give him a bully stick to chew, or a frozen stuffed kong to keep him occupied as he gets used to being alone while you are in the house. Play with him, put him on your lap, etc as much as you want. But also give him opportunities to be by himself so it is not a horrible thing for him. He needs both. There will be times when he has to be alone, and you don't want to set him up for separation anxiety, so be sure that teaching him to be alone happily is part of your everyday plan.

I think you're doing a **GREAT** job with Spot! It's just hard to think ahead all the time, and to think about what the side effects may be to

anything you do or don't do. It takes time and learning on your part as well as on the puppy's part. Be kind with yourself, and accept that you will make as many mistakes as your puppy. Making mistakes is part of learning for all organisms!

Attempt Everything - Blush At Nothing Regarding training a puppy

Hi Jane,

As someone whose disability is similar to yours in terms of body limitations - inability to do bend over to do low level tasks - I think there are a lot more things Spot can learn to do that will help you conserve energy and use the energy you have more effectively. Since I also had a Papillon service dog as my partner for a decade, I found the little guys can do so many helpful things - more than I'd ever imagined when I began this journey into service dogs.

You share that: **"...for right now and probably into the future the only need I have is for him to bring me things I have dropped and put them into my hand as bending is very hard for me."**

You also note that you plan to work on other behaviors as the need presents, and Spot matures.

I wanted to suggest a few ideas that you can put into place now, behaviors you may well find very helpful for Spot to have in his repertoire, and behaviors that you actually can use right now.

When bending over is difficult, everyday life chores take much more time and this can add more than a little stress to our lives. We rely on our human partners more and more, to do those things we have not yet taught our dogs to do. Yet, are there some simple things that are

based on foundation behaviors that could help ease the stress, give you more independence when your husband isn't around, and give Spot an opportunity to do even more fun-to-perform behaviors for you?

How about refinement of behaviors he already does?

If, for instance, you drop a pierced earring backing plate on the floor, have you taught him yet how to pick it up carefully with his front teeth only, and not mouthing it, so that he won't accidentally swallow it? It's simple shaping for this one - shaping a front teeth grasp and building duration immediately with the firm grasp. You can start with small less chancy items, such a postage stamp size piece of paper, then a lentil or split pea. The little dogs can do these front-teeth pick ups much easier and cleaner than a larger dog, because their mouth and teeth are smaller.

How about that quiet and firm "hold" until you cue Spot to release an item into your hand? Can Spot do this yet? If you ask him to sit in front of you and hold any item - can you then pet him all over his body, tug on the item, pick up his foot, jiggle his collar, roll around him, back up 10 feet, come forward 10 feet without him dropping the item?

These are the kinds of foundations you can be doing right now that will prepare Spot for more helpful tasks down the road. These are fun, non-frustrating behaviors to shape incrementally, and shaping them in your home environment will be very pleasurable for him. Each reinforcement will help as part of establishing a history of reinforcement, so that eventually, you will be able to take these behaviors on the road and have Spot do them in other environments.

How about the grab, hold, back up behavior chain used for tugging off socks, gloves, pajamas and opening lower cupboard kitchen doors and drawers? Teaching Spot how to hold onto something without jerking it, spitting it out - but holding it and then moving with it - is something you could use right now to help make life easier. Spot could be opening your kitchen cabinets and drawers, picking up light trash such as envelopes, string, wrappers - and putting them into the trash can,

then shutting the cabinet door by pushing with his two front paw pads (rather than raking his nails).

This will likely save you quite a bit of bending over and bending down.

Likewise helping with clothing coming into and out of the dryer. That tug and hold behavior is the foundation of not only opening cabinet doors and drawers, but also in getting clothing from the dryer, so that you don't have to bend over. With the little dogs, a sturdy step stool is most often needed - something you can cover with a rubber pad or rug matting to give the dog's paws "gription." If you have a dryer where the door hinges open on the bottom, this isn't needed. But having a solid, non-skid surface will help. Again, the sheet of rubberized rug undermatting or cabinet rubberized matting - can make teaching this chain of behaviors much easier.

At a year of age, Spot should be easily able to hop up onto the dryer door or foot stool, move into the dryer just a short distance, grab a piece of fabric, backup with it, and hold it out for you to pick up, or hold it over a basket and drop it into a basket. There will be some items he cannot handle - heavy towels, heavy jeans, etc. But even then, often the little dog can get a hold of one part of the item, and tug it just enough that you can then take hold of it and tug it the rest of the way without having to bend over at all.

Another thing Spot could be learning right now that is related to the two tasks I just mentioned - tugging open cabinet doors and tugging laundry from the dryer - is learning to help make a bed. It's so much easier for little dogs to do, because they can do it from on top of the bed, an option larger dogs don't have. But for the little dog, jumping up on the bed, grabbing the sheet/comforter cover and backing up while tugging with his mouth, toward the head of the bed - is not a hard thing to do, nor a difficult set of behaviors to teach. Likewise with pillows - the little dog can pull the pillows into place as he moves backwards.

Then, to save you having to bend over, all that will be left for you to do is straighten the pillows more squarely and straighten out the

comforter/quilt, which can be done without bending over, while you are in a sitting position in your wheelchair.

One tip: to make it easier for the dog, you can use baby diaper pins to pin the top sheet over at the edge, and pin it to the quilt, comforter or blanket. This leaves only ONE large piece of bedding for the dog to have to move, and it shortens up bed making time immensely. Okay, Martha Stewart might cringe, but I'm betting that if Martha Stewart couldn't bend over, and wasn't a gazillionaire with people to do these chores for her, she'd be finding short-cuts like blanket pinning starting to look very chic. I can just imagine her giving tips on how to decorate the plastic baby-diaper heads to coordinate with the quilt, or how to do an origami fold-over of the sheet to conceal the pin completely. Necessity is the mother of creative invention!

This has other practical applications - pinning the sheets, I mean. For sleepers who are restless, kick off blankets, pinning the sheets helps tremendously. My husband kicks off the sheets constantly, then gets frustrated in the middle of the night when he tries to find them, and can't get the top sheet lined up with the blanket or comforter. He's so used to the top sheet being folded over at the top and pinned, that if it isn't done, he has a little tantrum! Interesting, because at first, he thought I was nuts for doing that. His quip was, "I think you're just rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic."

My point is that something as simple as pinning the top of the sheet to the blanket can make bed-making very, very simple for a toy breed dog, and make bed-making a super-fast, no-stress task that requires no bending over.

Having your dog get used to picking up all sorts of items of different sizes and textures, hard and soft items, is really one of the core behaviors as well. This will allow you to keep your house uncluttered and the floors free from dog toys, fallen envelopes and paper, towels, clothing articles and magazines - all without you being required to bend over to do it.

Also helpful to learn at this point is teaching Spot how to put items into a container - trash container, basket affixed to your wheelchair/walker, or set on the floor with a rope or leash attached to the handle so you don't have to bend over to pick it up. You can move around the room with the basket on your lap, or hanging from the side of your wheelchair, and point to the items, having Spot do a "Paws up" and drop the item into the basket.

Having strap handles on low-lying items, such as short trash cans, can be very helpful. You can "hide" the straps if needed so they don't show, by turning the strap part toward the back side. Then you can teach your dog to move to the back of it, nudge the can with his nose or paw, and rotate it until he can grasp the strap and tug the basket to you, putting the strap in your hand, so you don't have to bend over to pick up the can.

Putting straps on ordinary containers, such as trash cans, laundry baskets, ottomans, etc. - can save you tons of energy when your dog can then have a way to do this for you without requiring you to bend over to do it yourself.

I mention all these little options, Jane, because I think when bending over is a problem, we just don't often see how many times a day we HAVE to bend over to do things, and how quickly this can sap us of energy and strength. When you have a lively, active, healthy little dog who loves doing behaviors like this, you can give him even more opportunities every day to help you out, and earn even more reinforcements.

Then, for future plans, you can think about teaching Spot to do directions - to move away from you straight ahead, veer right, veer left, move behind you - to find items. You can put names on items and have him find them. Or you can use scent discrimination to have him find items you touch.

These are the kinds of behaviors that can go into the planning stage now for later on, if you want to focus on the foundation behaviors done with mouth and paw.

This allows you to work on the regular foundation or as Steve White calls them, "Taproot" behaviors - the grab, the hold, the release, backing up - that are helpful with the foundation tasks that will mitigate your inability to bend over. You can then think about the things you'd like to teach in the future, such as that helpful scent discrimination or directional work. But in the meantime, you have lots of simple behaviors you have already started to use that you can refine into really helpful tasks quickly, that are going to make your life a lot easier right now!

You can teach Spot to untie your shoe lace now, or to tug on the velcro shoe closure. You can teach him to grab the end of your sock and tug it off your foot, then give it to you or lay it over your knee, or put it in the dirty clothes basket. Tip: If your dirty clothes basket is tall, use a broom clamp to affix it to the wall, so it's stable when the dog puts front paws on it to drop the item in.

You can start having him take and hold kleenex or single sheets of toilet tissue quietly in his mouth until you cue him to release it, shaping him to do this with his front teeth so the tissues doesn't get wet and disintegrate on his tongue. Learning to pick up these thin, delicate pieces of paper carefully, and to bring them to you without shaking or mouthing them - is an important foundation component of a service dog's retrieve. These are things you can teach any time, any place, just a few minutes here and there - when you're in the Loo, when you're sitting on the couch or in your favorite chair, or at the kitchen table.

You can also be teaching a very strong and fluent "leave it" with food items, something that you can begin to build very fluently at home before you take it out in public, "take it on the road." With a solid take and hold behavior of items, holding a food item is just the next logical step. If you're working in your kitchen, and you drop a hot dog, a slice of turkey, a piece of lettuce, etc. - then it's logical that you'll want your dog to be able to fetch these items and give them to you without eating them, so you don't have to bend over to get them yourself.

And how about his food and water bowl? Depending on the type you use, you can teach Spot to pick them up and give them to you so you don't have to bend over to get them. You can use coated plastic disposable bowls for dog food, and they are very lightweight and easy for the dogs to pick up. You can do the same for water bowls, too. Anything you can adapt to allow your dog to do so that you don't have to bend over is going to buy you energy, buy you less stress and frustration in your daily life. And they are ALL really fun things for the dog to learn to do, and to then do when put on cue.

After eating, my 5 dogs all pick up their food bowls and give them to me. I hold one on my lap, and each dog puts his bowl on top of the last one. This saves me a lot of bending over!

Do you do crafts at all? I do, and it's a messy thing. I'm forever dropping bits of colored paper, ribbon, yarn and knitting needles everywhere. The Papillons are great about picking these items up for me, and it's pretty funny to see them push each other out of the way to be the one to get to do the task.

Just some ideas that came into my head when I read that part of your post - and thought perhaps talking about them might give you some ideas of expanding Spot's repertoire right now. Even though he's still healing from his surgery, you can work on the take-give-hold of different types of articles, and you can work on the paw touch and hold - without the raking of the paws, and you can work on the hold and pull and walk backwards with a fabric attached to something stable.

"As he gets older and I find I have more needs we will work on other things."

A Service Dog has only to perform three tasks to be certified.

Jane, I think it can be limiting to set your goals too low. So what if only 3 tasks are needed for certification through your chosen training program? You can easily teach far more than 3 tasks right now, tasks

that will actually help you out so much in your daily life. You can work on "other things" as you can get out with Spot more, but there are just dozens of behaviors you can teach now, in the quiet of your home, that will be fun and safe for Spot to learn while he's healing up, and which will help you build a strong foundation for future tasks you may want to teach.

You can also think of it as an exercise for you to practice "lateral thinking." This is a great operant exercise to get our human minds working at their peak. How many things can you think of to do with a solid hold on a piece of paper? With a hold and pull backwards? What human body parts can you use these behaviors on? What household tasks can you use them with? If you make a few lists just thinking laterally about all the possible things - no matter how bizarre they may be - you are actively problem solving, and this will also energize you - it's like aerobic exercises for your mind!

Think laterally. Train in the Loo. Attempt everything and blush at nothing. Look for cracks in the Foundation and Fix them. Have FUN!

"I just heard on Animal Planet yesterday that dogs supposedly smell tension or nervousness on a human's breath, and that handlers often spray binaca in their mouths when they are nervous so a dog cannot "smell" the tension."

I never thought about that. I thought about purposefully quieting down overt body language, of relaxing, deep breathing to get the heart rate slowed down and even, but breath as an indicator to the dog of tension?

"On other lists I have heard people talk about a person using calming signals to relax a dog in a stress situation. here's my question. Isn't the handlers state of mind a vital part of this? ... <snip> ... I've heard people say they use these signals before they show or in situations dealing with a strange dog. ... <snip> ... Wouldn't you be sending mixed messages? Your body would be using calming signals, but if

your heart is racing and you are feeling stressed, how would the dog interpret this?"

Jane, I think, really had a strong answer for this. I liked that she said, "If I was using calming signals and "I" myself wasn't calming down, yeah, I think it would be mixed. But, if it was calming me down, I don't think it would [send mixed messages]."

Bingo. It's gotta be more than "I whistle a happy tune, then no one every knows I'm afraid." Well, maybe the humans wouldn't but the dog sure would!

Jane talks about taking deep breaths, and I think this is a real key. But some people have difficulty doing this, or they tend to take a deep breath, forget to let it out. Or they hyperventilate.

I try to use the 7-7-7 method to quiet myself when I'm uncontrollably nervous. I inhale slowly to the count of 7, then hold it for the count of 7, then let it out to the count of 7.

This helps me form a pattern, to actually begin to lower my heart rate, my blood pressure, my respiration, and sets me up for success. And it gives me a really simple formula to follow when I'm just too nervous to remember to breathe. It also gives me concrete numbers in my mind - the process of counting - which helps keep me focused. It's rather like an 'internal massage' for me. A way to instantly relax that takes very little effort to achieve.

Yawning does not work to unstress me, once the old adrenaline is surging. Only regulated breathing seems to help. But after just a very few repetitions of the 7-7-7 method, I can THEN yawn, stretch, half-close my eyes, etc. and throw off calming signals that probably DO work on ME as well as the dogs in question.

I think all too often we ARE sending mixed messages, and are working so hard to remember to not tighten up on the leash, clutch our hands, stiffen our backs. It's too much to remember. But the 7-7-7 method can

work to get one quickly to a state where we can then incorporate those more overt calming signals.

Finding Balance

Jane's post blew me away. I love when someone grabs an idea and takes it even further, into a whole new realm of possibility. Jane, thank you for addressing a problem so many of us on this list face: how to maximize our time and energy when we live with disabilities and pain, and find that balance between "too much" and "too little."

I think it's so natural for us to get a stab of energy and overdo it to the point where our bodies suffer, and because everything is connected, our thought processes suffer, our emotions go into turmoil, and dogs get what is left of the chaos. I am so guilty of doing this - when I feel really good, I'll do so much that I pay the price for several days, and as a consequence, my dogs suffer because I then lack the energy to meet their basic needs for exercise, mental stimulation, learning.

You have given me so much to think about, and I realize now, after reading your post, that the times when I feel the best after training and exercise sessions with my animals are those times that I have found a balance, and not pushed my body past its limits.

This is such a heady and important topic for us here on the OCAD list. So many of us here are living with disabilities, chronic pain, things that tax our bodies to the max, rob us of time and energy in a normal day. Then we add the time, energy and responsibility of training a service dog, and it can be totally overwhelming.

I think this is a great topic: sharing ways to maximize our energy without overdoing it, and finding ways to meet our dogs needs that don't put our future hours and days at risk.

I work from a powerchair, so I'm now far more able to conserve my energy, and make what's left of my body work for me. I don't have to use up my energy walking, I don't have to push a manual chair. These two things have liberated me to utilize what I have left, as long as I think about it consciously, and make a pact with myself to honor MY body, MY energy reserves, MY positive energy.

I don't think I do enough of that, most of the time. I'm too busy playing catch up, trying to just keep the house in order so we don't get overrun with clutter, dirt, doghair.

When I reflected back on the post I'd made that Jane responded to, where I shared what I did with my dog for 15 minutes, I really realized that what made it work and made it so marvelously tangible for me was the knowledge that I managed to accomplish several things without expending hardly any energy.

From a sitting position, I was able to play thinking, problem solving games with my new dog, reinforce some important targetting skills, reinforce eye contact and focus, reinforce recall to name, and keep the dog's body moving, alert and active while my body remained still, quiet and relaxed.

I did not have to move around quickly, whoop and holler - I just sat there and let the clicker do the work for me. With the clicker, I could just direct traffic, so to speak, without having to join in the physical side of the activity. Basically, I used my brain, I used my fingers, I used a bit of arm movement and that was it. And when I was finished, I'd accomplished so much, given the dog a good workout, and still had energy enough to write a post to the list. And because I did not overtax my body, I had energy that night to take all the dogs for a nice walk and run next to my powerchair, without being so tired I couldn't keep my eyes open.

I realized that night that I felt **GOOD** inside, that I felt I'd accomplished something, and that this gave me such a sense of peace and inner harmony - something I really needed to be able to rest well, get sleep, deal with chronic pain and the stress of daily living.

I'd love to hear some of the other listmembers sharings on what they do to conserve energy, and how they maximize their time and energy and still manage to train their dogs.

I find sit-down training sessions to be so rewarding now, and though I have always done a bit of "training in the loo" and other sit-down training, I also expended way too much energy whooping it up with my dogs, when I could have achieved the same results in a quieter, less demanding way.

I would love to live the active life I once lived, but I can't. I'd love to participate in dog sports, but I can't. I would love to roll around in the grass and play with my dogs actively, but I can't.

But since I don't want to focus on what I can't do anymore, I'll use my clicker thinking to help focus on what I CAN do, and how I can adapt to get the jobs done I have to get done, and get the training in that I have to get in, so that I can have a service dog eventually who will be able to save me time and energy, and allow me to participate in life more fully.

I realize that if I were still a traditional trainer, I would not have the options I still have to train my own dog through to fluency. I can't physically move my dog around the floor; I can't do an effective correction (even if I had the heart to do it), and every moment I make costs me in some way. But because I can now somewhat skillfully use the clicker, I am able to shape and fashion the training sessions to meet my own needs, and then have energy left over to do other things as well.

Jane really nailed it when she told how everything spirals when we let it go - our brains don't function well without exercise, our fingers can't respond to the timing necessary to utilize a clicker in a scalpel-like fashion, and we can easily give up, think, "perhaps tomorrow will be a better day." But if we don't exercise our bodies and minds in an effective way - honoring our own limitations - we WILL lose what function we most need to keep on going. And then, we feel

overwhelmed when we see the tremendous distance we still have to go with our in-training dogs. It's so easy to just give up.

But perhaps with conscious effort, we can make it easier on ourselves to honor our bodies, our minds, our emotions, our spirits - and maximize all that we DO have left. That includes our sense of humor!

One sentence in Jane's brilliant post summed up the commitment I am making today to my body and spirit, and my dogs - "What we do for our dogs, we also do for ourselves." I am making a commitment to MYself today, so that I will exercise my own body and mind in a way that keeps my own neural responses alert, yet does not tax the energy I have left to give to my family, to my dogs, to my training.

Thank you Jane, for a great post, and so much food for thought!

Foundation Behaviors

"I am re-reading a post that you wrote about Foundation Behaviors. Please would you expand for me on a couple? Teaching "offer focus to handler when approaching another dog, cat, squirrel, lizard, etc" and "wait when cued in any position, ahead of handler, behind handler, beside handler, etc."

Not having the whole post to refer to, I'll just try to answer as best I can.

Yep, foundation behaviors/foundation levels: pretty much the same with different names. I use "Foundation behaviors" because I worked a lot with Virginia Broitman and Sherri Lippman, who are close friends of mine, and those are the terms I became most familiar with and are now my default terms.

But the concept remains the same: without a strong foundation of fluent behaviors, dogs who work out in public cannot be expected to understand nor react as we would like them to, when they have not yet been taught behaviors into a level of fluency. Or call it stimulus control.

As part of teaching "offering focus" to the handler, the foundation begins with shaping eye contact: and adding the D's as we move along.

If my cue (and it may well be temporary, but I can always change it if I need something else) is the dog's name, then the game begins every time Fido looks at me, from wherever he might be in the house.

That means I have bowls of treats everywhere, and each time the dog seeks out my face, I click and treat. Eventually I add the cue word - "Fido" as the dog looks up at me and immediately click and toss a treat. I'm a big treat tosser. I don't believe in not tossing food - I think it's a myth built on not using food properly that has now become the catchphrase of the service dog industry. The belief is strong that a dog will become a "hoover" if treats are tossed. Horse Pucky! -

Then, as the "seek out my face" becomes more default and happening more often - and it always does when the dog learns he controls the game - I start adding mild distractions, such as dropping a book on the floor, or diversity, by moving a piece of furniture to a different part of the room, or opening an umbrella in the house and tossing the treat near the umbrella. And distance: I move further and further to different rooms, where when the dog hears 'Fido!' he runs to find where my voice is coming from. Then I'll up the ante and add more diversity, more distractions, so that eventually the dog still responds to the name=eye contact even when the door bell rings, or when I rush around in fast circles in my chair screaming wheeeeeee! Or when I holler, when I cry, when I drop noisy pots and pans.

I let the dog tell me when it's ready for new D's - though I'm constantly mixing them up, I'll backup a step or two if needed, should one of those D's show my dog is still finding that stressful.

But that's still not a solid foundation response to name recognition meaning: find my eyes. The game has to be taken to many different environments, in many different types of weather, around traffic, around children, around sports games, into parks and wildlife areas where animals running free are likely to be seen. Strengthening the foundation comes when we understand how to observe our dog, work on the edge of its stress trigger but not triggering it.

But that's still not a fluent foundation behavior. Will the dog seek the human's eyes when the human turns his head to the right? To the left? or lies on the floor? Or lies on the floor with an arm over his eyes?

Will the dog move right and left when the human shifts eyes from the right to the left, with no other body parts moving?

The cool things about a foundation behavior is that you can always change the cue word once the behavior is known, and even split that behavior into several different parts. A dog at a distance working for a quadraplegic can be taught to move right or left by the human's eye shift, or to back up when the eye rolls upward, or move forward when the human blinks twice, etc.

So the foundation may be whatever is required for the specific dog and handler. For the everyday pet, such extremes will likely not be needed. But to a person with a disability, it can be the foundation that saves their lives. So perhaps the first and most important part of any plan is to establish exactly what components make up a "foundation behavior" or "foundation level."

For an agility competitor, moving to the eyes may not be nearly as important as following a hand movement, or a verbal cued directional, or how to control their movements when they are really having an adrenaline rush.

For the most part, people using service dogs are not going to be choosing to use high drive, high energy dogs, and it's unlikely that many people with disabilities are going to be as concerned about those

kinds of things as they are that the dog sits when cued with zero latency.

As for positional changes, these can be extremely important for service dog handlers. There may be times when they cannot be in the "normal" position in which the dog is used to responding to that cue.

Most often the dog will have been taught through to fluency only in a couple of positions: They will "sit" when they are facing you and are certain that's what you are asking them to do. Or they will "sit" next to you in your chair, or walker, crutches, etc., because they are also used to that.

But as Ian Dunbar pointed out a couple decades ago, the dog doesn't really know "sit" at all, only in a few contexts in which it's been taught. Challenge anyone who claims their dog really "knows" sit.

Have them stand their dog. Then tell them to move behind their dog and cue the dog verbally to "sit." Most dogs will first turn around before sitting.

In one of the Expos I had three of these tests included in the presentation. One for the dog sitting when you cued the dog from behind it, one for when you were on the floor lying down, hand over face, and one when you were on your side, resting on your arm, kicking your feet on the floor. Not one dog was fluent. It was only fluent in the context in which it was taught.

So to me, a solid foundation means that we continue adding more and more D's and more and more different substrates, environments, distractions - until the dog will do the behavior no matter what is happening.

For a desert dog, the hardest challenge is to respond during wet weather! It's as if they say, "What? You want me to put my butt WHERE?" or to walk through a door when rain is coming off the roof in sheets. Since we don't have those kinds of opportunities to use naturally, we have to improvise, make mud puddles, tape hoses to the

roof, and teach the behaviours from scratch again until they are fluent in a very unexpected and unusual environmental change.

For the "wait" behavior, I expect a dog who is truly fluent in "wait" to be able to wait in any position, as I wrote. On leash, off leash.

I expect to be able to call off my dog from a rabbit running across his path, a lizard, a feral cat, a child. It doesn't matter if the dog is behind my chair, on my right side, left side, or 10 feet in front of me. If I call out, "Finn, wait!" or "Finn, down!" I expect that behavior - which I also consider one of the main foundation behaviors - to have zero latency once it has been taught to fluency.

If my dog is a ball fiend - and a lot of service dogs are - then being able to call off a dog from a ground ball moving close to that dog is going to be one of the most important foundation behaviors to teach. And it has to be taught to fluency, so that even if the dog is in a fenced in park with you, and kids start playing ball, the dog will respond to the cue no matter where he is in proximity to your body.

I am not among those who believe their dog should never engage in behaviors that can be innate to their particular breed. Just the opposite. I think to deprive a dog of what they were bred to do is cruel. I have a Border Collie. He lives to herd something. So I have things he can herd and a cue to tell him when it's appropriate to do that job. Yep, herding anything is a "job" for a BC! So he gets to herd his basketball, or herd the fish and turtles in the pond. I use it as a Premack a lot. It's the strongest reinforcer I have. Finn will bypass a fresh steak for the opportunity to herd anything.

But a lot of service dog users go by the old adage that if a dog is allowed to engage in anything they truly enjoy innately - like chasing a ball - that they will never learn that there are times when it's not appropriate to do this. **BULL PUCKEY!** It's another of those myths that go with traditional training, and not relevant when we have science to guide us in how to bring a behavior into fluency and how to work with instead of against the genetic grain. And we have Premack for motivation!

I'll never stop Finn from being a Border Collie and lusting after what he was highly bred to do. But I can teach him that there are times when it's appropriate and times when it is not appropriate.

It's appropriate when I give the "free" cue to him. But when we're in a park and kids are playing ball and frisbee, even if he's off leash, it's NOT appropriate.

The whole thing about foundation behaviors is that they are not the "sexy stuff" that people really get hot about learning. They want the dog to open the fridge, get them a Bud, or whatever. But unless the dog has solid foundation behaviors, what's the use of the sexy stuff?

If, every time we open the door, the dog has learned it's "escape time" and runs out into the road and is flattened by a car, what good is that sexy trick?

Or even simpler, if we ignore a solid foundation, and do not teach the dog to control the strength of the hold, what's going to happen to that can of Coke or Bud when the dog chomps down through the thin aluminum?

I consider that one of the foundation behaviors of learning a retrieve. Carry delicate items and carry cloth items - like napkins in a restaurant - without shaking them.

I can honestly say that the only truly great visitors with service dogs I've ever had visit with me are Sue Ailsby and Virginia Broitman. I could go anywhere with either of them, knowing their dogs would exhibit stellar behaviors no matter what the environment could come up to offer.

Did you ever see the pictures Sue and I took of Peek and Scuba activating the reel buttons on the slot machines? They are so cute!

And they are real. Both dogs actually could activate the button. In spite of being bumped by throngs of people, touched by people, with

spinning lights and clanging bells ringing all around them, they just did what they were cued to do: "Paws up, touch, HOLD."

Not sure if I answered your question or not, but I tried!

The Journey To Fluency Is Not An Overnight Trip

Attaching a cue word to the behavior whether we use an event marker (clicker, word, etc.) or not and having the dog respond in everyday environments - our homes, backyards, or on walks in places the dog is used to - is only the first part. The behavior and cue may be understood well in these contexts, but not in others yet.

The journey to fluency is not an overnight trip. Before a behavior is fluent, or under "stimulus control," we have to offer our dogs opportunities to perform and learn the behavior in a host of different situations, with different environmental prompts or no prompts, with a plethora of different distractions, and on the most diverse group of substrates we can find.

For example, a dog may be very reliable eliminating on cue in known environments, or known substrates (grass or ground covers) only to be completely confused when asked to eliminate on a man-made object or on pavement.

My current service dog Finn is pretty good on responding to the cue in most situations, but the behavior is still not truly fluent, not under stimulus control yet. It's getting close, but there are still situations where he has not yet generalized the behavior, such as on a pee pad in a busy airport when a group of children are squatting in a circle trying to get his attention with squeaky, happy voices and treat bribery. Or on a tarmac at the airport where there is only oil-soaked asphalt and

cement, and very loud jets, plus carts that beep and pull luggage around.

Fluency means that the dog will respond to the cue immediately, every time, and in all environments. This means the dog has learned to respond to the cue when you ask it to eliminate on dirt, gravel, asphalt, grass, stones, on wet driveways and on pee pads. It means the dog will eliminate when you give the cue in the park, when squirrels are running by, when cats hiss and sprint in front of the dog's face, when ball games are in session a few feet away, or someone is riding through the park on horseback.

It means the dog will respond to the cue and eliminate when other dogs are around who are on leash and off leash, when a group of children are trying to coerce the dog to play, or in a busy parking lot with cars driving by blaring rap music that bounces off the pavement like mini-earthquakes.

Keeping Up With Sue Ailsby. Not!

Whoof, Whoof, Sue! Great to see your post today catching us up on what you and Stitch have been working on lately.

A true mover and shaker, you share so many ideas we can use as fun and helpful learning activities for our service dogs. I am in awe of all you have accomplished in just a few short months. Worse, I'm exhausted just by reading it! To keep up with you for even a half a day, I'd need a triple dose of Ritalin, 3 pots of strong coffee and a turbo charger on my powerchair. To make it a whole day, I'd need a total body transplant. Yet, you DO inspire me! I love how you casually toss out that you have only six more conformation shows this weekend, then nothing until your son's wedding before heading to Chicago in a few weeks. Hahhh! I'd need 6 months just to lay out my clothes and pack my suitcase.

But I do love that your whole purpose of the post was to encourage us all to get out and have FUN with our dogs, because learning is a joy when we tap into our dogs' brains and show them just how great it is to learn new things. And, that there is something available to all of us - even those of us with major disabilities.

One fun sport I'd love to participate in (or just train for) eventually is Canine Freestyle Dance. I think it's a sport that lends itself to reinforcing the very helpful behaviors we need in service work, but adds the fun of putting it to music and adding a few flourishes that are fun to teach, fun to learn. There are quite a few canine freestyle clips on YouTube, and if any of you reading this have not seen the phenomenal Atila and Fly in action, I hope you will check out the Gladiator routine and the Charlie Chaplin routine, both of which are on YouTube.

Here's a direct URL to the Charlie Chaplin routine, where you can see a clicker trained freestyle dog do some pretty impressive moves: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5TW_uKSCUA .

Here is the direct URL for the Gladiator routine: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0RjKJfuPbE> . I'm hard pressed to choose which one I love the most!

I love Sue's response to "Why do we do all this stuff?": 'Why do we do all this stuff? Lots of reasons. I think they're fun. I'm a better trainer when I keep training for new things. Stitch thinks they're fun. Stitch is a steadier and happier worker when she's well-socialized, well-exercised, and learning new things.'

I have to agree that the more we find to creatively communicate, participate and learn with our dogs, the happier we will be, and the happier and healthier our dogs will be. I sure don't have the kind of energy I once possessed, and as humbling as that is, I still find lots of fun things to do at home here, without ever having to leave the house. I just had my new adolescent dog outside for 15 minutes, playing clicker games with him.

Here is what we did:

Targeted my cell phone, moved cell phone up, down, side to side, in back of the chair, and up high so he'd have to stand on back legs to reach it.

Practiced rapid sits, to work on zero latency (time between giving the cue and when the dog performs the asked for behavior).

Practiced heeling off-leash on the left side, while I tried to outrun him, turn circles, and had him "find" the position where the click and treat would happen. What fun to whoosh around the trees, the turtle pond, turn circles until I was dizzy, then take a zig-zag path as if I were drunk, and have the dog find the left side position for getting a click and treat.

Free shaping with a tossed object on the ground. Used several objects on hand - gardening glove, grill scraper, rake, garbage bag, empty container. Clicked for any interaction with the object. Then upped the criteria when he was 2 minutes into the game, and clicked only new, novel behaviors. If he was previously only offering a paw touch, I'd go for a nose bump, or circle around the object, or sit on the object - whatever he hadn't offered before. The object of the game was not to teach anything specific, but just to practice problem solving - what to offer to get that click and treat. Great fun!

Practiced left side off-leash heeling at a run, then stop quickly and cue a sit. Did a bunch of these around the yard.

Put small pile of treats on ground for dog to find and eat, then I high-tailed it across the lawn and practiced RECALLS.

Practiced name recognition with eye contact. Now at point where I am moving chair around and calling name, to have him find my eyes.

Tossed a favored squeaky toy for relaxation and non-thinking fun for a few minutes.

Buried treasured bully stick in dog's sandbox to encourage digging in that area of the yard only. (yes, new boy is a digger).

Played jump over the water hose, where I held one end in my lap, and lured the dog first right and left over the hose on the ground, then kept clicking without the lure as he quickly jumped over the hose as it got higher and higher toward my lap. By stretching the hose out, I had about 10 good feet of length to turn into slanted jump on the grass. He loved this! Even better, he loved it when I turned on the hose and he got to snap at the water coming out.

Okay, it's not agility or watersports or carting or freestyle or any known sports activity whatsoever, but it's simple fun and simple learning that gives both me and my dog a quarter hour of really fun learning time together.

What I got from Sue's post - the most important message, for me - is that wherever we are, whatever our level of body movement or strength, however short our time may be, clicker training offers us so many creative options for keeping our dogs mentally, physically and emotionally fit!

Leadership Exercises

I totally agree that Spot is finding his place, and that he is beginning to feel more "at home". We may never know what prompted the display toward Fido, but the incident gave you a real glimpse into his responses after you corrected him. You observed a very clingy, unsure reaction, and this indicates to me that leadership exercises may be very helpful, and that Spot is extremely sensitive to verbal aversives, and that using them may be counter-productive with this particular dog, at this particular time, when he's still getting acclimated to his new life with you.

This would be a wonderful time to list all the leadership exercises you can play with him, which will help him to look to you for a cue on what behavior you **DO** want.

The automatic "check in" is an excellent one to teach, and also teaching name recognition, where when you call his name, he doesn't come to you, but stops, gives you eye contact.

Another excellent leadership exercise is to teach "leave it" as a fun game, and work toward getting him to generalize that this cue means "cease and desist whatever you are doing and look to mom for the next cue." "Leave It" can mean most anything you want the dog to stop doing at that moment.

I think with a sensitive dog like Spot, it's really helpful to teach this behavior with positives, building on positives, and delivering the cue in as neutral a way as possible, not harshly as a verbal punisher. Sort of as you might say, "pass the butter" at the table.

This you can then use as a behavior interrupter, as well as a cue to look to you for direction.

Since you have not seen a lot of posturing and displays toward Fido, I would not be too concerned at this point. I tend to let dogs work out their own communication, as long as it doesn't infringe on my peace. But, I'm always looking for patterns, and trying to observe what may have triggered the display.

Once I have identified those triggers, I can then start doing proactive management, and stopping problems before they get out of hand, by asking for incompatible behaviors. And, all the while, teaching leadership exercises and helping the dog generalize them in as many different environments as possible.

As an example, I know my SD Peek has a trigger point, and will aggress at any other animal close to him if he's excited about going outside and we're about to put the Flexi's on for a riverwalk. So, to prevent allowing this unwanted display to be reinforced, I try to proactively give Peek a job to do while I'm attaching the Flexi's to the other dogs. I may ask him to settle on his mat, or go fetch the phone, or

whatever. My goal is to keep him busy with an incompatible behavior so I can bypass the excitement/arousal display.

Because when Peek's trigger is tripped, he will aggress at whatever animal is close by - the dogs or the cat, just out of the blue, and his signals that this is about to happen are imperceptibly subtle. I just know them by pattern now, and try to fill that 30 second trigger time with something he can do to keep the anxiety at bay.

And, like Spot, Peek has no issues with dogs taking bones or toys from him, etc. It's simply an arousal reaction, a stress reaction, and one that was well-established when I got him, so was very resistant to change. It will probably always exist to some extent, but it's very workable since I know the very few things that will trigger it, and can use management to handle it. It does not happen on leash, on the bed, during dinner times, or any other time - only when he's hyped and anxious to go on his walk.

I think you are being wonderfully proactive in crating him when you're not there to supervise, since you still don't know what his responses will be, and can't guarantee Fido's safety if you aren't there to supervise.

So, take a deep breath, use some herbals if needed, and use every opportunity to teach leadership skills in a positive, upbeat way.

We have many wonderful posts on how to teach these wanted responses in our archives, and also in our shared files section.

It does sound like Spot is just finding his place in his new home, and I suspect it will turn out much as it did with Fido. I think Spot is very fortunate to have you as a leader, and to teach him wanted responses so he won't feel the need to resort to handling every situation on his own. As Sue Ailsby says, "You teach him that you're the leader of the dance", and that all good things and all direction comes from you.

Delightfully, operant teaching gives us such user-friendly ways to establish leadership skills, without us having to resort to being dictators, however benevolent. We become the choreographers, the teachers, the

leaders sought out because we are kind, fair and take charge in a proactive way.

Keep up the good work!

Life Rewards As Reinforcers

Absolutely you can use "life rewards" as very powerful reinforcers! They are often the most powerful reinforcers available. For instance, for my Border Collie Finn, the chance to herd the fish in the pond is the most powerful reinforcer in my backyard. There is no food item or toy he finds of higher value than to watch the fish.

So, while training in the backyard, I often use the opportunity to go see those fish as the primary reinforcer for doing another behavior he doesn't enjoy as much.

There are other high-value life rewards that I DON'T use as reinforcers, such as crotch sniffing or scarfing down kitty litter bon-bons, or chewing the crotches out of underwear waiting to be washed. But there are still plenty of other things he loves to do that I can use.

Often what is the most rewarding depends on the environment, the context. If Finn's in the front yard, then the chance to interact with the neighborhood children is a higher reinforcer than getting to go out to the backyard to herd fish. If Finn's in the house, then getting to play with a squeaky, fuzzy toy is more powerful than prime rib waved in front of his nose. If I'm outside in the backyard, I could wave the prime rib in front of his nose and he would bypass it for the higher-reward of seeing the fish. If I were in the front yard, I could hold an aquarium of fish in one hand (if I could!) and a steak in the other, and he'd bypass both to greet children.

Reinforcers change in value depending on context! If my dog was starving, and I waved that juicy steak in front of his nose in the front or back yard, then he'd of course want the food rather than the normally more rewarding interaction or fish watching.

You can use obsessions as reinforcers, but you have to be careful in how you use them. Use them as rewards, during a specific learning session, not as bribes or lures. You also have to be careful that the presence of the object or thing the dog loves the most at that time does not send him over-the-top and out of control. You teach control around the object first, before you allow it to become a reinforcer for other behaviors you are teaching.

If your dog loves to watch squirrels, then you can use that as a Premack reinforcer - the opportunity to shift focus from you or another behavior to watch the squirrels. However, if the dog is manic about chasing and catching squirrels, then you may want to think twice about allowing THAT as a reinforcer, since it may have strong genetic components to it, and be hard to control in other environments when the dog is working. But, as time passes, and the dog becomes more fluent in controlling the urge to chase, you can then use the chase judiciously as a reinforcer - but you'd better be certain you have fluency in being able to call your dog off that squirrel first!

There are things that are too dangerous to allow a dog to interact with, ever. For instance, I would never use the chance to chase a car as a reinforcement for a dog who loves to chase cars. I'd never use the chance to nip at a horse's hocks as a reinforcement for a dog who loves to do this. That's pretty logical. But lots of other life rewards can be used and used very effectively. Food should never be the only reinforcement!

I wouldn't play with stuff I wasn't certain I could control and didn't want to get accidentally reinforced as an even stronger behavior. Variable reinforcement is powerful stuff, and doesn't leave much room for OOPS times.

But there's a lot of improvising you can do on a lower threshold. For instance, you can use a bird's wing as a reinforcer - the chance to fetch it, hold it, bring it back. I use kids all the time with Finn, because it's so powerful of an obsession with him, but it's one I can still control as long as I am aware of context. I don't use it if I think I'm in a situation where I may not be able to control his response, or in a situation where I don't think I can count on his ability to shift focus from the kids to me.

First, I work a distance away so the threshold is a bit lower, and I still use the opportunity to LOOK at the kids as a reinforcer. But to get to LOOK he must first give up the obsession to look, and offer me some attention. He earns the right to LOOK by offering the behavior I want first.

If he's too close to the kids, then I know he's not ready yet for that strong of a stimulus that close up - but he may do fine 5 feet away, or may do fine in a down-stay rather than a stand or sit-stay.

I think the key for using some of the strong desires of our dogs as reinforcers is to really know your dog's thresholds, really know their pre-cursor behaviors that indicate he's about to go into la-la land and won't be able to respond to you, and to work near that threshold edge without crossing over it, until gradually you can get closer and closer and allow for more and more contact with the object of the dog's delight.

Markers

I agree with Sue that it's still operant training whether we use a clicker, a tongue cluck, a made up crisp sound or a common word.

But in using common words we use everyday in our language, we run the risk of using that word in an emphatic way during a conversation

that the dog can take as a cue word. For example, I used to use "good" as my verbal marker when I wasn't using a clicker.

I can remember several times I'd be on the phone or talking to someone, have cued my dog to do a down-stay on a mat, and during the conversation, I'd respond to the human I was talking to with a "GOOD!" I also did the same thing with the word, "YES!"

Sure enough, the dog interpreted each of those words as release cues.

Now, knowing that common words spoken with emphasis can have this built in double- edged sword, I try to remember to use a word I never use in normal conversation, such as "YIP!" or a cluck of my tongue.

It's just something we need to be aware of, and there is no right or wrong - people use whatever they have at hand, and whatever works for them.

I love the scalpel-like accuracy of the clicker for shaping precision behaviors, but for refining some simple behaviors, the verbal sound works just fine.

I also have to agree with Sue that when we focus on what we DON'T want our dog to do, and suppress the behavior constantly with a "no" each time, then we are taking a big chance in poisoning the cue, and in teaching the dog to shut down and not offer behaviors when we may want the dog to. Why try anything if there's a good chance for a reprimand?

The clicker philosophy of focusing on what you DO want instead, is just so helpful, and you won't have the baggage that often goes with suppressing behaviors. This is not to say the suppressing behaviors with a verbal retort doesn't work, only that one should use it with great caution, and only on occasion, not regularly - if you don't want the dog to lose the courage to be truly operant. Teaching a dog to be operant means that we allow them to make mistakes, and we re-direct or shape the behavior we DO want and allow the unwanted behavior to be extinguished.

While I'm sure most people DO use a verbal reprimand at times - and there are times when it is very handy - it can be a tough habit to break, and an easy habit to get into doing.

This is one reason why a decade ago, I figured out on my own that 'no reward markers' like the word "wrong" were backfiring on me. I found that at times when I was tense, or stressed, or worried - I would use that word very emphatically, so that it became a punisher rather than a neutral piece of information. Plus, I found my dogs began to reduce the amount of behaviors they were offering me, and waiting for me to guide them every step of the way, like the old carrot and stick.

I didn't want this, and I saw I was causing behaviors that were problematic to learning and problem solving.

I think this is a natural process of learning for all of us. We try things, we observe our dogs, we see what works and what tend to maybe work but comes with fallout or baggage. So we adjust what we are doing, we keep learning, and we become better trainers.

I think it's a wonderful thing when we can look at our mistakes in the same way we look at the mistakes our dogs make - as stepping stones to learning, as part of the process. When we let go of ego, and see ourselves as always being students, we become better trainers, better communicators and we learn to train faster and more efficiently, and confuse our dogs less.

Obedience And The CGC

I SO agree with you about the word "Obedience" being very different in today's context for clicker trainers, and also about CGC being a really fun goal to work towards.

Old words aren't going to go away overnight. I agree with Lindsay that some common words are really hard for me to stomach as well: "command" is an example. I use "cue" because it doesn't have that same "do it or else I will hurt you" connotation in my own mind.

I hope you won't let "old terminology" from trying something that can be lots of fun to practice! I love practicing precision and instant responses, and find that each behavior that becomes fluent can be used in so many other contexts, such as for service work, for freestyle dance, therapy work, etc.

Everything you teach your dog every day can be considered part of "obedience", though you certainly don't have to think of it that way.

The CGC test is lots of fun, and a way to show off the wonderful clicker training skills you've developed, and how well your dog has learned fluency in those important everyday "manners" behaviors. Your dog will walk on a loose leash, be non-reactive when a friendly strange dog is brought into the room, not jump on a person or shy away when you shake hands with another person, remain with a tester without whining or showing anxiety as you leave the room for a few minutes, etc. These are just everyday routine things we teach our dogs, and have fun doing it along with our dogs.

I think of the CGC test as a way to "show off" what a wonderful dog I'm with.

Puppy Foundation Behaviors

What I'm seeing in this pup's responses now helps affirm what I suspected - that I was in such a rush to teach all I could at the youngest possible age, and that it was working against me. That even if we wait until the dog is more mature, the behaviors still shape up well when we

begin training them. And that those foundation behaviors are absolutely the most important of all to work with at an early age.

The foundation behaviors we have worked with are:

- eye contact, automatic check in
- name recognition: stop and make eye contact
- recall with increasing distractions
- sit
- down
- stand
- wait at all open doorways until a cue is given
- walk on a loose leash
- walk off-leash with focus
- stop at all sidewalk/road crosswalks
- wait when cued in any position, ahead of handler, behind handler, beside handler, coming towards and moving away from handler
- leave it, generalized to all objects, behaviors when cue is given, and to make eye contact with human
- offer focus to handler when approaching another dog, cat, squirrel, lizard, etc.
- sit and greet people of all ages appropriately
- run and explore on a Flexi-leash without pulling
- settle on mat
- move under table
- "chill out" or instantly relax
- relax when being handled, body parts all being manipulated
- stand, sit or lie motionlessly while ears, paws, eyes, anus are checked
- accept insertion of rectal thermometer - accept being handled and positioned manually by other humans
- relax in vet's office, on cold, hard stainless table
- have legs stretched out while in supine position
- accepting hands of unknown people coming toward him from all directions
- doing a "paws up" on my wheelchair to have leash, collar, attached
- moving off chair when "off" cue is given
- gaiting with chair on both sides, not just one
- "find" hidden objects

- fetching games based on play only –
- tug and release games
- some object discrimination by names (toy, ball, leash, people's names, etc.)

We are beginning to approach a level of maturity where I will be asking for higher criteria, more focus, and in teaching some tasks. This pup still does not have a real working retrieve, but has a fine play retrieve. In varying objects during play, I'm getting him used to putting all types of objects in his mouth and carrying them. I will soon start backchaining the retrieve to bypass some of the pitfalls of building a retrieve only on a play retrieve, such as the pounce, shake and kill of soft objects.

Stubborn Or Savvy-Smart?

"Sure, there are times when maybe he is truly distracted, but there are times like yesterday when I was in the hallway at one end and he was at the other end and I was trying to get him to come so I could put him in the bedroom in his crate before I left work. I think he'd gotten spoiled all week with my husband not here because I haven't been putting him in the crate. So here I am at one in of the hall looking straight at him, treat and clicker in hand ready for him to come and calling him and he is at the other end laying down staring at me and not budging. He does this quite a bit when he really doesn't want to do what we ask. So to me that seems like stubbornness?"

Think about it. The dog knows you are about to leave for work, and that you're going to crate him and leave. Is it stubbornness to not respond to the clicker and treats when it's being used to coerce him to do something he won't find fun to do? Or is he SMART for realizing that the fun is going to quickly end, and in this instance, the click and

treat become a bit of a punisher, meaning "good things will end." Is the treat worth his response when he knows he will soon be crated for the day? Or when he knows other 'good things, good times will end" if he responds?

Remember, dogs are opportunistic beings. They usually do what works. If NOT responding is going to keep the enjoyment happening longer, then why respond? To me, it's a sign of intelligence - the dog has already learned that the human sometimes uses the clicker and treats to coerce him into doing what he really doesn't want to do, and the reward is not worth it.

Instead, why not shift the perspective a bit so that "something good happens" even when other good things stop. For instance, if going into the crate when you are getting ready to leave for work means that he will go into that crate and receive a nice, frozen, delicious stuffed Kong, which he can enjoy for the next 30 minutes, then perhaps it might be more worth responding to?

There are times my new Papillon rescue does NOT want to come back into the house, and is having a fine time outside sniffing, marking and doing other doggy-delightful things. So, instead of trying to coerce him to come in, I just ignore him totally, close the door, and right BY the door - where he can hear and see - I start playing with the other dogs with toys or clicking and treating them. In a nanosecond, the new boy realizes he's missing out on good things and then asks to be let in.

There's no need to get frustrated when a dog is just smart enough to realize he's walking into a trap! Just remember who has the opposable thumbs, and use your wits to find what is more enticing to him than trying to coerce him to do anything. Make yourself the most interesting thing in the world at that moment - you can laugh, eat something yummy and make lip-smacking sounds, ignoring the dog, but just enjoying yourself.

Or you can dance around, pretend to be having a great time, and it's likely that the dog will want to come close to you to see what's happening. Let him participate for a few moments before taking his

collar, snapping on his leash, and leading him into his crate - where something wonderful and yummy is awaiting him.

Teaching Backing Up

"Here are a couple of things I am trying to put together. #1 Trying to teach her "back" is a joke. I use the command "back" and use body language to get her to go back, but then her front legs go out to the sides her head goes down and she tries to bite or nip at my feet."

Will she follow a food lure? If so, the quickest way to get the message to her of what it is you are asking her to do may be to just use a food lure and your clicker.

Since she bites at your feet when you attempt to force her to move backwards using your body language, and splays her feet outwards, head down, (gee, sounds like an Aussie or Border Collie!), continuing to try to "push" her away from you is obviously not working, it's time to try something new.

But first, dump the "commands." She does not understand the sounds you are trying to command her with yet, so it's just more "noise" getting in the way of her understanding what you are asking of her. If I moved in really close to you, and commanded you to "BURFLE!" what would you do? Would you be a bit confused to keep hearing me say something that made absolutely NO sense to you? Would you get frustrated and give me a verbal "nip," perhaps?

In clicker training, we don't add the "cue" word until the dog already is doing the behavior repeatedly. This is a tough one for most everyone starting out clicker training. The best thing you can do, in my opinion, is to duct tape your mouth closed so you can't accidentally start giving verbal directions that mean absolutely nothing to the dog. Think I'm

joking? I'm not. I have literally duct taped my mouth shut to learn to bypass using verbal prompts. They get in the way, and they slow down learning for the dog.

So, tape up your mouth so you can't command, "BACK!" to the dog. Your goal is to use the food lure to move the dog in different directions, but not by starting with the backing up direction.

Use a high-value food treat when the dog is standing in front of you. But, instead of moving forward, into the dog, to try to force her to move backwards, take a step or two backwards, while offering the food lure. The dog will either stretch out her neck to get the treat while standing in one place, or will take a step toward you to get close enough to get the treat. Click when the dog is taking that first step towards you. Deliver the treat a half-second later, when she has completed the step.

Do this several times, so that she realizes that moving is what is earning her the click and food reward.

Then take a few steps sideways, and repeat. The other direction, repeat. Then, when the dog is like a rubber band, following the food lure forwards as you back up, and to the side as you move to the side, move into the dog one tiny half-shuffle step. If the dog balks, and refuses to move, ignore it - and back up and click the dog for taking a step towards you as she follows the food lure.

What you develop here is a sort of dance, where the dog begins to follow your body forward, sideways, backwards, for a single step. If the dog is still balking, and not taking a step backwards, then back up and look for muscle twitches to click - signals that the dog is ready to move, but hasn't quite lifted the leg to take a step yet. You may even have to click and feed at first for being able to move toward her without her splaying her legs or nipping at your toes.

If you can get to where you can capture a single backward step with one foot - then it will go easier after that. But, you may have to first

back up and move in other directions to get past the bad association she now has with the word "back" and in moving into her space.

There are many other ways to teach backing up with a clicker, rather than using food lures. Targeting is extremely effective, but if you're new to clicker training, it may be easier just to begin with a food lure. Food lures are only problematic when people don't know how to 'fade' them - get rid of them - quickly enough, and the dog begins to rely on food as a "bribe." But you can certainly use food to lure an initial behavior and then fade it out as soon as the dog has a hint of what you are asking of her.

I think it's asking a lot of the HUMAN who is new to operant training, to know how to handle a target stick, a clicker, get the timing of the click right, handle the leash, the dispensing of food, and resisting the urge to "help" the dog with verbal or physical prompts.

So forsaking being the purist, I will always opt to use what is easiest for both the human and dog, because let's face it: you're learning along with the dog, and you are going to make mistakes along with the dog. Why set yourself up for failure by trying to do too much, too soon, when you still don't know how to use the tools correctly? Make it easy. Use that food lure to get the beginnings of the behavior you want, but then, stop using it before it becomes a crutch that turned into an expected bribe.

So, the wrap up of this advice is to:

Keep quiet while teaching, duct tape mouth to remember this.

Move backwards with lure so that dog moves TOWARD you at first.

C. Don't move into the dog's space to coerce the "backing" motion until your dog will follow the lure in other directions first.

D. Think of moving backwards as just one part of a dance you do with your dog, where you teach your dog to follow you in whatever direction you move, while she is facing you.

And one more tip:

Think of substituting the word "command" in your mind with the word "Cue" instead. It will help change your mindset, and help you to remember you are not commanding your dog to do anything, but asking nicely for a behavior. It's like sitting at the dinner table, and "commanding" someone to, "GIVE ME THE SALT!" or asking nicely to "pass the salt, please." A command comes with a built in "or else," but a cue is just a neutral sounding prompt the dog has come to know is paired with a behavior it already knows how to do.

Finally, remember to resist adding a cue word until the dog already knows the behavior. Until then, it's just added "stuff" that will slow down the dog's ability to learn, and frustrate both you and your dog.

We get frustrated when we can't get our message across to the dog. What we have to remember is that dogs don't understand our language. Imagine if you were in a different country, and had no idea what people were saying to you, or what people were asking you to do. Would that not be incredibly frustrating?

What the clicker does is bridge that gap between the human language it does not yet understand, and gives the dog a clear picture of what it is doing that will earn a reward.

We do this all the time without words with other humans. Imagine having your back scratched, and an especially itchy spot gets some attention by the scratcher, who has no idea that this is an itchy spot.

What do you do when the scratcher gets near the spot where you need more scratching? You probably make a sound, such as "ahhh" and this sound lets the scratcher know that THAT spot being scratched really feels extra good, so the scratcher gives it more attention.

Now, you could try giving the scratcher detailed instructions ahead of time, explaining that you have a particularly itchy spot 3 centimeters under your left shoulder blade, and 4 centimeters toward your spine.

With a bit of luck, the scratcher may remember this, but probably won't hit the target very accurately with verbal instruction only. But if you wait until the scratcher is in the area, then say "ahhh" when the scratcher hit the spot, at the exact time - it's a clear signal of what you do want, and you didn't need words to explain it.

If the clicker is too tricky to use at first, just lure with food and use a verbal crisp marker sound, such as "YIP!" or a tongue click. Simplify. You can always add the clicker later. The important thing is that you are learning what a 'marker' signal is yourself, and how it is used properly. Whether it's an actual clicker or a verbal crisp sound won't be very important in the beginning, with simple behaviors. The beauty of a precision tool like the clicker is that it will be there when you have honed your skills to be able to handle it along with all the other things you must handle - at one time. And it will give you scalpel-like accuracy for more complicated behaviors and behavior chains.

But sometimes, starting out with the clicker when you have already run into problems - can slow you down, unless you have a coach there helping you. If you need to simplify, and not use a clicker, then that's fine! Just use some sort of sound you can make with your mouth that the dog doesn't hear all the time. For instance, "good" is probably NOT a good word to use: we use it constantly in daily speech, and we need to use a more unique sound the dog does not always hear out of context as a marker sound.

Good luck, and keep us posted on your progress!

Teaching Food Zen (Leave It) and Poisoning The Cue

By pulling Spot back when she goes toward the cat food and saying "leave it," you're pairing coercion with the cue word you want her to respond to. It's a good way to "poison the cue," and it sets the dog up

to require restraint and a verbal "reprimand" rather than a cue to leave the food alone.

At this point, management is your key while you "teach" instead of force your dog to learn what "leave it" means. Put the cat food up on a counter where the dog can't get at it, because each time she does get to it, it strengthens the behavior, even when she only gets it some of the times.

There are many effective and positive ways to teach "leave it" instead of using force and coercion. When you teach it with a clicker and treats, you allow the dog to choose, to make a conscious choice during the learning phase.

Right now your dog doesn't know what "leave it" means. So go back to foundations and teach the behavior the clicker way and you'll find just how quickly you can shape this behavior and how fast the dog will pick it up.

There are several posts recently discussing how to teach "leave it" in this way, plus there are posts in the shared files outlining how to do it.

One of the best resources you could hope to find are the files on the Clicker Solutions website at <http://www.clickersolutions.com> and also on Sue Ailsby's website in the "Training Levels" section: <http://www.sue-eh.ca>. I strongly recommend checking out Sue's web site and joining the Training Levels email list, as it's very organized, and will take you step-by-step through each level of learning so that you don't miss any important foundation steps. It's AWESOME!

I can't suggest strongly enough that you do this, as you will not always be there to pull your dog off the cat food, and the variable reinforcement of Spot getting to the food at times is really making the behavior much stronger. When you learn how simple and elegant - and FAST - it is to simply shape this behavior, it will blow you away!

If you need a good video to help you actually see how the foundation behaviors can be taught with clicker training, check out "The How of

Bow Wow" by Virginia Broitman and Sherri Lippman, available at <http://www.dogwise.com>. It's excellent, and was the 2004 DWAA winner for training video of the year.

Training Tips And Musings

Good Morning List members!

I'm back to the land of the living, after having become quite intimate with the flu bug over the holidays. And now, I think I'm almost ready to begin Christmas shopping!

Since I'm just beginning to sit up at the computer again, I'm woefully behind on all list mail. Almost as far behind as I am with dog training. You don't even want to know what this wild bunch of canines is like right now - but just imagine three toddlers who ate a pound of high-caffeine powder bouncing off the walls. I'm just thankful dogs can't hold a crayon in their paws. <G>

So what do you do with wild doggers when you can't lift your head off the pillow or get it out of the toilet? I've found it possible to sit spread eagled on the floor, propped up by the wall, and click the dogs for anything I can get. Like a few doggie pushups all in unison in the bathroom, or allowing each dog to retrieve something, or for solid touch and holds on my palm from each dog or by three dogs on one palm at the same time. Anything I can do in 60 seconds before the next wave of nausea hits!

Of course, over the holidays here in Tucson the weather was quite glorious. Mid-60's, high-60's, sunshine and breezes were the norm as we huddled over our porcelain thrones. Yesterday, as the flu broke and I could finally get outside, the weather turned, a nice storm front came through and the temperature didn't get past 50 degrees, was rainy and windy....Brrrrrr! Still, I managed a short river walk with the doggers,

who were sure they would never get outside again. I don't think they walked once. They sort of pogo-sticked down the path, doing gazelle leaps from one side of the walk to the other.

After they had about 10 minutes to sniff, rock and roll, I started working individual dogs. I'd run one dog for a half mile or so, then do random downs from a distance (16 feet, the length of my Flexi-leashes). It was asking a lot of dogs who have been cooped up for 2 weeks. But they all did me proud, dropping instantly on their bellies when cued.

I'm absolutely positive they offered these terrific responses out of pure Lassie-style love for their "Timmy", and that it had nothing to do with the nuked garlic chicken in my treat bag, nor the fact that the release from that successfully cued behavior consistently netted them another 5 minutes of walking and sniffing each time. <G>

At one point of our walk, I had all three dogs on Flexis running out ahead of the power chair, and we were moving along at about a 3.5 mile an hour clip. A group of cyclists passed, and one fellow paused, said, "Look at those little bitty dogs pulling that wheelchair - isn't that amazing?" Hahhhh!

At each bridge, and at each path crossing, I cued the dogs into "close" or "Heel" position in brace, and practiced auto sits and auto waits. Then it was back to the "MUSH!" cue - I'm just starting to establish this cue with the dogs in unison - so they will jump into instant high gear, begin to run out in front of the chair. The two mature dogs are great at it, but the pup, who has been shaped to pretty much remain in the "close" position, can only do it when the other dogs are with him, otherwise he will stop every few feet, look back at me, or fall back into the "close" position. Yep, I upped the criteria too quickly for the little guy, so I'll have to go back, shape the behavior from square one when he's not with the other dogs. Fortunately, he's a quick learner, so once I back up and find the weak link, and where I lumped instead of split, he should be fine.

I'm having a bit of a licking problem with this pup. I have, at this point, used no aversives. Instead, I put "kissing" on cue, and give him chances

to lick and chances to refrain from licking, waiting for that cue to do so. But it's really interesting to see the fallout from not being able to lick when he wants. He's so INTO licking that when he's working hard to NOT lick, his entire jaw trembles - it bobs up and down like Mr. Ed, and the tongue will rapidly dart in and out between his lips.

When it gets overwhelming, he'll do an air-lick or two. I've been working to very incrementally increase the time of not licking, but this is by far the most difficult behavior this pup has ever had to attempt. The worst part is that it's almost impossible NOT to laugh when I see that little lower jaw start doing the shimmy. But I also see this is now a very compulsive behavior, and will take a lot of work to redirect. It's so darned self-reinforcing for the pup. In general, he is an extremely "oral" dog.

Another interesting observation is that at times, when we're practicing the licking cue, when he's NOT licking, he'll drop his head and suckle on the blanket or on a piece of cloth. This is relatively new, and cropped up only in the last few weeks. Again, I try to re-direct this so it doesn't become a default behavior. But just seeing the INTENSITY of his desire to do oral type things is very, very interesting. And trying to figure out priorities in shaping alternative behaviors is a true challenge to me at this point, with this manic licker.

Hope you all survived the New Year celebrations fine and dandy - I'm not allowed to say "millenium" here in our home, since I live with a scientist who constantly reminds me that we have another year to go.
<G>

Oh! One more thing I wanted to mention. My birth-daughter Lisa, also a list member, got this wonderful digital camera for Christmas that takes short 15 second videos. She made me up a little mpeg of her shaping her dog to do a spin and down. This is just SO cool! You can see each movement, hear the click!

I can just see all sorts of wonderful possibilities here for folks trying to understand a clicker concept, and how helpful this could be for those trying to learn clicker training without the benefit of a nearby trainer

or center. With these little short gems, it's possible to **SHOW** what takes so many words to explain, and it's just fantastic!

I can especially see this as being very helpful for things that can be extremely confusing to try to explain in words, such as "101 things to do with a box". Yet, when you **SHOW** it, it's very obvious what is being attempted and how it can work to encourage problem solving and behavior offering.

Does anyone use these camera for helping people understand problem areas in clicker training? I can see **SO** many possibilities here!

Using Good As A Marker

Interesting discussion!

If I'm a handler who regularly uses a praise phrase of "good sit," for example, then I expect my dog will quickly catch on that the context has changed, even if I use "good" as a verbal marker in other contexts and "sit" as a cue in others. I do think dogs are very capable of subtle discrimination.

On the other hand, let's say I'm a handler who doesn't regularly use "good" as part of a praise phrase, that my dog is highly operant, and I used "good" as a verbal marker regularly. The dog was used to listening closely to my words during learning sessions of compound cues, adduction, etc. If I abruptly use "good sit" during a learning session, then I would then expect the dog to be most likely to interpret the "good" as a marker, stand/change position, and repeat the sit.

I think we can teach our dogs to respond in lots of different ways, to ignore things when out of context, or to listen for words or tones whether in context or not. That's the beauty of behavior analysis. With

skill, we can refine responses to cues/prompts to whatever level of sensitivity we choose.

When I'm on the phone or talking to someone else, not focusing on my dog, I am pretty certain my dog can understand some words I use all the time. I suspect it may sound something like this: "yadda yadda yadda....sit down....yadda yadda....come....yadda yadda yadda....open....yadda yadda.....take....yadda yadda...give...yadda yadda....thank you....yadda yadda....good...yadda yadda....."

Hearing these words in another context doesn't mean that my dog is going to "sit" or "come" or "take" or "Give" each time it hears a known word uttered in normal human speech that's not directed specifically to the dog.

Likewise, if I have taught the dog that "good sit" or "good down" is a praise phrase, then I won't expect the dog to shift position so that it can move into a sit or down position again, when it hears a praise phrase. If the dog is in the middle of a learning session of compound cues, I'd expect the dog to respond to each word separately.

If I'm moving down the street in my powerchair at a good clip with the dog at my side, and I say, "good close (my dog's word for heel position), I don't think my dog's going to stop, then re-find "close" position again. He'll quickly learn to generalize that in this context, it's simply a praise phrase.

I don't happen to use "good sit," etc. as a praise phrase, though I do use "good boy." I also use "good!" as a verbal marker, along with many other crisp sounds, like "yip!," "Yee," "yep," "wow!," "Yo!" etc. I can use any sound delivered in a short, crisp way and the dog understands it's a marker word from context, tone of voice and duration of sound.

But even when I deliver the praise phrase "Good! boy" with the "good" said crisply as I would while using it as a verbal marker, my dog has come to understand that "good" in this context - no matter how it's delivered in tone and duration - is not a marker word, but part of a praise phrase.

Video Tape Training

I have sent out copies of the "Dogs with Jobs" spot we did to all who have requested copies. And I've had almost no feedback. I'm disappointed. Why?

This tape hosts a MULTITUDE of trainer mistakes, and it would be great practice to identify them, and think about how it could be done more effectively.

In sending out these tapes, I had no illusions here. I knew they were filled with glaring errors of all kinds. My hope was to show that stress can affect us all differently, and that nervousness can override what we think are new defaults, and show all the ways we can backslide and confuse our dogs by our inconsistencies.

My thinking was that if nothing else, the tape would show that in spite of trainer errors, we can STILL have a well trained dog who can assist us and have good public manners. That with clicker training, we have chosen a very forgiving method of communicating with our dogs, and one that allows a bit more latitude when WE make mistakes, just as it does for when our dogs make mistakes.

I think video taping our sessions is one of the most helpful things we can do. Had I kept up with doing this, I might have bypassed many of the "nervous" behaviors I exhibited, as seen in the shots on the tape. I could have chosen to film around many people, in order to trigger my nervous responses, and then to watch the tape carefully to show me what I most had to work on.

These films can be interpreted as great embarrassments, or as training tools. I choose the latter. If I'd have been the one to choose which footage I would have shown, you can be darned sure all the bobbles

would have ended up on the cutting room floor, with only the best ones shown. But is that reality?

Reality means we ALL have some kind of things that trigger unwanted responses in ourselves. Mine is nervousness, and when I'm nervous, I add, rather than subtract: I add superfluous hand gestures, body gestures, nonstop nervous talking, etc. Watching these responses I automatically exhibit when I'm nervous really helps me to systematically desensitize myself to environmental triggers.

I realize also that I spend a lot of time desensitizing my dogs to environmental triggers, but woefully little effort is spent on reshaping my OWN responses to things that trigger my unwanted responses. Sometimes seeing footage like this is just so helpful, because we can graphically SEE where we err, and we are motivated to make changes in our responses.

So, for all of you who have received our video tape and remained "respectfully" mute - please feel free to talk about what you saw! The mistakes are only mistakes, no different from what our dogs make all the time. I have no illusions of grandeur and excellence as a trainer. I know I can get the job done, and I know I can get it done in spite of the many mistakes I make. It will not hurt my feelings in any way to discuss those mistakes and how they can be avoided. I think it's a great learning opportunity!



THE CLICKER

Clicker And Reward

A clicker is simply an 'event marker,' or a special sound that marks a moment in time, just as a camera click captures a picture in freeze-frame of that moment in time.

The clicker itself has no magical powers. You don't even need a clicker to train an animal, but for those who want scalpel-like accuracy, the clicker is a magnificent tool. But it's not a primary reinforcer - it's just a marker, that tells the animal two important things: 1. What they were doing when they heard that click is what they will NOW be rewarded for. 2. Something good will now happen.

Not all dogs will work well for treats initially, just as food is not enticing to all people. We can TEACH a dog to work for treats, but we still may need other reinforcers besides food, and, I always encourage people to make lists of things their dog finds rewarding. For a dog with strong innate proclivities, such as scenthounds, sighthounds, herding dogs - food may be less important than a chance to do what they were bred to do, even once they have learned to work for food and to enjoy getting "paid" in food.

The thing about food is that it's very fast and efficient, and it allows the teacher to get in a lot of repetitions of the behavior very quickly. We can use other reinforcers - such as a chance to catch a ball or frisbee, or chase a fuzzy toy, but these take more time, and we won't be able to get in as many reinforcements in a short learning session. Food is simply very convenient.

The clicker is only used to shape a new behavior, and once it has been learned, put on cue, and the behavior is considered "fluent," there clicker is no longer needed, unless we are upping the criteria, and changing environments, etc. Some dogs WILL find it rewarding to work with just the click and no treat or other noticeable reinforcer. offer this thought with major caveats. Often times there is something the dog is finding even more reinforcing that we are not even aware of. The chance to continue on with solving a problem can give us a dog

who will bypass accepting a treat when learning a chain of behaviors, and the dog may choose to wait until the chain has been learned before accepting a treat (and by 'treat,' I don't necessarily mean food, it could be a game or whatever the dog loves the most).

However, this is not very widespread, and tends to happen mainly, in my experience, with dogs who are very clicker savvy, who have learned to enjoy the problem solving process in itself and don't want to stop to get a treat at that specific time.

As for how long between click and delivery of a primary reinforcer - again, this can well depend upon the clicker savvyness of the dog, who has come to know that the treat may come immediately after the click, or a minute after the click. Initially, we give the treat immediately because otherwise, we are lying to our dogs by teaching them that a click means a treat is coming.

As time progresses, the dog may well choose to wait a bit, and not find it frustrating to have to wait for the treat to come.

If I'm shaping a new behavior, I want those treats to come fast and furiously after each click. But if I'm doing a group sit and ignore the sirens outside our door, then with my now elder, clicker savvy dogs, I can click, take my time going into the kitchen, taking out some treats, cutting them up, and finally, a minute or so later, delivering them to each dog. The dogs still worked for the click - but they have also learned that the click never lies - it always means "something good is about to happen." And if they have to wait a minute, it's sweet anticipation because they know what's coming is worth the wait.

While I have had many instances where I click and a dog is reluctant to take a treat - for many reasons - I still always offer the treat and let the dog make the choice to take it or refuse it. If he chooses to refuse it, fine. But it's still there, it's still offered, and it's totally the dog's choice.

I just don't ever do treatless clicks on purpose. With my little fearful rescue girl, to whom human hands touching her meant everything when she first came here, a click and a scratch on the chin was what

she desired most. But it was HER choice. I offered food, she ignored it, but she moved in close to my hand, and pushed her chest against my fingers. When I scratched her lightly there, her enjoyment was palpable. Now that she's more confident in her surroundings, she is a treat queen, and wants that treat as well as the chest scratch. But at first, that click told her that she could move up close to a human hand and it wasn't going to hurt her, and she wanted that more than anything in the world.

As Christy and Marga have noted, we honor the dog by finding what works for that dog at that place in time.

Or, as Marga has discovered - that CAT! I had a Maine Coon cat who also refused food, but worked for the click and a chance to wind around my wheels without the dogs pushing him away. Once I realized what he considered to be his favorite primary reinforcer - I made sure to keep the dogs away, so the cat could do his little winding around the chair behavior. Fine. Cat's choice. I can tell you my DOGS would not have found that one bit reinforcing, but it definitely was the cat's choice.

But as Christy has noted, to NOT offer some type of primary reinforcement after a click most often dilutes the power of the click, the power of the promise of something really, really good that's coming. There will always be exceptions, but what I have often found in these 'exceptions' is that the dog is finding something else reinforcing enough to continue on without taking a treat.

I can remember a few instances working with my late Papillon, Peek, where he - a major food hound - would refuse a treat while he was busy working on a behavior chain, and instead CHOSE to do the next behavior in the chain he knew - as his reinforcement. Fine. His choice at that time during that training session. The next time, he might well have chosen food.

The point is that I observe the dog, let the dog make the choice, but I never assume the dog will NOT want the primary reinforcers I have for him. I always offer and let the dog choose.

For my late Border Collie Finn, the chance to be petted by a child or to go see the fish in the pond - was the strongest reinforcer I could find for him. He would accept food most of the time, but in certain environments, certain instances, food was too low on the pay scale to be noticed. I watched him bypass a steak on the ground to get a chance to play with a child.

Food is still a very efficient and expedient primary reinforcement, and I think it's very helpful to teach a dog to enjoy and accept food reinforcements so that training can commence as quickly as the dog is capable of learning. When we need to teach behaviors quickly, there are few things faster than using food to get that behavior quickly learned and on cue.

Click And Toss

I'm sure many folks on this list will find I'm spewing dangerous blasphemy by advocating click and tossing of treats. I used to feel the same way. I truly believed that tossing treats was totally counter-productive in service work and that it reinforced floor sniffing. I have revised my opinion on this. I think it's the misuse of treats, not the tossing of treats during training sessions that is problematic.

Jeanne mentioned dogs at the conference that she saw sniffing the floor, and expressed her feelings that treat tossing was the problem. I have a different observation, after watching those same dogs. I saw sniffing behaviors happening when the dogs were exhibiting stress responses, and feel that floor sniffing can be a way for dogs to shrug off stress in a very challenging environment. I don't know that I saw anything there that convinced me that tossing treats was what caused the sniffing.

I saw Scuba, Sue Ailsby's dog, perform brilliantly without hoovering the floor, and this is a dog for whom thousands of treats are tossed during any given week.

This was a hard concept for me to buy, I'll admit it. But I started to think that perhaps my adamancy that we should never, never, ever toss treats to service dogs in training was more of a superstitious behavior on my part, than based in fact. But the more I work with this, the more I come to realize that it has not increased the amount of sniffing my dogs do, and has greatly speeded up learning.

I'm finding that many of the things I held as "absolutes" are really not all about black and white at all, but suffused with many shades of grey. I think for some handlers, tossing treats can be problematic, due to how those treats are tossed, the timing involved, the accuracy of the toss, and the type of treats used. If bits and pieces of treats fall all over the floor, then the dog will have to Hoover around to get up all the crumbs.

But to watch Sue Eh?, Sue Alexander, Sherri and Virginia shape behavior by tossing treats is to watch masters at shaping, because they have captured the dog's total attention and focus, so that they are already the most interesting thing in the room, not what may be on the floor.

By observing those who are so brilliant at tossing treats, I have revised my own opinions. Others may not, and that's fine, too. What I think is very important on a discussion list like this is that we all feel comfortable in sharing our experiences without worrying that we are being judged, and that if something is working, and not causing problems, then we have no need to toss it out when others disagree.

We can still learn from those with whom we disagree on specific issues. I'm sure there are those on the list who are wagging their fingers at me right now, and that's fine! We can agree to disagree, and still learn and share with each other, building on things we do agree on, which are far more in abundance!

Click Ends The Behavior

The clicker is an "event marker" that says "YES! What you did the moment you heard the click sound is right! Now STOP what you were doing when you heard the click, and come get your reward from mom!"

The clicker IS your stop signal while you are training the behavior. It signals the end of the behavior.

When you click, you have to expect her to stop, and look for her reward for earning that click. Once you have the behavior "on cue," and under stimulus control, you will no longer need to use the clicker anymore. But it will take a while to get to that point, because you have to allow for time for her to learn the cue in a lot of different environments and in different contexts.

So for now, while you are building duration with your clicker - just remember, the click sound means, "YEP! GAME OVER! You won! Leave the game now and go get your reward!"

Imagine you're working on a big project at work, one that may take a couple weeks to finish. On your normal payday, your boss doesn't give you a paycheck when you clock out, but instead, says, "Nice job! Keep on working and when you finish the whole project, I'll give you your paycheck for this week as well."

Clicker Service Dogs Learn to Dance

Your heart would have soared if you'd seen the group who met in Delaware for a week last month. It was the very first clicker [0] service dog conference, and it was out of this world wonderful. You would

have loved seeing all the service dogs offering behaviors, all the upbeat handlers and happy dogs having a total blast learning. Having attended many service dog conferences, I can assure you this is NOT the norm. Force and coercion is still the mainstay in service dog training, so seeing this gathering of like-minded people all enjoying learning with their dogs just was too cool for words!

Virginia Broitman and Sherri Lippman did some really fun exercises - they set up "run the gauntlet" where there are two long lines of every possible distraction, and an aisle between the lines where people would walk their dogs through the gauntlet of distractions while working to click their dog's attention back to the handler. It was most impressive - there were a dozen distractions on each side of the aisle, squeaking toys, piles of sumptuous treats, bouncing balls, flapping blankets, people slapping hands on the floor, people mewling like kittens while lying on the floor covering their faces, etc. Every dog did So well!

And we had Carolyn Scott (she's incredible), one of the top freestylers in the world - come to do a demo and lead a clicker freestyle workshop for service dogs. She jumped into a wheelchair and started clicking all sorts of great behaviors - side passes, pivots, jumps, spins. Then she helped others teach their dogs these movements. It was awesome!

To see Carolyn working with her own dog makes people cry - there is such joy between them, such poetry in motion - and you sense while watching them that there is no place else either of them would rather be, nothing else they would rather be doing. And what's so extraordinary about this team is that Carolyn has never forced or coerced Rookie to do any movement - she has just let HIM pick the movements, and then shaped it to refine it and to put it on cue [0]. It shows in their performances so much. There is nothing mechanical about their movements together - it's a flow of pure joy, with the dog doing the movements it most enjoys, along with the person he most enjoys.

This is indeed my new focus - to bring freestyle dance into the service dog world. So many service dogs are bored to death, or under-exercised. This is a way to exercise, to have FUN with a dog, even when

the human can't move very much. All the steps can be taught from a stationary position, with the dog moving around the handler, or moving at a distance. And even distance training is possible, thanks to the clicker!

Clicker Training Talk

I am often asked to speak at groups where there are many traditional trainers, trainers who have been successful with their methods, and are very happy with the results they get.

I've had to adapt strategies for communication with traditional trainer friends and acquaintances that allow us to build on something we agree on, so no one gets on the defensive. I try to choose my words very carefully, and to test them, I apply the words I'll use to clicker training, so I can hear in my mind how it will sound to someone who is as passionate about their method of training as I am of clicker training.

I look for common areas of agreement, such as dog's body language - to start a conversation. I might ask what they have seen in their dog's body language and how it changes under stress, and what they have observed. I try to ask open-ended questions and listen, even when I may not like what I hear. Still, it's information, and it gives me an idea of how to proceed next, so that whatever I say doesn't put that person on the defensive, where they have no choice but to come out of the corner with their boxing gloves on.

Last year I was asked to speak for a national group of dog owners, all of whom were very traditional trainers, a couple of them very well known and had written many successful books. I knew I could not stump for clicker training with this group, because they were in no way receptive to it.

I rolled into the room and saw some very tense body language, since the audience knew ahead of time they were going to be forced to spend a hour with a clicker trainer. I felt a bit like Daniel in the lion's den, and more than a bit intimidated! I was just a "nobody" service dog trainer and handler, had no titles or published books or anything that would have impressed them even remotely.

So I used what I had - my obvious disability, my positive outlook and storytelling to talk about clicker training, and what a liberating thing it was for trainers with disabilities who simply could not do a leash correction, or physically move a dog around the floor. Many could not even give a verbal correction. Basically, I painted a picture in story form of how use of clicker training would give these trainers back their ability to train animals again, in a hands-off way.

I was very careful never to refer to other methods in any negative manner, or to compare clicker training to traditional methods. My focus was on taking them on a clicker journey by having them imagine they were working from a wheelchair, or with hands and vocal cords and bodies that didn't work the same as theirs.

I posed each challenge as one I had to face personally, such as, "Now, how could I get this message to the dog when I couldn't tug or snap the leash or grab his collar?" And I'd ask for audience ideas, of which there were few, as you can imagine.

Then I'd demo of a finished behavior with my clicker-trained service dog how I got that behavior without using hands or voices or body movements. Things like teaching a dog to ignore food without using an aversive were very eye opening to this audience. Again, I never implied it was the **ONLY** way to teach the behavior, but reiterated that clicker training was a godsend to me and others with major physical disabilities when we're just not able to use punishment effectively.

I then demo'd how I shaped a solid retrieve by backchaining. Most of the audience members were trainers who used ear pinches and toe hitches to teach forced retrieves. I wanted to show them how a backchained retrieve was taught, to maybe open their minds just a tiny

bit to alternative ways of teaching a fluent retrieve without using aversives.

By approaching it from a disability standpoint - of "this is a way for people who have little body strength and mobility to get a solid retrieve" - and not even hinting that it was a "better way" - it allowed the audience to just observe the process in a neutral way, without putting up defenses. I didn't have to "sell" my chosen method, I just demonstrated it and demonstrated the fluency of the finished behavior amidst distractions.

I talked about people with so little ability to move that their eyeballs were the most mobile body part, and how they used clicker training to teach their dogs to move around the floor at a distance: eyeballs up for moving backward, eyeballs down for moving forward, blink for stop, eyeballs right and left for moving in those directions.

For me, my disability has been a real ace in the hole in communicating with traditional trainers. They are willing to watch and listen to how clicker training works for people who can't do it their way. They also may get some ideas on little things they can try with their own dogs, though I surely made no mention that they should try this. I just made it fun and interesting to observe, because I know that curiosity will get them to try something at home.

I closed my presentation by genuinely thanking them for being so open to learning how clicker training can give disabled trainers back their ability to train, and that I hoped it might give them some ideas if they found themselves with a client who was unable to follow a more classical training approach. I also thanked several members of the audience for specific things I had learned from their books, and how I was able to apply that advice even when I was unable to train traditionally. That's the truth, too. There is always something I can gain from any good trainer, regardless of their methodology. I find those things I can agree on, and I let them know I appreciated them sharing that knowledge, and how it had helped me.

I'm a clicker trainer, and I got a standing ovation from a traditional training audience, and a whole lot of hugs as well as I was leaving. They listened, they took notes, and I think some went home and tried some of what they saw. Just maybe!

Obviously, it's not an approach that everyone can use, but since I do have a very visible disability, it's one I CAN use and do use shamelessly to open the doors of possibility and keep defenses from going up. It drives the message home very well, but I think the "don't say ANYTHING that can put someone on the defensive" is really a key to success in communicating with a traditional trainer.

My mantra has become: Find something you can agree on, build on that, and let your dog's behaviors be a quiet testimony to the efficacy of clicker training. As many have already posted, arguing is pretty futile because it does put people in the position where they have no choice but to defend what they believe in, and then their minds are closed to other possibilities. Find a way NOT to trip those triggers and you've not only opened communication, but you're practicing clicker tenets in human to human communications as well. I look at it as a great exercise for me to practice clicker thinking!

Clicker vs Praise Phrases

There are many, many simple behaviors that can be easily taught without the precision of a clicker. Think of a clicker as a scalpel. You can use children's safety scissors to cut a piece of construction paper just fine, but those scissors would not be the choice of a surgeon who requires the kind of sharp precision to do delicate work.

I would, however, consider "Well Done" or "That is excellent" or "Aren't you Clever" as praise phrases, and not markers. And for some behaviors, these praise phrases are going to work just fine. I do this myself all the time. I just don't do it when I'm trying to shape a

precision behavior, or a complicated behavior chain. There's not enough accuracy for what i require.

When you need precision, and you want to teach very specific behaviors, or a long behavior chain, then there is nothing quite like the crisp and fast click to tell the animal exactly when it's done something that will earn a reinforcement (reward).

I had to teach my little SD to pick up very tiny items with his front teeth. There was no room for error in this specific behavior chain. I had to first teach the dog to hold its front teeth closed, then to lift the top lip so that the teeth were exposed. Then to hold the object quietly between his front teeth, and finally, incrementally, shape the dog to pick the object off chairs, tables, and finally floors. By little items I mean things like the metal earring backing plates for pierced earrings, darning needles, etc.

If I'd used a simple praise phrase, such as "good boy" the dog could easily have swallowed the object before I could then give the release cue. So there are times when precision markers enhance safety, as well as make learning extremely fast because there are no "muddy edges" the dog has to learn to translate.

If I tell a dog "Good Boy" when it goes out to eliminate, I could easily be reinforcing the dog moving up from a crouch, or wagging it's tail, or sniffing the area in which it's just urinated. The phrase is just too long and too slow to be an effective, crisp reinforcer.

Now, if I take my clicker - or my crisp verbal marker of, 'YIP!' and give that marker sound just as the dog is finishing, but before he has totally finished - then the dog clearly understands that what it was doing the exact moment it heard that crisp sound is that it will now be reinforced for doing.

Of course a clicker is not imperative for good training. It's just another tool, and a darned good one that can offer precision in small, workable, quickly learnable segments. It's a tool like any other that can be used

sloppily, used incorrectly, and it does take practice and skill to become proficient at using it to shape precision behaviors.

But you know, it's a lot like someone putting me behind the wheel of a Ferrari. I may know how to drive and have a lifetime of driving behind me to draw upon, but could I handle that precision driving automobile with the same efficacy I have with a Ford Escort? Of course not. It would take accepting that there is a learning curve, and tossing out my lifetime of good driving ego for me to learn the precision and skills necessary to navigate a Ferrari with the confidence and accuracy in which I can operate a Ford Escort.

Could I successfully get into a Ferrari the first time, start it up, drive a straight line, stop and then turn the engine off? Most likely, yes. But could I navigate that Ferrari around banked mountain curves at high speeds? Sure, if I had a big death wish!

That was an exaggerated example, but my point is that a precision instrument that marks a precise moment in time can be a real boon to training quickly, efficiently, and in making every learning moment count. But if I'd just started to learn how to clicker train, I would not choose a lengthy and precise behavior chain such as a retrieval to begin my learning process. I'd learn first how to be precise in my clicking, by doing exercises that enhance my hand-eye coordination. Then, when I felt sure I would not be clicking too late or too early - I'd begin with clicking behaviors the dog offered naturally, capturing them with the click and learning how to then add the cue word.

The clicker is just a precision teaching instrument, and once the behavior is nearing fluency, it's no longer needed for that behavior or chain of behaviors. There are still many simple behaviors I can use a crisp verbal marker instead, and that works just fine.

Praise phrases, on the other hand, don't accurately mark that moment as well, so it can take longer for the dog to figure out just what it's being reinforced for doing. Wagging my tail? Turning my head? Circling around? Sniffing excrement or urine? Kicking the dirt with back legs?

But I'm also not about to discard praise phrases, either! There's a time and place for them, and I use them constantly to verbally reinforce a job being done well, a task that has already been learned and now is being taken "on the road" for proofing.

Shaping

I'm in love with my dogs. My emotions often spill over with them, and I spend more than a fair amount of time just enjoying being with them, praising them, playing with them, being silly with them, and plum having fun with them. I couldn't exist 24/7 with 5 dogs if I didn't allow my emotions to come out lots and lots every single day with them.

However, when I'm shaping new behavior, I adhere to keeping my mouth shut and my body language as neutral as possible. I must use every bit of my focus and energy to capture the exact moment I want to mark with my clicker. I also want to have the behavior I clicked offered immediately so I can click again as quickly as possible. I want to get the maximum responses and clicks/treats possible within each short session.

This requires my dog to be in a very receptive, thinking mode, and I don't want to inject anything into the session that could distract him, or slow down the repetitions.

For example, I'm now teaching my dog head movements: up, down, right, left. If I stopped to praise and "cheerlead" my dog for each slight twitch in the direction I want his head to go, it would likely take me a much longer time to get the behavior I want as my end goal. Why? Because each time I stop to praise and cheer my dog on, he steps out of "thinking mode" for a few moments and shifts his focus to me, and the pleasure of hearing my emotionally charged happy cheers. To get back to that tiny little head flick I'm trying to capture with good timing, I

need to adhere to rapid clicking and treating, and not distract my dog, as much as I'd love to.

This does not mean that when I'm in a more casual communication mode - yet still teaching the dog - that I won't use praise and cheerleading. I do. Copiously. But when I'm shaping a brand new behavior and I need that scalpel-sharp click, so we can continue rapidly shaping - I shift to a different mindset. The dog is still having fun, I'm still having fun, but we're just moving way too fast in the shaping process to stop for praise.

When I'm in the park, or just in the house with the dog, then I use tons of praise with less accurate verbal markers as needed. Sometimes I'm chucking food and using no markers at all. I reserve the clicker for very exact marking, for the most part, during shaping sessions.

If I'm out in the park, and my dog sees another dog running toward him, and offers me eye contact before responding to the approaching dog, I'm likely not going to use a clicker at all, but will use a verbal, "YIP!" or "GOOD!" followed by food or lots of praise and attention.

If I open up my back door, and a dog waits for me to offer some cue before going through the door, then I'm also likely not going to click - but again, give them the cue they want most - and as they move through the door, I'll likely be cheerleading big time and whooping for joy at what a good dog he is. I am not looking for scalpel-like accuracy at times like this. So cheerleading and praise work splendidly.

But truthfully, I could bypass the praise and cheerleading in this instance, and just let Premack do it's work - the thing the dog most wants is not my praise or attention, but to get out the door into the yard. The praise and emotional whoops for joy are really, mostly for me!

I see no reason we can't have it all - times when we do "power shaping" with a clicker, and times when we just use praise and games and whoop-ti-do's to let the dog know we are delighted with what they have just offered.

It would be a really fun exercise to videotape both "power clicking" to shape a behavior, without any cheerleading or praise, and then to shape another behavior using cheerleading and praise.

You can do a very simple timed trial with just a kitchen timer and a 6-hole muffin tin, each hole filled with 20 tiny treats. Put the timer on for one minute, and see how many times you can click and feed. At the end of the minute, when the timer dings, see how many pieces of treats are left in the muffin tin hole you've been working out of. Then do another session of a minute and see if you have relatively the same amount (or none) of the treats left. Etc.

Then pick a different behavior to shape, something similar - and use the muffin tin, the numbered treats, and take time to praise and cheer the dog on. When the timer dings, see how many pieces of treats you have left. Do this all the way through to the last hole in the muffin tin, and you'll likely see a very different amount of treats left than when you were doing nonstop clicking and treating.

Then compare the behaviors, and see which behavior is the most fluent at that point. It can be very illuminating. I was for me! Even more, as a novice back when I did that, it was an Epiphany.

What is Clicker Training?

Clicker Training is a methodology based on using two parts of operant conditioning: Positive Reinforcement, or +R - "Good things happen" and Negative Punishment or -P - "Good things end."

The philosophy of clicker training is very different from traditional command-based training. Clicker training is based on being "pro-active" rather than re-active. The clicker trainer doesn't coerce nor command nor force the dog to respond to a cue - there is no "or else."

We don't wait for an error to happen so we can "correct" it. There is no punishment for "misbehavior." Does this mean it's a free for all? Totally unstructured? Nope.

It means that the clicker trainer works to invoke the dog's own volition. The dog is incrementally "shaped" to perform any given behavior, or chain of behaviors. The dog chooses, the trainer does not force.

So how can this work? Doesn't it mean you then have totally out of control dogs? It would seem so, but the laws of learning don't work that way. The structure is there, but it's just subtle.

The clicker is nothing more than a little plastic box with a metal tab which makes a clicking noise - a bright sounding click - when depressed. The click is like a camera click: it isolates a moment in time and acts as a "marker", giving information to the dog. It's like saying, "YES! Great! Right NOW!"

We use "markers" all the time in our lives. Think of the last time you had your back scratched. When the person doing the scratching got to the really itchiest part, you probably went, "Ahhhh!" and "marked" that itchy spot so that the person could scratch just a bit longer and harder right there. The "Ahhh" was a marker, just as the clicker is a marker.

In dog training, the clicker "marks the moment" you want the dog to remember, and this is followed up by a treat or something the dog really likes, is really motivated by. So why not just chuck food? Well, you can. And in some instances, this works just fine. But, one can have problems with chucking food. Dogs can easily become "food crazed" and only give the trainer brilliant behaviors when food is present. Also, it's not very accurate for teaching really complicated chains of behaviors, such as the retrieve. It can be hard to get the food to the dog at exactly the right moment - the moment you want the dog to remember.

This is where the clicker works to bypass focus on food. The dog begins to problem solve, to offer behaviors which will "make" you click - and

the food is not delivered until after the click - sometimes several seconds after. The dog works for the click, not the food, though the food is the primary motivator. Just that few seconds of delay can make all the difference in performance down the road.

Clicker trainers use liberal doses of punishment! But they use "negative punishment, or -P - the removal of a good thing. When the dog offers a behavior we don't wish to reinforce, we simply ignore the offering, not reinforcing it. An example: dog jumps all over person coming in the door. Person ignores dog, turning back, makes no eye contact, no petting. This is using -P or Negative Punishment because good things will END until the dog offers a behavior you are looking for. The moment the dog stops jumping, plants 4 feet on the floor, the person clicks and offers a treat, pets dog, gives the dog what it wants the most - ATTENTION. It's still punishment to withhold what the dog wants, but it's not adding an aversive to accomplish the behavior change.

Clicker training, because it is so "Pro-active" depends also on developing skills of observation, and working with observable behaviors. We don't worry much about why a dog is doing what it is doing, or trying to psychoanalyze the dog's reasons for doing what it is doing. We merely move from what we see. Dog is jumping on us, we remove the thing the dog wants and give the dog what it wants once he has offered a behavior we want. We don't care if the dog is jumping because it's excited, or because it came from a kennel, or because we perceive it may be acting "dominant" or any other reason. We observe the behavior right there in front of us and respond accordingly.

We don't use positive punishment (adding an aversive) for misbehavior. Why? Well, we know that mistakes are a vital, important part of learning anything new. A young child just learning to walk takes many awkward steps, falls, gets back up before he learns to balance, and finally to run. Do we slap that child down for the errors made? of course not! We allow the errors to help the child learn what does and does not work. We encourage the child to make mistakes in order to learn what DOES work.

We could no doubt get a behavior change on the jumping dog by adding an aversive. We can knee the dog in the chest, we can holler, "Bad Dog!", we can throw in a leash jerk, and a whole lot of things. Yep, it will probably work. But why add an aversive if all we want to do is get the information to the dog about what we want? All we need to do is refuse to reinforce behaviors we don't want. By ignoring the jumping, we know that dog will most likely stop the behavior in the next 30 seconds or less, when he is getting no reinforcement for it.

The beauty of this is that the dog figures it out on his own. And one quickly sees that "AHA!" moment when the dog realizes that "Oh, you mean all I have to do is plant my feet on the ground here and I'll get pats and treats and all sorts of good attention???"

Obviously, this example is very simplistic. But it is the principle upon which clicker training works: we mark the moment we want the dog to remember, we reinforce with something the dog wants, and we take away good things when we are offered an inappropriate behavior.

Because clicker training is so based upon observable behavior, one learns to develop a keen skill of observing dog behavior. We read the dog's body language a lot. When we are working with desensitizing a dog exhibiting fear aggression, let's say, at the approach of another dog, we would first note at what point the dog began to throw off "calming signals" or displacement behaviors, such as hackles rising, lip licking, tightening of posture, etc. Then we would begin our reinforcement at a point just beyond when the dog begins to stress. If the dog shows signs of stressing at 50 feet from an approaching dog, we begin to reinforce for OTHER behaviors we do want at say, 60 feet. We engage the dog's volition and get the dog's attention, and rapidly reinforce what we want at that point, gradually moving closer to the feared object.

What this allows us to do is to capture the dog's attention without adding an aversive to suppress behavior. When the dog's adrenaline is surging, when he is totally stressed, little learning will happen. So we work from the periphery of that stress, constantly moving INTO it in little steps, small enough steps that the dog can handle it and develop new responses.

Clicker training helps the dog develop problem-solving skills, and to offer new behaviors. This is especially important in service work, where we may have a problem we need the dog to solve, but the dog has never been taught to do that behavior we need. The dog who has been encouraged to continue problem solving, and not just waiting for a cue to perform a behavior - is the dog who can problem solve when you need him to do this the most.

When my friend fell out of her car and her wheelchair rolled away, into a ditch, she cued her dog to go fetch her cell phone, which was in her backpack. She'd never taught the dog to open the backpack. But she had played lots of problem solving games with the dog. The dog first tried to bring her the keys when he couldn't get the phone. Then brought her the jacket hanging over the top of her chair. She ignored these offerings. Finally, the dog went back, sniffed for the phone, figured out how to open the zipper right then and there, and got that phone out and brought it to her.

Same for my Papillon who could not get the wheelchair to me, as it had lodged on a chair leg. He tried all the ways he could to loosen it up, pulling right and left - but it remained stuck. But, thanks to problem solving games, he finally tried something that DID work - he backed up across the room, took a running jump and leaped into the chair, successfully dislodging the stuck wheel, and then was able to pull the chair the rest of the way to me.

Hope this helps in understanding a little bit about how clicker training works!



CROSSING OVER

Explanation

Dear Listmembers,

Just a friendly reminder that the OCAD list rules prohibit discussions advocating the use of choke chains, prongs, shock collars, etc. This is a clicker training discussion list, set up to a very different approach to changing unwanted responses and getting the behaviors that are wanted instead.

We realize this is a very narrowly focused group, and that it may be too restrictive for those who are comfortable using the clicker as well as corrections. For those who would prefer more open discussions where the clicker is used outside the tenets of clicker training, there are many other discussion lists where this is done in a more "combined training" approach, and such discussions would be welcomed.

However, on OCAD, our list rules prohibit the discussion of using choke collars. You can read these rules once a month when they are posted on the list, or on your introductory letter that asked you to accept the list rules before posting, and you can also read the list rules on the web in the shared files section.

A good many of the listmembers here are "crossover trainers," and were very skilled at using traditional training methods before they chose to change their approach to utilize the tenets of clicker training. This list was started in 1998 as a safe haven for trainers and handlers who wanted a different option from traditional and combined methods currently being discussed; those who joined to discuss how to find solutions and ideas within the framework of clicker training.

Again, we realize this forum will not be comfortable for everyone who uses a clicker - there are so many different ways to use a clicker and

adapt it to other methodologies, and these approaches may not fall within the tenets of clicker training.

Jane's posts requesting ideas for clicker trainers who find themselves in more traditional methodology classes are on-topic, however. Even more, they ask very important questions that experienced listmembers may be able to help answer: how to communicate with someone using the tenets of clicker training without putting that person on the defensive. These are important issues that are very much on-topic and worthy of discussion on a narrowly focused clicker training discussion list.

We do realize that many methods of training are used, used proficiently, with good results - methods that may utilize a clicker or not, but just don't fall within the guidelines of "clicker training." We're not here to convert anyone to clicker training, only to offer a forum for discussing how to use clicker training effectively and efficiently. We realize there are a good many people who will not be comfortable within these guidelines, and hope that those who are not comfortable will seek out other training lists that may better suit their needs.

Fortunately, there are a plethora of training lists that should offer places to discuss every method or combined methods. On OCAD, we'd like to keep the discussions within the tenets of clicker training.

Operant Successes

When I switched to clicker training over a decade ago, my young Papillon Peek was known as the "Vomiting Comet" for his ability to projectile hurl his stomach contents whenever anything was attempting to be placed in his mouth.

I was counseled to use more force, tie his mouth shut, yadda yadda, but I couldn't do it. Jen's right when she said, "If they had the heart for

it...." - at least in my case, since unlike Morgan and Sue, I had no background in doing forced retrieves. It just looked too barbaric for me, and I hate hate hate hearing animals scream in pain or stress. I readily admit to living in wimpdom.

As a last ditch effort, I joined a service dog training program that used only clicker training. I didn't expect it to work, but at that point, I was willing to try anything that did not cause him more pain and more stress. He hated learning sessions so much, and his body language screamed stress.

It was like a miracle to me when Peek responded to backchaining on that very first try - with such joy, and progressed so quickly, as if he was writing the manual as he learned. It happened like clockwork. What was once the thing he most hated and feared ultimately became his favorite task to do.

The morning of his death, he ate breakfast and picked up his food dish and gave it to me, though it took a lot of energy to rise up on those back legs and do a paws up on my wheelchair while living with end stage CHF. But it was such a reinforced behavior by then, that he wasn't about to NOT do it, even though it clearly taxed him to try.

I will never forget those first days of shaping a backchained retrieve, and how it was a major turning point for me. To see that little dog take to it so willingly, so happily, and without exuding stress signals all over the place - it just rocked my world totally. And once that door of possibility is opened, it's hard to even consider going backwards and using force or even gentle coercion again. It was the clarity of using a marker signal that made understanding instantly clear for Peek. No fuzzy edges.

Peek was my greatest teacher, because he was a dog who simply refused to respond to force of any kind. Yet allow him choice, and teach by successive approximation - and he'd soar. There were times when I was first learning about behavior analysis and how to apply it, that it all seemed so complicated and I just wanted to quit. But Peek would not let me.

I believe I kept up, pushed through my doubts, fears and fumbles because I loved that dog so much and knew this approach was the only one that made learning easy for him. He took to that marker sound so quickly, and from that point on, learning anything new was much easier for him.

I poisoned a lot of cues along the way, made tons of mistakes, but thankfully, not only is clicker training forgiving, but my dog was forgiving. We learned together, and taught each other.

It's hard to believe that at a year of age, he was a totally out-of-control mess of a pup, that traditional trainers told me should be euthanized because he was "All alpha" and I wasn't willing to shock him or force him into submission. He was, in their eyes, "RUINED."

When, in 1999, he was honored as a National Service Dog of the Year, it was yet another affirmation of the power of the click, and of learning to shape rather than force learning. We had come a long way together, and though he still had many behaviors that weren't truly "fluent," I recognized that the lack of fluency was due entirely to my laziness in following a training plan through to fluency, not fault of the dog.

Reflections Of A Crossover Trainer

Matthew, reading that you are 15 years old simply blew me away. I agree with my dear listmates who are stunned by your commitment and desire to learn all you can, and to make animal communications/teaching an important part of your life at such a young age. At 15, my greatest concern was in getting rid of zits and attracting boys' attention. My animals took a backseat once my hormones kicked in.

Melissa's post was pure ambrosia! YES! Her advice about APDT, the Bailey Chicken Workshops and working toward finding funding to attend some of these remarkable conferences and workshop - is right on target. You have a bright future ahead of you, and I'm still totally overwhelmed by the depth of your interest at such a tender age. If you keep it up, you'll be a world-class trainer one day, giving those seminars and workshops.

Thank you so much for sharing your classical trainer friend's reasons for her choices in how she teaches. Like you and Melissa, I too have friends who are marvelous trainers, who have chosen to teach in a traditional methodology. Though I may wince at times when corrections are given, and in my head, am thinking of proactive ways to get the same behaviors without using the aversives - I also see the efficiency and efficacy of a highly skilled trainer of any methodology.

For nearly 30 years, I was a traditional trainer. To "put down" those who choose to use traditional methodologies would be to invalidate all the work I have done in my life with horses and dogs. Your trainer friend makes a strong point that just because a dog was trained with aversives, does not mean that dog will be a lackluster performer, nor that the dog lives in fear.

As such a trainer myself for all those years, I had a wonderful relationship with my dogs. My dogs were trained as my service dogs long before there a name for dogs who helped people, other than guide dogs. I just called them "pets."

And that's what they were: pets who slept with me, played frisbee all day with the customers at the shop, pets who brought my artificial legs to me, opened doors, carried bags, fetched things for me. They were all trained with traditional methodology, and their eyes never left me: they followed me wherever I went, without fear, and with what I am assuming was contentment.

If I was an abusive "torture" trainer, a person who instilled fear in them consistently, I don't think I would have had the kind of happy attention I was constantly offered from those dogs. Nor the willingness

to always do my bidding. As your trainer friend wisely stated, there is still a LOT of positive reinforcement going on when a skilled trainer uses traditional methodology.

So for all those years I had what I considered great success with animals. They were mannerly, well socialized, healthy, given copious attention and enjoyed interactive play/work all day long. Then one day, I met a little bold dog who could not be forced into compliance. And this dog changed my life, because it forced me to seek out other ways of imparting information that did not use any 'hands on', any coercion, any force.

Force shut this boy down fast, and eventually, frustrated him enough that he began to fight back. Gosh, none of the other dogs in my life had ever reacted in such a manner. They fought sometimes, yes, but eventually capitulated. I sense this dog would have fought until he was decapitated.

So what brought me to clicker training was NOT that traditional training wasn't working most of the time, but that I had finally met an animal I could not force nor coerce, and I had a dire need to get this dog trained to assist me. And I did not want to follow advice and euthanize this dog: he was so smart. I just needed to find a way to get through to him.

What made me switch in total to proactive clicker training is the instant change in this dog's attitude, and the pure joy of seeing him beg to have training sessions, plopping clickers in my lap all the time. What made me switch was seeing the "vomiting comet" - our pet name for this dog who learned to projectile vomit when anything was gently placed in his mouth - then change his attitude totally as a complete "hands off" approach to retrieving was taught.

He couldn't get enough of it. His body language was relaxed and he thrived on problem solving. He hated being "put" into position, handled at all when he was trying to figure out a problem. But let him figure it out, mark those moments of incremental success toward the end goal, and he was one happy camper, learning at warp speed.

Now that several years have passed, my timing has become far better, my skills of observation more finely honed, and my ability to remain proactive - marking the moments of excellence so that reactive corrections were not necessary - have grown immensely. The first couple of years, no WAY could I shape with the speed and efficacy I do today. There is no way I could get behaviors to fluency as fast with a clicker as I could with traditional training.

But funny thing about mechanical skills: if you keep at it, eventually you become proficient, and able to use that scalpel with precision. Just as the skilled traditional trainer can level a well-timed correction, the clicker trainer can deliver a surgically precise positive reinforcement. It does not happen overnight. It takes time to learn to do anything well. Not many of us got on a two wheeled bike and rode off into the sunset flawlessly that first day. And a whole lot of us used "training wheels" for a long time.

Today, I believe I can shape a behavior or a chain of behaviors far faster and with far more precision than I ever could traditionally. It's hard to admit, because I thought I was pretty darned good at one time, able to teach my dogs very quickly. I just never had this kind of precision, never was able to catch those nuances and put them on cue with so little effort and so darned much FUN!

But I do not believe in my heart that all my years as a traditional trainer were years of abusing my dogs. I used the tools that were accepted and known at the time, and I learned to use them fast and efficiently and get the job done. And like your trainer friend, Matt, I spent a lot of time praising and just enjoying the company of my animals, with few problems.

The difference is that I now have a way to communicate effectively with ANY species of animal. I can teach my rat a trick in the same way I can teach my dog a task and the same way I can stop an angry confrontation with a human.

I could never have even thought about teaching a wild animal behaviors in the past. How do you effectively use aversives with a wild animal, who can just flee?

Yet today, I can sit in a park and "shape" a squirrel from a distance, clicking and tossing him a treat. I can shape a wild bird to do a behavior, or shape a child to offer a behavior. I don't need to do any "hands on" teaching to do this, and I find this totally liberating.

One other consideration for me, as an assistance dog trainer, is that many people with high level physical disabilities simply CANNOT use aversives, cannot physically move the dog into position, nor deliver a leash pop, nor even a verbal reprimand.

Yet, with clicker training, the level of disability does not prevent that person from teaching their animals all the way through to a high level of skill and fluency without the use of tools and body muscles and body parts they don't possess. This is such an empowering thing for people with disabilities!

I look back on my years as a traditional trainer not with guilt, but with new eyes. Eyes that recognize that I did many things very well, and some things quite horribly. But that's what learning and growing are all about. There can be no growth, no forward movement without change and opening one's mind to new possibilities. And any change like this is going to have it's own set of frustrations.

There are still times I verbally correct my dogs, lose my patience. They are less and less each year, but they do still happen. I accept this, and I don't dwell on my errors. I simply use them as an indicator of new responses I have to build in my own mind. Of new default behaviors I seek to establish. There are times I still accidentally tighten up on the leash, or start to do a quick leash pop. There are times that leash actually pops, too. But again, I find it happening less and less, until it's now a rarity. And I let it go, don't dwell on it, and move forward again into proactive communications.

I find, as you do Matt, that I learn from ALL good trainers, no matter what methodology they use. I may choose not to use some of the tools they use, nor use tools in quite the same way, but that doesn't negate the information they have to share in many areas. I take what I can use, I let the rest go, and I thank that trainer for sharing his/her experience and knowledge with me. Every good trainer has something to teach me, and for that something taught, I am oh-so-grateful.

If I were to close my mind and my heart to those who train differently than me, it would be MY loss. I always remember that not long ago, I was one of "them."

Keep up the wonderful learning, Matt. You do us all proud. I don't know about anyone else on the list, but I would be incredibly proud to have you as my son. What a changemaker you are going to be one day!

Sniffing And Punishers

I only have a few minutes to respond to your posts, and cannot begin to discuss all the issues you have brought up. I'm headed across town, and must catch a bus soon, arghhhh!

First, the food issue for your dog is one I want to address right now. Of course a hungry dog will sniff. You need to set yourself up for success so you always have food for your animal - always. You can do this no matter how financially challenged you are. It just means looking for sponsorship.

Those of us living on disability have little to spare - you are so right. So that means we have to be a bit more creative to meet our needs. Small businesses in your community can be approached to sponsor you as a service dog team, and vets can be approached to offer lowered fees, or donated services. Church and civic groups can also help.

It just takes a bit of work to do outreach and give them an opportunity

to help. People do enjoy being heroes, and there are times we simply cannot meet our needs. We need to learn to accept what others have to spare. It's not easy, when one is fiercely independent and wants very much to pull their own weight.

But that is **JUST** the kind of person groups and businesses wish to help. Those who will continue to be motivated, those who will in turn reach out to do community education, service (like visiting school children to educate on service dogs, etc.).

So my first thought is to network ASAP and get the supplies, the essentials you need to have a healthy, happy working partner.

Second, I truly do not think punishers are in line for your particular sniffing problem with your dog at this time. Punishers certainly have their place, but you have a dog who has not been trained to "leave it" and you do not have this behavior under stimulus control yet. Rather than punish for a normal dog behavior at this point, why not learn how to shape the behavior and put it on cue?

This is an easy task, actually. It should not take long. It's also called "Doggie Zen" because you are asking the dog to give up something in order to get something.

From all you have explained about your partner, this is a very quick, savvy dog who should learn these lesson rapidly. Even my sniff-obsessed dog is no problem when on leash in public. But remember sniffing is also a calming signal. It is a stress reliever for dogs. You must be sure of what you are observing here.

Again, until you can walk through a restaurant, say "leave it" and your dog responds to the cue immediately, the behavior is not under stimulus control and you still have shaping to do. To punish what the dog does not yet truly understand is not really productive.

Often we think behaviors are under "stimulus control" meaning, whenever we give the cue, the dog responds. In every environment. Many times I hear, "Well, my dog just blew me off!" It's considered

"willful disobedience" when in fact, it may well be that the dog simply does not understand the cue in the context you have given it.

For example, once in class after a year of training, our instructor asked all of us how well we thought our dogs had generalized the behavior and cue of "SIT.": We all raised our hands, as our dogs responded verbally each time.

Then our instructor had us put the dog in a stand, walk **BEHIND** the dog, and give the "sit" cue. Not one dog sat. Every dog turned to his owner, **THEN** sat. The dog did not know the cue in this context: he had always looked at the owner or been at the owners side, or whatever. This taught me a valuable lesson, and made me truly rethink the times I thought my dog was "blowing me off."

I hope you'll check out the "keeper posts" and begin your shaping of "leave it" soon. It will, I believe, be a great help to you.



CUES

Adding the Cue

If I look at you and say, "Flubbort!", what would you do? Would you walk over to the couch and sit down? The word wouldn't mean anything to you, so you'd have a pretty hard time responding to my request, right? When we teach any behavior, we are usually only muddying up the works if we attach words to the process of learning a

behavior. The dog is trying to concentrate on problem solving, on finding out what he needs to do to get you to click and treat him. If we inject superfluous words, like "go to your mat" before the dog has a clue about how to do the behavior, are we not adding a totally useless thing?

For the dog who has learned to problem solve, the process of finding out what needs to be done to get us to click is one that demands concentration. We often hear "let the click speak". We hear this because anything we add in the way of verbiage while the dog is actively problem solving is a distractor!

So, we instead allow the **CLICK** to speak for us, and we incrementally shape the behavior.

In the case of teaching a dog to go to a mat (something all my service dogs do), there is absolutely no advantage to adding a cue word before the dog knows the behavior.

I teach "go to the mat" very incrementally, pure shaping. I drop the mat, dog sniffs or turns head toward it, I c/t. I continue rapid reinforcement for every body movement closer and closer to the mat. I'm **TALKING** to the dogs through the click. Sort of like the old "hot and cold" game, where someone tells you to find a present hidden in the house, and as you move around the house, trying to find it, the person tells you "cold - - cold - - warmer - - warmer yet - - **HOT!**"

Once the dog realizes the game is to do some kind of interaction with the mat, I then begin withholding the click for just a sniff, a head turn. I up the criteria. By now the dog has had several rapid reinforcements, and he is really engaged in the game. He wants to do more. He is motivated. He steps on the mat. **C/T!**

I then reinforce quickly several times, until he's running to the mat each time to touch it. Then I withhold the click a few seconds, until the dog offers something more, usually moving further on to the mat.

Incrementally, I continue to shape full body position on the mat, then the down position, never saying a word, just clicking at what the dog offers. Once the dog is running over to the mat from many positions in the room, I begin to add the "cue" word just before the click.

Then we take the show on the road, practicing the mat in many environments, gradually adding distractions.

I've never had a need to add a cue word before the dog understood the behavior, and for the life of me, I can't think of a single reason why it would ever be needed. The clicker just has such scalpel-like accuracy. But you're SOOOOO right that it's very hard to stop doing this, and I struggle with it all the time. To help myself, I often videotape training sessions, just to see when I'm inadvertently over cueing. I catch myself way too often! <G>

Training and Using the "Default Behavior"

"Can you share how you worked on the self control with Finn. Were the children the cue to back up and into a down position?"

Finn's greatest love is children. Self control is VERY hard for him, always a struggle. I have literally tossed down a fresh steak on the ground and had children 10 feet further away, gave him a release cue, and watched him totally ignore the steak and go to the children.

Finn had 4 years of being allowed to interact freely with children before he went into service dog training. That's four years of reinforcement, so we (his owner/trainer and I) knew it would take time for him to learn new responses, and to "check in" with me when every bit of his being trembled with excitement to interact with a child.

Fortunately, his trainer gave him some very solid foundational training, with his "down" behavior being taught to fluency - his most reliable stationary position. It was interesting to me when we first were paired as a team to see how much harder it was for him to contain himself when cued to "sit" near children.

Yet, he could be cued into a "down" position, and I could move away from him and trust him to not move, not even when children were surrounding him and beckoning him to play with them. Okay, his tail never stopped thumping, but he held the down very well.

Though he is now moving closer to fluency in his "sit" and "stand" behaviors around children, it's still the "down" position that is the most fluent and what I will rely on when Finn's triggers are truly tripped to the max. This is normally when he has not been able to interact with children for many days, and the first kids to give him attention are the hardest to pass up. After a little while out working, though, he gets much better at offering me eye contact amidst those very enticing distractions.

So, I used that "down" behavior as the default for getting out of the van when all the "mosquitoes" (the little kids on our block who love Finn as much as he loves them) swarm my van when I pull up to the house. They know Finn's in the van, they start hooting and hollering before the door opens.

Your terrific question of "Are the children the cue to back up and move into a down position?" isn't easily answered, because though I'd love to say, "YES!" in truth, he's not at that level of fluency yet. He will not try to jump out of the van unless I cue him to, so he is learning to use some restraint. But I still give him the back up (scootch) and "Down" cue before I get out of the van.

I wouldn't need to do this with all children, especially if we were in a shopping center parking lot. He clearly knows that's work time, now. But once at home, with "his" kids whooping it up and waiting to smooch all over him, it's still a crapshoot I'm not willing to place a bet on yet.

But yes, that IS the cue I'm working towards - the presence of kids - ANY kids - as a cue to look to me first and relax until I give the cue to exit the van, or to interact with a child, or to ignore them.

Each time Finn and I go out of our house, it's a training session in self control for Finn. I try to be proactive and recognize when triggers are about to be tripped, and then cue Finn to do an incompatible behavior, one that requires him to "check in" with me. I might ask for a "wait," a "sit" a "stand" or a "down," or just re-cue "close" which is his cue for moving in a heel position next to my chair. Which cue I use depends on the intensity of the distraction, and how long he's been out with me that day.

If we're just going out for his first outing in a couple days, then I know it's going to be harder for him to ignore his trigger distractions. I'll cue the most reliable, most fluent behavior - his "down" until he is offering me focus. I will even leave him in that down and move away from him, which strangely enough is easier for him then if I stay close.

There are times when I do rely on a gentle leader just to be able to control his head. When we're out working, the only time I'm apt to use it is when we're in a line waiting for a cashier and there are women or children cooing at him with squeaky, happy voices. I put the head halter on just for those few minutes, and reinforce all "check in" behaviors - glances at me, turning away from the women and children, or just standing or sitting quietly with a relaxed head position. Once through the line, the head halter comes off, as I have no need for it then as my backup for when I might be distracted while paying for an item, and can't watch him as closely as I'd like to during those trigger times.

Thanks for the good health wishes, Diane! I'm on the upswing now and may try eating semi-solid food tomorrow. But for today, Jello is yummmmm-delicious!

Fluent

If you cue Spot to turn on the kitchen light, and he runs to ring his go-out bell, then the first thing I'd look at is whether Spot truly understands each cue. Is each cue really fluent? Often we think a cue is fluent, when it truly isn't. In order for the cue to be fluent, it has to happen each time, every time you give the cue, quickly, immediately, and correctly.

It's a bit like the old "Sit Test" Ian Dunbar thought up a decade or so ago. He mentioned that often we think and assume a dog understands a cue in every context, because human brains work differently from dog brains. We can generalize learned behaviors faster, easier than dogs can, and we often assume that dogs process information the same as human brains do.

Dr. Dunbar's challenge was to help us realize that our dogs often have no clue of what we are asking of them, when the context changes. Your dog may respond to "sit" perfectly, every time, quickly when he is in front of you, at your side, or in places where you have reinforced the behavior many times. But what happens if you walk/roll around in **BACK** of your dog and verbally cue him to sit? Will your dog sit, or will your dog turn around to face you before sitting?

What if you are lying down, instead of sitting up, with your face to the floor, with your arms over your face. Will your dog immediately sit when it hears the verbal cue when you're in that position?

What if you're in another room, or around the corner and the dog can't see you - will the dog still respond to the "sit" cue at that moment it was given, or will the dog come into your presence before sitting?

If you're lying on the couch, with your feet up over the back of the couch, your head toward the floor, and give the cue, will your dog respond immediately wherever he is when he hears the cue?

In that context, it might be really helpful to test Spot on just how fluent those cues are in different contexts for him. You can make it easier for him by putting up the door open bells so that's not going to be his default response. Or, you can go into a more neutral room, like the bathroom - whatever sets him up for success the easiest.

Then, give your cue to turn on the light as you normally would give it, from the position and distance it is most often given. Turn around and face away from Spot, then give the cue. Does he still do the behavior immediately?

Move into another room, give the cue. Will he move from one room to another and turn on the light?

Lie down on the floor, put your face in your hands, and give the cue. Will he still do the behavior instantly, upon hearing the cue?

Roll outside your front door so you can reach the doorbell. Give the cue to turn on the light, and immediately ring the doorbell. Will Spot still run and turn on the light, even if the doorbell rings?

Give the cue in the same room as the light switch, and immediately after giving the cue, drop a pan, a book, or open an umbrella. Will he still immediately run to turn on the light?

I strongly suspect that Spot is familiar with both behaviors - turning on light switches and ringing the door bell, but that the cues for each behavior are not yet fluent, and thus, the behaviors themselves are not individually fluent.

Learning Cues

"I did what was suggested and put the small trash can in front of me so that he had to hand the trash over the can to

my hand. At first I just dropped it into the can and said "trash." He is still not sure what I am asking but we are working on this."

Hi Jane! Any reason why you are giving the cue before he knows the behavior? At this point, "Trash" is just noise to him. It's not a cue yet. Cues are much, much easier to attach if you get the behavior first, and then when you're getting that behavior 80% of the time, start adding the cue just before you click, as the behavior is happening.

This allows the dog to learn the behavior without confusion, and it makes learning the cue very simple: it's paired with the behavior at the time it's happening, and the click comes immediately after.

What is Spot's release cue for objects he holds quietly and firmly in his mouth until you give him other instructions? Is it, "Give" or "Drop" or...???

I'd start with the cue he is already familiar with, put the basket at your feet, right where he's likely to drop the object normally, then hand him an object, wait a couple seconds, then give your release cue. You can then change the cue if you desire - it's very simple and fast.

In Karen Pryor's cueing workshop in Tucson, I was one of the coaches. It was just awesome to see that every dog was able to learn a new cue, replacing the old cue, during the working sessions.

We coaches worked with small groups of 5-6 dogs, and at first, we took a "baseline" to see what the dogs knew - each person came up with the dog, asked the dog to sit as they normally did. We then had to assess if the dog responded to a hand signal, a verbal signal or a "symphony" of signals - hand, verbal and body parts nodding.

The neat thing was, it didn't matter - each dog learned very quickly how to understand a new cue when it was taught in a way the dog could quickly understand. First, the visually cued dogs were given a verbal cue to learn. The visual cue was given first and as the dog began to sit, the verbal cue was added just before the click. They repeated this

many times, changing positions, changing handlers - other handlers would handle their dog - and within a couple short 6 minute sessions, each dog understood and responded to the new verbal cue without a visual cue added.

Then, Karen gave each handler a piece of typing paper, and said, "This is your new cue!" The handlers were to keep the paper behind their backs, and then bring it out and hold it in front of their stomachs just after the verbal cue was given, and before the click. The sequence was: new cue, old cue, behavior click.

Each dog got to practice this with other handlers in the group and earn reinforcements from them as well. Every single dog in my group learned new cues and responded to them when given by their owner or a different handler.

It was pretty neat to see how fast dogs can learn when we stop "helping" them along, cajoling them, bribing them with treats, luring them with food - it can get in the way of learning, and actually slow down the process considerably! I think every person in that workshop really saw the power of trusting in the click, and how much quicker the dogs learned, and how much faster the dog's behavior became fluent.

If there's one piece of advice I wish I'd taken early on in my clicker education, it would have been to put away the food lures, the body posturing, the "helping" of my dog. It can become as habitual to humans to do this and boy, does it resist extinction! We get in the habit of wanting to "help" our dogs learn, when in fact, most times, we're just adding more confusion and more noise and setting the dog up to expect that particular "helpful" thing or prompt in order to do the behavior.

How many times do we hear people say that their dogs are really excited about learning when the food is present? But when there's no food around, the dog is lackluster about learning. Is it the food that's the problem, or the way the food was used? Was the trainer building a reliance on the presence of food inadvertently?

How about the trainer who does a "symphony" of signals at the same time - for a "sit," for example, the trainer uses a hand signal, a verbal "sit" word, and also leans over the dog, dipping her chin? How long does it take before the dog begins to wait for ALL these signals to happen before doing the behavior? Now add food focus: How many trainers hold their food in their fist, or put their hand on their food bag on their stomach or hips, and at that moment, the dog knows this is a signal as well?

So the dog may have 6-10 different signals and prompts it's responding to for any one single behavior! The trainer wonders why the latency is increasing - that's the time between giving the cue and the dog responding to the cue by doing the behavior. By trying to "help" the dog along, they have inadvertently attached so many cues and prompts that the dog knows it can take its time to respond - until all those cues are in evidence. "Oh, sit. Okay, well I hear the word, and yep, here comes the hand, but she hasn't leaned over me yet or dipped her chin. Oh wait - she has her hand on the treat bag. Must be serious now. Time to "sit."

The other problem I saw constantly as a coach was food obsession in the making. A couple of dogs were so food focused they could not even hear the click. **THEY COULD NOT HEAR THE CLICK!** They only were looking for the finger wiggle, the hand movement toward the treat bag. Their eyes never left that spot, and listening for the click was not important to them.

There was one dog in one of Virginia and Sherri's workshop, where I also coached, that would respond to nothing at all except that food. Even when the click happened, the dog didn't respond - it had learned to focus only on that hand-fingers-bag-delivery of food. If the trainer wanted the dog to sit, the trainer moved her hand in the treat bag up a bit, as if the food was coming out of the bag. The dog sat. If the trainer wanted the dog to down, she pushed her hand down deeper into the bag. The dog wasn't hearing the word cue, wasn't hearing the click - it was cueing totally off the hand position in relation to the treat bag!

What was cool was seeing this change immediately once the food was removed from the dog's direct vision. I just asked her to turn the bag around to her rear, and keep her hands quiet and hanging down at her side. Then she started using the clicker to capture a new behavior - a head dip. Guess which dog was then able to demo a fabulous new behavior to the group at the end of the lab session? Yep, that same dog who would do NOTHING before when it was totally obsessed with focusing on the food and reading the owner's hand position. But as soon as she removed those prompts, the dog began to actually focus on the click and learned a new behavior in warp speed.

I know Virginia and Sherri see this all the time in their classes, but for me, it was just a mind-blowing experience to reiterate how much we humans can get in our dogs way and slow down their learning process when we think we're "helping" them just a bit.

Each time I participate in sessions like this, I'm motivated to go home, and start cleaning up behaviors in my own dogs that I have allowed to become sloppy, and a "Symphony" of cues. With 5 dogs, it usually happens that the one I'm most often working with gets clear cues, because I'm concentrating on that. But the others, the pets - end up with some cue baggage I've allowed to get inadvertently reinforced, so I always have dogs at home I can work with on something or other.

This is a long and windy response to a simple question on teaching a dog to release an object into a basket, isn't it? <G>

I could have written it much more succinctly: stand or sit up straight. Put food out of sight. Give old cue. Attach new cue immediately after old cue, as behavior is happening and immediately click and feed.

But of course, the very human part of me wants to throw in every thought instead of just making one thought very clear! Hahhh!

Leave It

A few things that may help set your dog up for success:

1. Teach "Leave it" as a **cue** rather than a commanding punisher - meaning, deliver the cue word in a neutral voice, just as you might say, "Pass the butter please" at the dining room table. It's very easy for us humans to accidentally morph into using "Leave it" as a verbal reprimand/punisher, considering the punitive society in which we live.

With clicker training, however, the phrase is not meant to mean, "Stop what you are doing OR ELSE I will hurt you." "Leave it" is simply a cue phrase attached to the already learned behavior.

2. Think about how you deliver that cue phrase to the dog when you are frustrated, hungry, fearful or busy. Do you often use it with a punitive tone of voice? If so, it may be helpful to consider thinking and teaching a new cue word that has no punitive connotations to you. It doesn't matter to the dog - you could say, 'Strawberry' or 'Cupcake' or any neutral word that you don't normally say with any kind of stressed voice.

When clicker training was just becoming more widely known, a decade or so ago, trainers were often using the word "wrong" as a supposedly neutral "no reward marker," meaning, if the dog tried something but it wasn't something they could earn a reinforcement for offering, the trainer would say "wrong" so the dog would know that behavior just offered would not get them a click and treat.

One problem with that use of "wrong" is that the word itself is punitive in our society a great deal of the time. And, under stress, in times of duress, when we're hungry, upset, cold, pms'ing or whatever - we often tend to deliver that word very abruptly with a punitive tone. The neutral and soft "wrong" now becomes "WRONG!!!!" and turns into a punisher instead of a simple verbal no-reward-marker.

So, if you're still considering cues, still early in the training process, it may be worth considering to find a totally neutral word that has absolutely no punitive tonal qualities to it in our society. That way, if you are stressed, you are not apt to use the word with a punitive tone. It's pretty hard to say "strawberry" harshly!

3. When teaching the behavior, start close up with the "doggy zen" method of having treats in your hand, and reinforcing the dog each time it ignores the treats and looks up at you. Then, when you move to food items on the floor, have the dog on a leash. That way, if the food becomes just too much temptation due to its location on the floor - a natural scarfing up behavior for dogs, after all - you will be able to keep the dog from getting its head all the way down to eat the treat.

People who walk also often use their feet to cover treats on the floor. I don't have that luxury, having no feet. But I do remember how successful all the dogs were in service dog clicker classes at bypassing all the most sumptuous treats you can imagine - cheeses of all kinds, meat of all kinds, on the floor, on plates on the floor and low tables, etc. By graduation, we had to be able to give our dog a 'leave it' cue, leave the room for 3 minutes and trust the dog would not choose to snarf up the goodies.

4. Each time you change something in the dog's environment, you can expect the dog not to quite understand the cue in the new context. For example, just because the dog understands and responds to the "leave it" cue at home, or in the training center, does not mean it will generalize it in a more novel environment. A trip to the grocery store, the pet store, or outside on a sidewalk where people drop fried chicken bones- - will be a whole new ball game.

Be sure to **TEACH** the behavior again in each new environment, not just try to "proof" the behavior in those places right off the bat just because the dog is really reliable at home or other known environments. You are either setting the dog up for success in new environments or setting it up for failure. If the dog is not ready to avoid sniffing in a grocery store, the inclination many people have is to say, "**LEAVE IT**" in a harsher, more abrupt tone, and a with louder voice.

If you find yourself doing this, then it's "information" for you - and means that the dog is just not quite ready for this particular environment yet, and that you need to go back to basics, and TEACH the behavior again, as if it were the first time - in that environment.

Jan had some great tips for what may be too attractive to the dog's sense of smell in these novel environments - food items down low, clothing with many human smells on it, etc. (Thanks, Jan!). Each time you approach a new area of a store where you suspect your dog may be distracted, back up and start rapidly reinforcing focus on you, the handler.

It helps to think of what you DO want the dog to do, rather than to focus on what you DON'T want the dog to do. So, if you want the dog to avoid sniffing all the bags of dog food and rawhide chewies, be prepared to start down that aisle using rapid reinforcement and very high-value treats your dog really enjoys. That's setting the dog up for success.

As you progress, remember to continue reinforcing the dog for making the choice to NOT sniff and offer you attention/focus for a moment, instead. That's certainly worthy of a click and treat!

Happy Training!

Marking the Moment

"When you capture a behavior through C/T, do you also label the behavior (E.g. "Good Sit") that you've reinforced? If not, how do you put the behavior on command so the dog will do that behavior when you call for it?"

I don't ever use a cue during praise, such as "good sit." "Sit" should mean "place rear on floor with head in air" and if the dog is already having rear on floor and head in air, he can't comply, and it's in my mind weakening the cue.

I also figure that if I have trouble working out tenses in Japanese, which is at least another verbal language belonging to my own species, that it's perhaps too much to expect every (non-verbal) dog to be able to work out tenses and context in a foreign species' verbal language.

I add the cue by giving it immediately before I get the behavior. Example, I say "sit" just before the dog tucks his rear. Then when I see the dog anticipating, I give him a moment to get it on his own, and voila! we've got it.

That works well for non-verbal cues, too, such as indicating articles on a track. I can't say "good article!" and expect the dog to have a clue what I'm talking about - I simply let him see the article an instant before I cue "down," and then reward.

Patterning and Cueing

Sounds like your service dog is used to a specific pattern: eliminate, and then whoopie! Time to play. Time to mix him up a bit, so you don't have to try to capture his attention when he anticipates it's play time. Instead, you can teach him to "check in" with you and your partner, and offer you focus to see what the next cue will be.

The eye contact games are so helpful when we need to redirect a dog, and they are great fun for the dog to learn. Do you have the "How of Bow Wow" video tape? It takes you through how to teach this step by step, and you see the dog learning to quickly move its body to "find your eyes." They learn this VERY fast. If you don't have the "How of Bow Wow" tape yet, it's a fabulous foundation tape, and shows you

several great ideas and how to teach them that would work in this situation.

Besides eye contact games to teach the dog to focus on the handler, instead of anticipating a different behavior, you can also teach targeting. The dog can quickly learn to target your hand as you move it around in different positions.

You can also ask for rapid responses of well-known behaviors such as sit/down, while reinforcing the dog with food treats.

Teaching the dog that the presence of another dog means, "Look at the handler for what to do next" is a good thing to do, as well.

For emergency situations, before the new cues are understood and generalized amidst strong distractions, have an ace in the hole and carry something that may be more value than romping and playing, if the dog has something he likes more than that behavior. For some dogs, it might be a squeaky toy, ball or tug rope. Though this will be somewhat reinforcing "play time" it can also work to get you out of a jam if there is another dog approaching, etc. and you have to get from point A to point B without the dog getting too focused on whatever the distraction may be. You don't have to use it, just keep it held where the dog can see it, and use it as a focus item until you are past the distracting area.

Be really careful about using your voice cues as punishers: you can quickly teach a dog to ignore you until the really loud and strong cue is given. Instead, teach your dog to listen carefully for quieter and quieter cues, finally ones that can be delivered in a whisper.

In essence, it's like the new show "Nanny 911." Have you ever seen this show? One of the biggest problems the Nannys encounter in a home situation where the children are out of control is that the parents continue to raise their voices louder and louder, so it becomes a contest of wills - who can shout the loudest. It's an easy pattern to fall into.

Funny little story that kind of goes with this scenario. Years ago, a guide dog user on one of the list serves told me a story about his dog working on a street in a busy city. The dog was at a stoplight, and when the light changed, the dog was busy sniffing the light post and wasn't listening for the "forward" cue. The handler gives the cue again, this time a bit louder. Still, the dog continues sniffing. Finally, the handler SHOUTS to the dog, "FORWARD" and the dog finally responds.

The funny part is that two elderly ladies were standing near him as this happened, and one turned to the other, said, "Oh, isn't that the saddest thing you ever saw - a blind man with a deaf dog!"

We can teach our dogs to wait for louder and more commanding cues very inadvertently. So being aware of not raising your voice, not hollering out the cues - is a very helpful tip. You want to work to give softer and quieter cues all the time, and this means the dog has to learn to focus his attention - checking in with the handler - often.

All the attention and targeting games are very helpful, as is mixing up the play time after elimination. General training advice with puppies often includes that of not bringing the puppy inside right after it eliminates, because it can teach the dog that the fun and sniffing and outside time can be extended by putting off eliminating. Instead, the advice is to get the job done, then play with the dog for a few minutes, so it learns that play only happens after the elimination is finished.

Just as we sometimes wait too long to fade food or toy prompts, we can do the same with the play behavior. Once the dog knows to go outside and eliminate where and when asked, then start mixing up the play time by walking the dog to another area before playing, or taking the dog inside and then playing a couple attention or problem solving games.

It's such a natural thing that dogs will come to anticipate patterns. Cats are good at this too. My husband, for example, has our Maine Coon cat well trained to be the most obnoxious cat in the universe after a human showers. Every day, for the past 8 years or so, my husband gets up at 5 am, takes his shower, and right after his shower, he heads to the

kitchen and feeds the cat. So of course, the cat now expects his food right after the shower is turned off, and howls nonstop until the food is presented to him.

By not mixing things up, by keeping to a very regular schedule, the cat now assumes and expects that certain cues mean certain things are going to happen. And if it doesn't, better have your earplugs on.

I purposely never feed the dogs at the same time each day. I vary the feeding time, and the things I do in preparation for feeding so that I don't have to put up with the stuff my husband does with the cat.

When I take my SDIT outside, it might be for a run before going on a task, or it might be going right into the van to get on the road, or it might be just to go outside to eliminate. I keep him guessing, and looking to me for the cue, rather than assuming that each time we exit that specific door in service dog dress, he thinks he's to run to the van and jump in.

Jane explained this pattern-oriented behavior very well in her response to you (thank you, Jane!), and I just wanted to elaborate a bit because it gives me a chance to tell stories, something I love to do!

One more thing - it may help to shift thinking of the word "command." Even the sound of the word is "commanding" and "Demanding". In contrast, if we think of it as a "cue," then we can think of giving that cue in a very neutral voice - politely, as if asking someone at the table to "pass the butter, please." The more we teach the dog to look to us for the next cue, rather than have to coerce the dog's attention - the easier our job is, and the more harmonious the partnership.

Thoughts on Adverbs, Adjectives and Other Modifying Words

I know many list members have had great success with using "lick/no lick, " "speak/no speak" and other cues like this. It doesn't work for me, and it took a lot of thinking and talking to a friend who is a super shaper to figure out why it wasn't working for me as well as it apparently works for others.

All the dogs I live with (5 of them) are very clicker savvy. I do lots of speed shaping sessions with them, so they learn to respond super fast to every word they understand, the moment the word comes out of my mouth.

So what happens when I give a cue like "Speak" and "No Speak" is that I get a dog who barks, then hears the "no" and stops and hears the "speak" and barks again. They are responding to the words so quickly, that "no speak" literally means to them to pause for silence then immediately bark again.

While talking to my super shaping friend, I learned that her dogs respond the very same way - they are also very clicker savvy, and used to power shaping sessions.

So for us, the logical choice has been to use a different sounding cue altogether, rather than to modify the one they already know. "Speak" means bark one. "Speak speak speak" means continue barking until cued to do something different. Something different might be "quiet" (no sound) or "thank you" (stop whatever you're doing right at this moment) "touch" or any other cue that indicates the speak cue is finished and another cue is now to be responded to.

In general, I have found that modifying phrases can be tricky and backfire with clicker savvy dogs. I often hear people use praise phrases such as "Good down" or "good sit," etc. after a dog has responded to a "down" or "sit" cue. Since I have used "good" as a release cue when a clicker wasn't handy at least a gazillion times, any crisp sounding "good" means "the behavior ends now." So if I use a praise phrase of "good sit" with my dogs, I get confusion in response. They are already sitting, but when they hear "good sit" they immediately get up, and sit

back down again. They responded to the praise phrase as two separate new cues. "good" and "sit."

Being anthropomorphic, it's as if they might be thinking, "well, I'm already sitting, so the human must want me to change position and sit again!" If I say "good sit" three times in a row, I get doggie pushups - sit/stand/sit/stand/sit/stand.

The only time this is guaranteed not to happen with a modifying phrase with my dogs is the phrase "good boy," since "boy" is not a cue to anything. They have learned that "good boy" means I'm in general pleased with something they have just done, though they may not be clear as to what exactly it is they have done to make me respond in a pleasing manner. They just know that in general, when they hear, "good boy" or "good dog" that all is right with the human, and in harmony with whatever behaviors they are offering.

The more I use power clicking sessions to create scalpel-like accurate behavioral responses, the less I use praise phrases. I may use them far more copiously in public, where the dog is not in a clicker session, but just doing well at whatever he is doing. He may just be walking calmly at my side, and I may offer a "good boy" praise phrase, which the dog seems to interpret simply as "the human is pleased with me at this moment in time." Or, it may mean to them, "The human is not stressed at this time". I have no idea, since I can't read my dog's mind.

But no matter where we are, if we're in a clicker session or not, if I use a phrase that contains two words they already know separately, I'm likely to get both behaviors the cue signals in rapid succession.

Sometimes this is really cool, because I can cue from a distance two or three words in a phrase and the dog will respond with the behaviors they know those cue words mean, in the succession they were given. An example might be, "come down flat" and the dog will run to me in recall, do a down position, then quickly roll over onto one side and lie there quietly. "Come" being the recall word, "down" being one position and "flat" being another position. I've never successfully been able to get more than three cues given together as an accurate response. Two

is more the norm. Three happens when I have good focus from the dog. But four hasn't yet happened.

Interesting what works for different people and different dogs in different situations. I think it's neat to share our experiences, as I often try different things just to see what kind of responses I may get. And from those experiments, often new ideas come out, and that's fun too!

I offer these observations and experiences simply as a sharing of what I've noticed, with dogs I live with and have worked with, not as a judgement on anyone who may be successful in doing things quite differently!



BIOGRAPHICAL

Cooper's Story

I picked up my "Whippion" a week ago. What the heck's a Whippion? It's a dog who was supposed to be a Papillon but looks like it's probably a Papillon-Whippet cross. He is a dog I picked up through one of the

Papillon rescue groups, chosen after 7 months of searching through hundreds of dogs, for a plausible candidate for a SDIT.

As many on the list know, I found out 8 months ago during a demo at a large veterinary conference for an ultrasound company, that my service dog Finn was dying from Splenic cancer. It was a shock, because until that moment the nodules were found in the ultrasound, we all thought he was in perfect health. We lost our dear Finn a month ago.

I chose this little rescue "Whippion" because he was almost 2 years old, was an owner turn-in due to a debilitating stroke, and the owner knew she could not care for him properly at that point. No abuse in his background, and he was touted as a very mellow, calm dog who enjoyed children and other dogs of all breeds.

The foster family had him for about 5 months, and they were very precise in their description, plus I had someone in that state (Michigan) go do a home visit and assess him for things like ability to bounce back, reactivity, ability to be handled, observing him with kids, other animals, etc.

He passed with two thumbs up, and the evaluator said if I chose not to take him, she was going to put in an application for him because he had so many good attributes. That was enough for me - I made the donation and signed the contract, though I'm always leery of getting a dog sight-unseen. At least 3 times in the past decade that choice has proven to be a disaster for me. But this time, I did my homework better. Nothing like a decade of mistakes to help make a better future choice!

What a nifty little (okay, by Papillon standards, BIG) dog he is, and full of confidence, obsequious but not shy or withdrawn, doesn't care if the other dogs take away his chew stick or toys. He just finds something else to play with. He took to clicker training very quickly, with great enthusiasm.

I have been amazed that he has shown so little need to adjust to his new environment and new people - he just sort of waltzed into the house, made instant friends with my other 4 dogs, and began playing

with them. No lip lifting, no growling, no posturing - by any of them. They all just instantly accepted each other. Amazing, to me.

He sleeps on the bed with us and all the other dogs, and is so malleable he's like a gumby. You can move him anywhere, put him in any position and he stays there, totally relaxed. Again, amazing. He did not have to "earn" bed privileges, this one. He just took the spot not being used by the other dogs and was happy as a clam. He couldn't care less if the other dogs step on him, jump over him, or get more petting than he gets. Again, Amazing to me!

I have been working with him daily on just getting acclimated to his new home, not asking for a lot, but getting a lot of offered behaviors now that he realizes this can get him a click and treat. He's very, very, VERY green, knew absolutely nothing but a sort of "sit" when he came here. He didn't pull hard on leash, but he had no real idea of how to walk on a loose leash next to a person. He just went for "free" walks with his foster family and the neighborhood kids - on a long leash, out in front of them.

I'm always concerned that new dogs - especially Papillon sized dogs - may get accidentally clipped by the powerchair wheels, but this guy is the first one I haven't had to teach to stay out of the way of the wheels. He just "gets it" on his own. Again, AMAZING!

Every day, I try to get in about seven 3-minute shaping sessions, very simple and upbeat, fun things. Recall (he has none yet!) games, more recall games, and yet more recall games, interspersed with bathroom learning of simple targeting, head dips, paw touches and nose touches, and sit and capturing his often offered puppy bows. Basically, if he offers a behavior on his own, I capture it and begin shaping it. Right now, I am not adhering to a training plan of any kind, other than just getting him used to enjoying learning by the clicker and treats, and observing his body language, signals, and getting him used to the routine.

Each evening, we go out for a run next to the chair, and he does very well, though he still gets very distracted. That's fine. We are also

working outside for a good 5 minutes before our exercise run, doing loose leash walking and sits. I'm seeing so much less latency even with increased distractions now with the 'sit' behavior - the only behavior he even had a semblance of knowing when he arrived.

And, at first, he had about a 4 second latency between giving the cue and performing the behavior. We're at nearly zero latency now indoors, without major distractions, and outdoors with mild distractions. That's more than good enough for the first week - far more than I ever expected, and I would not have even worked on any of that stuff except he seems to enjoy learning so very much and offers me attention and focus I hate to waste.

He does not know how to wait at doorways yet, nor how to ring the doorbell to go outside, and as I mentioned, he still has little recall, even indoors. But he now responds to his name, and that's a good thing! He's offering me eye contact with his name now. Oh yeah, his name is COOPER!

I'm really happy with this boy, and think he has a good chance of making it, though it's still too early to tell, and bobbles still can come up, and I expect them to come up. But the major "wash-out" issues are not apparant - such as fear of children, other dogs, loud noises, unexpected sights and sounds. I think I can work with whatever other issues crop up if I don't have to deal with those things, especially the distrust issues with kids, adults and other animals.

Still, I look at how far we have to go, and I feel swamped! I sometimes look at this wild child and ask myself, "What was I THINKING?" Not because he's not a great candidate, just that any green adolescent dog takes so much time, so much work, so much energy, so much training to get to a level where he can work in public safely, non-stressed, and in a mannerly way.

Funny, a dozen years ago, it wasn't this hard. I'm feeling my age now, and my level of disability, for sure. Still, I think by taking my time in choosing an appropriate candidate, and having him properly "vetted," (it's an election year, forgive me!) I have at least set myself up

for success, even if I groan inwardly knowing just how much work it's going to be.

I'm looking at my 'pet dogs' with new eyes this week, though. I often think of them as "wash-outs," as they are all service dog wannabees that didn't make it for one reason or another. But I never really thought about how much they **DO** know, like picking up things I drop, ringing the doorbell to go outside, waiting at doorways instead of forging through, having a good recall, being aces at clicker problem solving games, and walking nicely on leash. I took that all for granted.

But having a green adolescent around sure helps me to appreciate the maturity of my pet dogs, and seeing how much they **CAN** do rather than focusing on what they can't do, or why they were unsuitable for service work, or just picking on what I perceive as their faults.

Nothing like a new kid on the block to give a tired trainer a much needed attitudinal adjustment! Now, if I could just steal some of that adolescent energy from Cooper, I'll be all set to get to work!

On Clicker Expo

I am so hooked on the Clicker Expo now, and giddily await the next opportunity to surround myself with clicker thinking so fully. In my last post I just touched on how awesome it was for me that each individual presenter's programs seemed to support and enhance every other presenter's program, which brought a sense of seamlessness, cohesion and shared enthusiasm to the Expo as a whole.

I was blown away by how presenters from academia found ways to reach out to those in their audience who had little previous knowledge of graphs, charts, interpreting data from their empirical studies. I'm basically just an "Average Joe" with no formal academic behavior analysis background, and I often find detailed academic explanations

to be way over my head, and can feel my mind shut down from trying to understand, and my eyes glass over from trying to follow charts and graphs.

Not so at the Clicker Expo! One fabulous example of how the CE's more academic presenters reach out to the "Average Joe" is Dr. Jesus Rosales, who offers both the academic, detailed charts and graphs, but breaks up the info by injecting personal stories with "real life" examples that keep nonacademic audience members sitting on the edge of our seats, offering instant "translations" in anecdotal, storytelling form.

For those of you who may have missed Dr. Rosales' presentation on "Poisoned Cues, Healing Cues," here's one example of the kind of marvelous anecdotal "real life" story he shared to help describe what we were seeing in the charts and graphs, and give us "mind pictures" of how we experience poisoned cues all the time in everyday life.

Dr. Rosales explained that he loved to go grocery shopping, looked forward to it, and enjoyed looking for new food items to enjoy at home. One day, his wife gave him a list of items to be picked up at the grocery store, and he enthusiastically pocketed the list and bounced out the door to head to the grocery store. He couldn't find one specific brand of beans his wife had listed, so he picked out another brand he'd never tried.

He returned home, excited to share his great time at the grocery store and show her the new things he'd found. But his wife's first reaction was to admonish him for not getting the right brand of beans. Verbally leashed and popped for this gaffe, Dr. Rosales felt the wind leave his sails.

The next time his wife sent him to the grocery store, he found ways to procrastinate, reasons why he just couldn't go at that time, and realized that the joy of going grocery shopping was now gone, and he was avoiding grocery shopping because of it. He recalled his last trip to the store and how unpleasant it was when he was corrected sharply for making a mistake.

He'd find creative ways to avoid going shopping when his wife asked him to go pick up a few items. He was a bit too busy, he was involved in something else at the time, - he found excuses to avoid doing the behavior he once enjoyed.

Whoa! Now THIS is an example I can understand far better than all the graphs and charts he could present. I could see how my husband and I did this inadvertently to each other quite often, without ever realizing we were "poisoning the cues" for each other. I could give so many examples of how each of us found reasons to not do a particular chore or errand we used to enjoy, due to our individual responses to each other when mistakes or oversights were made.

Last week I sent my husband to Home Depot for a dozen small items we needed. He came home with a smile on his face, but only 11 items in the bag. My focus was ONLY on the one item I really needed him to get, which he forgot.

Did I enthusiastically reinforce him for the 11 items he did pick up, and make a mental note to pick up the last item the next time I was near Home Depot, or ask him nicely if he'd pick that item up later in the day, when he went near Home Depot to return the videos we'd rented? NO!

Instead, I did exactly what Dr. Rosales' wife did. I opened the bag, looked for the one thing I wanted most, ignoring all the others, then spurted, "Tim, where's the garden hose washers I need to stop the drips in the backyard hose? How could you forget the one thing I told you I needed most at Home Depot? "

Oops.

Hubby responds, "Okay, I screwed up. But you just poisoned the cue by verbally leash popping me for forgetting the washers instead of focusing on all the items I did remember to get. You do realize that the next time you send me for stuff to pick up at Home Depot, I'm likely to find reasons why I can't go, don't you?"

He then suggests we start over, go back to Home Depot together to pick up the washers and stop for pizza on the way home - turning the mistakes on both our parts into a "good thing" so we could avoid the fallout from poisoned cues.

But back to my point about the academic presenters at the Expo who were able to offer both detailed, academic examples and real life examples for their audiences. If Dr. Rosales had only presented his empirical data in an academic way, I couldn't have brought home the information to my spouse in a way that has directly enhanced and strengthened our communication.

Because I could bring home all this wonderful information, and share it with my spouse in a way he could understand - he is now enthusiastic and enormously supportive about my attending future Expos. The other day he got an unexpected refund check, and said, "I'm putting this in your Expo savings fund." He knows that every bit of information I bring home to him will help him in shaping my behaviors. <G>

I realize I try constantly to live and think positively, but when I'm most stressed, I take out my frustration on my husband. I still catch myself nagging and verbally leash-popping my husband in ways I'd never do with my friends and acquaintances. I save the last bastions of punishment for my life partner, and that's a sobering realization.

But it's also a life-affirming realization, and brings the Clicker Expo experience into my daily life, giving both my husband and me nonstop opportunities to "tag each other," or catch each other doing something right, which helps us in striving to become more supportive, less punitive, and more "clickerly" with each other.

From Lap to Laundry

"Mommy, Mommy!" the child squeals, seeing my little 9 pound Papillon fetch the cell phone for me. "Look at that doggie. He wants to talk on the phone!"

Talking on the phone is a behavior I haven't taught him yet - it's up there with cleaning out the toilets and doing the dishes. But it's one of the few things he can't do for me.

I'm a double amputee with vasculitis, and I use a wheelchair for mobility. Because I get dizzy when I bend down, Peek has been trained to do ground-floor chores for me. In the USA, dogs like Peek specifically trained to assist people with disabilities are granted full access privileges to public facilities, the same as guide dogs assisting their blind owners. Peek is allowed to accompany me into restaurants, stores, in airplane cabins uncrated and even in hospital visits, when I'm an in-patient.

In spite of their diminutive size, Papillons make excellent service dogs. They are alert, enthusiastic about learning, and love nothing more than the opportunity to spend every waking hour with the person they love. It's a good life for my working dog, who embraces his job with great enthusiasm.

He loves doing the laundry, pulling out the warm clothes from the dryer, placing them in the basket, then tugging the basket into the bedroom for me to fold the clothes. Quietly munching on his bone until I call him to put the folded clothes away, he leaps to my voice cue to go back to work, and places the folded clothes into the drawers. When all the laundry has been put away, he then takes the basket back to the closet, and closes the door.

In the kitchen, Peek's also a great help. He opens and shuts all the lower cupboard doors, the drawers, and opens and shuts the refrigerator door for me, by pulling on a dishcloth I have fastened to the door handle. He brings me paper towels, carries the kitty litter bag to the trash can, and picks up all the things that have dropped on the floor, like those inevitable pencils, paper clips and pennies.

Tidying up the house is also a breeze with Peek at my side: he picks up newspapers, dirty clothes, errant towels, hair curlers, envelopes and magazines, and places them in a basket to be taken where they belong, saving me the agony of bending over, and getting dizzy in the process.

Out in public, Peek becomes a marvelous assistant. In restaurants, he lies quietly on his pad under the table, and is ready to fetch anything I might drop, such as my napkin, my spoon, or pocket change. When we are ready to leave, he retrieves his pad, gives it to me to put in the backpack I carry on my wheelchair, then scoops up his leash from the floor and places it in my hand.

When my hands are full of packages, Peek opens electric doors by jumping on my lap, reaching up and pawing the handicap door opener button. Once the door opens, he hops off, fetches his leash, and follows behind me until he's through the door, then takes up his normal heel position beside my chair.

When we get home, Peek helps put away the groceries, then puts the folded grocery bags in the bin under the sink for me. Exhausted, we both flop down on the bed, and I usually realize I forgot to ask Peek to make the bed that morning. So before we take a nap together, Peek and I make the bed together. He gets on his side, grasps the sheets, pulls them up, then repeats the exercise with the comforter. He jumps down to the floor, retrieves the feather pillows, and drags them back up on the bed, putting them at the bedstead. I do the same on my side, and in 2 minutes, the job is complete. In 4 minutes we're both asleep.

Peek is one of many toy dogs doing mobility assistance work for a person with a disability. But there are other types of service work that Papillons can do just as well. They make excellent "signal" dogs, or "hearing-ear" dogs, because they are so alert. A signal dog works with its hearing-impaired owner, alerting the owner to sounds in the environment, both at home and in public.

At home, the trained signal dog will paw the owner when the doorbell, the microwave, or the alarm clock goes off. It will also lead the owner

to the nearest exit in case the smoke alarm goes off, a lifesaving gesture. Signal dogs also alert their owners to their names being called, and take their owners to the source of the voice. While in the car, the signal trained Papillon can paw the owner if a police or ambulance siren is heard.

The service dog who works with psychological and emotional disorders is also doing a valuable service. Imagine living with agoraphobia, and not being able to leave your house for years. Often, all it takes in such a situation is to have a companion dog along to help get a person back into the ebb and flow of life again.

Not all Papillons are suited for service work, however, just as not all Papillons excel in the breed ring, or the agility ring, or in obedience work. Normally, the dog who enjoys obedience training, has a calm disposition, and is not easily excitable or frightened, has the best chance of succeeding as a service dog.

But even the timid, quiet dog who doesn't care for outside attention can be trained to be a home-service dog, doing retrievals for those with arthritis, with bad knees, with aching backs, or by doing hearing-ear work for those who must take out their hearing aids at night. There is no end to the creative ways our little dogs can help us at home.

Most of us, at some time in our lives, will either be living with some type of disability, or will have friends and family members who are. A Papillon service dog could do wonders for those people, giving them real assistance with daily life, and still get the joy of being a full-time companion. When trained with humane methods, and treated with respect and love, the service Papillon leads a wonderfully fulfilling life. There is no more important job in the world.

Intelligent Disobedience

I had to laugh loudly reading Sue Ailsby's response to the question of "especially the very early stages, how do you all distinguish between "she's just pawing me for attention" or "she is just being bratty today" or "she just wants the treat I have" vs. "she is trying to tell me something is wrong, etc."

Sue replied:

"Retrospect, usually."

Indeed! This has happened to me and others as well. When my retiring service Papillon, Peek, began rising up to stand on my knee, and drill a hole through my eyes, refusing to avert his eyes, I wasn't sure what was going on. But since it was a totally new behavior thrown at me, I tried to figure out what was going on. First, I cued him to move off my legs, then remain in a sit. He sat, but kept drilling me with that stare. I kept chatting with people, while glancing at my dog occasionally. His eye stare never left my eyes, and he began to whine nearly silently, and one paw came up off the floor and stayed there, as if held up by Gepetto's puppet strings.

Very quickly after that, started getting nauseated and shaky, and realized I'd forgotten to eat, and that I had to get food inside me immediately. I ate some cheese and had a glass of orange juice, and Peek just sauntered away, did a down-stay on his favorite settle bed and ignored me from that point on.

This happened several times, and continued to baffle me. But each time, a few minutes after the odd behavior was offered by the dog, I'd feel woozy, nauseated and start getting shaky. And once I ate something, I'd stop shaking and the dog would again ignore me.

It was indeed retrospect that allowed me to see that the dog was responding to changes within my body, and that I was beginning to have a low blood sugar episode. It was like the light bulbs came on in my head!

I rather liked his own version of "alerting me" with the paws up and one paw held high, along with the strong stare. So I reinforced it by sharing my food with him when he offered that behavior unbidden. I realized there was a reason he was doing it.

My friend Sherri Lippman had taught her dog to "find mine" - meaning, find anything she had touched and had her smell on it. One night late in a dark parking lot, Sherri dropped her purse and the contents went flying - some of it under the car. Sue cued her dog to "find mine" and the dog picked up all the objects and gave them to Sherri. But when it looked like everything had been picked up she cued the dog to hop into the car and the dog just stood there, staring at her.

Smarter than me, Sherri immediately realized she'd missed something, because this dog was very fluent in the car entering behavior, and to "refuse" to enter that car meant something wasn't quite right.

Sherri got out her pen light and shined it under the car, and sure enough, there wedged against the wheel, where the dog couldn't reach, was a pen from Sherri's purse. Once the pen was retrieved, the dog hopped right into the car as normal.

I think once our dogs reach a level of fluency, and also become more and more in tuned with our human behavioral and medical responses, they can become creative in finding ways to communicate with us. We just have to learn to listen, to look, to not assume the dog is "blowing us off" and that there may well be a very important reason for the lack of response to a cue we assumed was under stimulus control.

I just had facial surgery on Monday, and each dog wanted to sniff the wound. Two of them wanted to lick the wound. All of a sudden, the Border Collie, Finn - leaped up onto the bed - something he rarely does, preferring to be on the floor - nudged the dogs away from my face, and just lay there at my side with his chin resting on my shoulder, as a sort of "look out" for the rambunctious, quick moving younger Papillons. His innate gentleness with the Paps amazed me - he didn't growl at them, just used his huge head to gently move them away from my face.

Finn and I have only been paired together for under 3 months, but it amazes me how "in tune" with my needs he has become, quite on his own. Any reinforcement for these behaviors has only been a quiet petting, because those times when I have been in pain, I have had no other reinforcements available. I didn't feel well enough to reinforce with a toy, and I didn't have food treats on me. But for Finn, the quiet petting let him know I appreciated the new job he had just invented, as my "guardian" from the hyperactive Pap twins.

Also interesting, he is very attentive in his observance of my retiring dog Peek, who is now very adept at alerting and responding to my low blood sugar episodes. Finn just sits there watching intently, and I suspect in time, Finn will pair the changes in my body and behavior with a need to notify me.

Just yesterday, while I was lying on the couch with ice on my face, Finn came up to the couch (Peek was outside) and did a "paws up" on the couch and stuck his nose in my face and just held it there. This is unusual for Finn, as he really doesn't like doing a "paws up" at all due to negative reinforcement and positive punishment - all unintended. When he first arrived, he did a very solid "paws up" on my legs. But on some days, my legs are so sensitive, and I get shooting pains through them and can't bear to have anything touch them.

I've cried out a couple times when Finn put his paws on my legs, and he quickly figured out that doing this behavior was only acceptable when he could put his paws on the front of my wheelchair, without touching my legs. If I cue him to do a "paws up" and forget to spread my legs, so there is ample room for his paws, then he just stands there waiting. He refuses to do a "Paws up." That refusal, from a dog who is so fluent in this particular behavior, helped me to figure out the problem. So now when I cue "paws up," I'm careful to first arrange my legs so he can hit the chair seat and not my thighs.

Yep, retrospect and hindsight: great teachers for us humans!

K9 Epilepsy

I adopted an epileptic dog 6 months ago, an absolutely beautiful Papillon girl who, if human, would resemble Beyonce. Once a show dog with a promising career, she began having Tonic-Clonic (grand mal) seizures at 2 years of age. She's now 6 years old, and no reason was ever found for her seizures: there are just so many reasons - including genetic - why a dog can begin to have seizure activity.

I listen closely when Jeanne Hampl speaks about medical issues: she's had a very successful career in nursing, as well as in training service dogs. Now that I've been caring for this little dog, I've researched a great deal about epilepsy in dogs.

There are some excellent resources online, and a couple of very fine discussion groups made up of owners of epileptic dogs as well as veterinarians. One excellent resource online is: <http://www.canine-epilepsy.com/Resources.html> .

The website discusses possible causes, in-depth articles on what happens neurologically, and traditional as well as alternative treatments. It's a very good place to get an overview on canine epilepsy, become comfortable with the terminology, and know what tests are necessary for diagnosis as well as finding the correct levels of medications to help a dog live with epilepsy.

One of my most relied-upon resources is the book, "Canine Epilepsy: An Owner's Guide To Living With and Without Seizures" by Caroline D. Levin, RN.

While it can be often impossible to find the cause of seizure activity in some dogs, Levin does stress that increasing evidence strongly suggests that environmental chemicals can affect the neurological, endocrine and immune systems and cause dysfunction. She talks about free radical molecules that steal electrons from normal molecules in the

body. She notes that the FDA has identified about 140 pesticides as neurotoxins. She states that "It is both fascinating and disturbing to note the relationship between pesticides and kindling, the phenomenon in which the brain's electrical pathways become increasingly established with each seizure. The more developed the pathways, the greater the likelihood that seizures will recur.

It makes absolute sense to me that if environmental chemicals toxic to dogs are used on lawns, that many of them could be contributors or the cause of a seizure onset, since the data now strongly supports this.

Jeanne also mentioned that if the dog has ingested a toxin that has already caused multiple seizure activity, then the damage has already been done. It may not be reversible.

Though it is always possible that the dog's seizure activity will abate, the odds are not very favorable. I think it's very wise to educate the owner as much as possible, so that she can make this potentially painful decision to retire and rehome the dog to the foster family - a decision based on all the latest data. There is no way a dog who has Tonic-Clonic seizures (Grand Mal) can be relied upon as a service dog.

It becomes impossible to predict when it may happen. One moment the dog may be fine, just lying there being petted. The next moment, the dog can go into a full seizure. The bladder and bowels will always empty during the clonic part of the seizure, and the post-seizure time (for the dog to return to normal behavior) can be from several hours to over 24 hours.

If the foster family is willing to take the dog, to learn about how to live with a dog with epilepsy, and are committed to giving the dog the best possible life of reduced stress - then as hard as it is to let go, it's in the best interest of the dog to live in an environment where no one expects the dog to do anything other than being a loving and wonderful pet. The dog can still do retrievals, and have fun, chase balls, and be part of a family.

My adopted epi girl has seizures about every 8-10 days, even though she is on both Phenobarbital and Potassium bromide, and eating a allergy-free diet. I never know when it will happen. It could be any time of day or night. There are times she will bite her tongue and during the seizure, she will spray blood everywhere, at the same time she is expressing her bowels and bladder. She has to be monitored constantly: whenever she is outside to relieve herself, because we just never know when a seizure may happen.

In her last adoptive home, she nearly drowned in the swimming pool after having a seizure while lying next to the pool, and fell in. Indoors, she might have a seizure and get stuck under a chair, start thrashing, and injure herself because she is caught in an area where she cannot have free movement.

It is emotionally and physically draining to live with a dog with epilepsy, even if the dog gets to the point where it may only have seizures every month or two. There is just no way to know when it may happen, or to prevent it from happening. The medications just help to increase the time between seizures.

I can't even begin to imagine how heartbreaking it must be for the owner of this dog to have to face what is happening and make what will likely be a very tough decision: to retire and rehome the dog. Yet it may be the kindest thing for the dog. My heart goes out to her.

If there is a lesson we can all learn from this tragic event, perhaps it's that we all need to be hyper-vigilant when allowing our dogs to walk across well-tended lawns. If the dog gets the toxins on his paws or feet hair, licks it off, then our dogs may be in great jeopardy. It's one very good reason to teach a service dog to eliminate on cue, and on all types of surfaces/substrates. That grass on the neighbor's lawn may be mighty enticing, but who knows what chemicals may have been used to get that lawn to look so beautiful?

I live in the Mojave Desert, and lawns are either non-existent or very small. Our front lawn is kidney-shaped, surrounded by gravel and native plants. It's the greenest lawn in the whole subdivision, and I

never use any chemicals on it. I use a non-toxic watered-down fish poop fertilizer. I don't spray for insect control, but also use non-toxic Safer Soap products to keep insects at bay, but not put my dogs at risk.

But I think of all the times I have taken my dogs to grassy areas around banks or stores, and let them just enjoy lying in the grass. I never stopped to think that there could easily be toxic chemicals that could put my dog's life at risk. This topic has been a real wake-up call for me. I now realize it's not enough to keep my dogs' environment as toxin-free as possible, and of course, I never allow my dogs to eliminate on anyone's lawn. But I just never thought about other places where the dog might pick up poison.

Working at a Distance: A Service Dog "Emergency" Story

Thinking and writing today about why I rely on distance behaviors reminds me of something that happened that I haven't yet shared with the list.

Earlier this year, I was driving from Las Vegas to San Diego for the Clicker Expo with my SDIT, Finn. Through the mountain pass, rain came down in torrents, and rocked the van, taxing my windshield wipers moving at warp speed. Trying not to stress and grip the steering wheel as if it was a lifesaving branch during a fall down a cliff, I kept taking deep breaths and doing stretching exercises. Finn slept quietly in his crate.

My van, still new, began faltering, with the engine missing. The storm raged on, and I was forced to stop the van in a pullover area, as it sputtered to a stop.

My cell phone was not working in that area, so I couldn't call AAA for assistance, and knew I'd have to flag someone down to call for me once they were in an area where reception was again reliable.

But first, I thought I'd get out and roll around the vehicle and "see" if there was any obvious reason for the van's engine problem. This is sort of like kicking the tires when choosing a used car - it's a placebo that doesn't do any good, but it makes you feel like you're doing something.

I open the lift, and the wind and rain slash at me. I wrap a pee pad over my hand controls, as I realize I've left my rain poncho (that fits over my body and the powerchair) home on the table. I know I'm not only going to be soaked all the way through with the frigid rain, but I chance shorting out my chair. I can't get to my dry clothes, because my husband has packed the van with an iron arm, stretching bungee cords to hold things in place, and I don't have the strength release my suitcase, which is behind the portable fridge and the dog's crate, also bungeed in place firmly.

I still have 300 miles to go before I make it to San Diego, and traffic is moving at roughly 30 miles per hour. It won't be an easy or short 300 miles, especially if I'm soaked or have to crawl and push my shorted out powerchair onto the lift.

But I get out anyway, roll around the van, and see something flapping under the van. I back away, and see that a very heavy industrial-strength plastic bag has been caught under the engine, and likely is covering up the air-intake causing the van to falter. I groan, thinking I'm going to have to get out of my chair, crawl under the van and try to pull that thing out of there.

It finally dawns on me that I have a service dog with me, and though still in training for public access work, he has solid foundation behaviors taught to him from puppyhood by Virginia Broitman. He's a Border Collie, a dog used to working and playing in rain, mud, snow and sleet, and has a nice undercoat to keep him dry. My Papillon service dogs, in contrast, have no undercoat, have experienced little inclement weather other than heat, and no way would they go out and

work during a major rainstorm that would have blown them over at 10 pounds each.

I get back into the van, get Finn out of his crate, and cue him to exit the van and wait. He jumps down, stands still, turns to look at me to see what I want him to do next, as he's been taught to do.

From inside the van, I was able to cue him to move toward the van, do a down, and to fetch the plastic. He downed, crawled under the van, grabbed the only thing in sight - the plastic, and began pulling on it. It ripped and came apart in large pieces. Finn crawled backwards pulling the first plastic piece, stood and looked at me for what to do next. I cued him to move out, toward the trash receptacle in the pullout area. Then just before he got to it, I cued him to "wait," then do a "paws up" on the trash can, and to release the plastic in the can. He also was taught to push objects into containers, so he kept pushing until the plastic was all the way into the can.

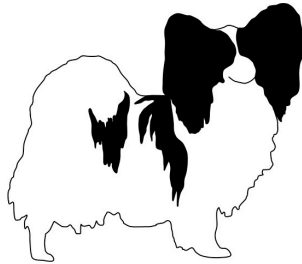
I then recalled him, and en route, cued him to fetch again. Since he already knew there was more plastic under the van, he moved to the van again, crawling under and pulling on another piece of plastic until it came loose. Again, I cued him to move out toward the trash can, and put the plastic in the can.

I did this 4 times until all the pieces were gone and there was nothing more to fetch. I couldn't SEE if anything was left, but I just kept cueing the fetch behavior until he started looking for other things to fetch - and picked up an aluminum can nearby. I knew then that there was nothing left under the van, or he would have continued to work on getting all those pieces out.

Cueing Finn to jump back into the van, I towed the majority of his coat off, rinsed his belly and paws with fresh water, in order to be sure he hadn't crawled through any antifreeze or oil, toweling those areas as dry as I could, and cued him to move back into his crate.

I started up the van, and it ran fine, so we were able to go back on the freeway, and head towards San Diego.

Off leash distance cues: very handy to have during emergencies!



EQUIPMENT

Care of Plastic Food Bowls

"I've heard that plastic dishes are bad for dogs. Is this true?"

I've heard this before, though have never experienced it myself. I do realize that plastic can get scuffed, scratched and harbor bacteria - one look at my cutting board tells me this. But that hasn't stopped me from using plastic dishes - they are lightweight to travel with, easy for me to handle, and just too convenient to stop using.

To counter harboring bacteria on my cutting board, I keep a 10% bleach solution on the sink, and scrub the cutting board with it daily. I do the same with plastic water bowls, or any bowl that can't go into the dishwasher to be sterilized. I wipe down all drawer handles, sink knobs, etc. with the same solution daily.

Since I also feed my dogs raw, keeping bacterial infection at bay is very important to me - it would be very easy for my husband and I to pick up some e-coli from the raw meats if I wasn't scrupulously careful about cleaning the cutting board and food prep area with bleach solution each time after meals are prepared. I do the same with the plastic bowls I use. Shoot, I have a large "community" water bowl of stainless steel that all 5 of my dogs and one cat drinks out of, and I clean that out daily with the bleach solution as well.

I use a foldable plastic water dish for my dogs, for trips away from home. I just am careful to not store it away in my backpack when it's still wet, and to rinse it with the 10% bleach solution every couple of days.

Driving with Canine Companions

It's hard to make a choice to crate a dog when you see how much they enjoy riding up front and watching what's happening with you. My dogs would all love to do this.

I think Dick was very wise in noting that if your car has a passenger side airbag, you may be putting your dog at major risk, even if he is belted in securely. He's a small dog, the size of a human baby. And this is why I don't use my harness anymore on the dogs, but crate them.

I grew up in the country over the top of an autobody repair shop. My father had the towing contract for our county, so I'd often get to go on "wrecker calls" with him. One of the saddest I ever went on was when a neighbor had her 2 year old son in the car, on her sister's lap, since they were just going less than a mile down the road. But a drunk driver came out of a driveway without looking and broadsided them, killing the mother instantly, turning the sister into an quad, and the impact turned the child into a missile.

When we arrived, no one even knew there was a child in the car. The mother was dead, the sister was in a coma, and the car was accordioned, with the child on the floor pressed between the front and back seats. It wasn't until the grampa arrived at the scene and screamed, "My grandson is in there!" that the child's body was discovered.

The sight of that tiny closed coffin holding that delightful child who used to giggle as he rode around in my wheelchair, haunts me yet today.

And it is this vision that makes me stop, put my dogs in crates and keep them safe, no matter how much I want them up front with me to enjoy the ride.

But enjoy it they do, nonetheless! The crates I use are wire-type, and very open, so they have full-vision and can enjoy the sights. They also are on nice plush padded pads, have their chew toys with them. And I stop every hour or so to take them out on a Flexi, just for diversion (and probably because I get lonely for them!).

I'm very fortunate in that I have a large vehicle, and very small dogs. Their crates are roomy, and they can stand up, sit, or lie down.

I used to use the seatbelt harness all the time until I moved into a vehicle with passenger side airbags. Reading the stats on how much injury these can cause to children made me realize what danger I was putting my dogs in, and I knew I wouldn't be able to live with the guilt if I let something happen to them.

Since you have a little dog, Jane, I think the booster seat/harness combo should work well for you, especially if you put it in the back seat, where you don't have to worry about air bag activation in case of an accident. It's not as much fun as having the dog in the front seat, you're right - but in case of emergency, your dog will not turn into a missile like that precious two-year old, nor will the dog be smothered by the airbag.

My way of coping with the loss of a companion next to me in the seat is to stop more often, and let the dog enjoy new sights and smells. And to listen to books on tape to keep me from missing having a dog up front, close and personal!

Internet Book Site

Jane just sent me a fantastic URL, which has comparisons of book prices for ordering online. You type in a title or author, then it will pull up the cheapest place to get the book. I was AMAZED that when I typed in Jean Donaldson, pulled up "Culture Clash", that Amazon was NOT the cheapest place to purchase it. Some place called "books.com" was offering it complete with shipping for only \$18.16, and Amazon was at \$21.90 with shipping. Also has Canada and other international costs on it.

I then typed in Terry Ryan, pulled up "Toolbox" and found the same diversity in prices. WOWWW!!! This is a great way to save on purchases. A GREAT site!!!

Check it out at: <http://www.acses.com/>

Thanks Jane!!

Power Chair Info

"Is there a website where I can learn about power chairs?"

The wheelchair junkie site is a bit confusing to navigate, so I wanted to offer the direct URL to the most relevant information to help you assess the type of chair you may need:

<http://www.wheelchairjunkie.com/page2.html>

What may work well for one person could be horrific for another. There is no one "best" chair for all. Each chair and type of chair has advantages and disadvantages. The trick is listing all your priorities before making the choice.

Do you intend to use the chair in the house?

Do you intend to use the chair outside, mainly for exercising your dog?

What type of terrain will you be on 80% of the time? Flat pavement, grassy ground, hills?

I have two powerchairs, both very different and used for different purposes. My "super" chair is a 21st Century Bounder, the fastest chair made, and very, very heavy duty. My need for this chair is for comfort, reliability and enough speed and power to adequately run my dogs and build up muscle and endurance. It's a fabulous chair for outdoors, for the type of terrain I'm on, but it's a horror indoors, since it's so powerful and can wipe out a wall in no time flat if you accidentally touch the joystick by accident, or a dog happens to trigger it.

But outdoors, it's beyond superb for me, and has a motorcycle halogen headlamp and taillights for night driving, something I need very much living in the desert, where it's way too hot in the daytime to exercise the dogs. At night, it's bright enough and fast enough that I can travel in the bike lanes on the road, and really get from one point to another quickly.

For indoors, I have a small Invacare Ranger Storm, which is more compact, less powerful, but much easier to handle in tight areas of the house, such as hallways and bathrooms. I found it on eBay 3 years ago for \$700, used, and it's been a real workhorse for me. This is also the chair I travel with, as I'm very wary of anything happening to my Bounder chair, with all the electronics on it.

Barbara Handelman has a new Invacare mid-wheel drive, which is now made much more stable than the older ones, that would rock forward when it stopped. I don't care for mid-wheel drives at all, prefer rear wheel drives, but Barbara loves her new chair and it has a very tight turning radius. It's also very spiffy looking!

You might want to try out several types of chairs to see what "feels" the best for you - mid wheel drives, rear wheel drives, rear wheel direct drives.

Also, you might enjoy hopping over to <http://www.wheelchairjunkie.com> and reading about the different types of powerchairs, and about batteries, turning radii, maintenance, etc.

Good luck and I think it's a GREAT decision to consider a powerchair. They have much more versatility than carts, and certainly have much more power and speed.

You just have to find the particular type that meets YOUR needs, and assess each component carefully.

Source of Service Dog Training Aids

Those who were lucky enough to attend Robin Poole and Veronica Sanchez's class at the recent P.A.W.S. conference in Orlando will already have this link, and likely have seen some of these products, but for those who did not see these wonderful tools for teaching specific service dog tasks, here's a link:

<http://dreamlandspecialties.home.att.net/products.htm>

Positive trainer and SD user Diane Shotwell developed these products, (they are so impressive!) and is offering them at what I feel are uncommonly low prices. The products available so far are:

The Toggle Light Switch Plaque The Rocker Light Switch Plaque Pull Cord Training Plaque Phone Grip with Target Ball Keyring Grip and Target ball Door Grip and Target Ball Cane Grip and Target Ball Door Knob Grip and Target Ball

These are SUPER products, and look like they will be terrific training aids. I'm going to order some soon!

I have no financial interest in this company, but am sharing this link for others on the list, who like myself, are always looking for creative and well made portable task training aids.

Wheelchair Lift Resources

Here are some resources for you. There are several different kinds of lifts for manual chairs. The one I used to have was a Braun Chair Topper and held the chair in a fiberglass container on top of the vehicle. Then when the door was opened, I activated the switch and the unit opened up horizontally, and a lift came down to grab the chair and bring it up and down. I used this type for about 10 years and really liked it. It also took up no room inside the vehicle!

But here are some resources:

<http://www.spinlife.com/critpath/spec.cfm?prodid=71030> this is the arm type you were asking about, I think. Or one of them. Again, there are several different types.

<http://www.planetmobility.com/store/wheelchairlifts/tip-top/index.html> A clamshell type design - not great if you park in a low ceiling garage or carport, as they open up and need vertical room.

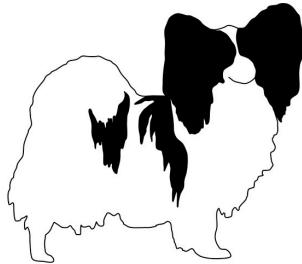
<http://www.braunlift.com/consumer/Chair/index.htm> This is the Braun chair topper I used.

<http://www.bruno.com/lifts.htm> An arm-type lift

<http://www.jazzy-electric-wheelchairs.com/Inside-Vehicle - Lifts.htm>
Inside lift

<http://www.wclrs.com/Herc-3000.htm> The Hercules arm-type lift that works in most vehicles

Hope this helps!



GAMES

Creativity Games and Cued Behaviors

"What if the dog is so eager to do the requested behavior he anticipates the next move (or a whole string of moves) and starts frantically throwing unrelated behaviors? It's almost impossible to calm him enough to proceed. I try to ignore the offered behavior and wait for Spot to start thinking about what he's doing (or I give him some conscious - on my

part - cue, or a lure or a target) to get him headed in the right direction. But if I hesitate even a second in clarifying my request, he gets frustrated and whines and barks."

This is a terrific question, and one that is very worthy of discussion, especially for service dogs. Judy adds to this question: **"Is this more a matter of training/teaching some kind of impulse control (if that's applicable to dogs, and, on second thought, I guess it is)?"**

Impulse control is still something we may need even when we're in a clear cut creative learning session - if dog is obviously over-stimulated, and offering barking along with each behavior, then that clearly indicates he's over-the-top and too stimulated to continue the creativity session at that moment in time. Barking is one of those added behaviors we can see really enthusiastic dogs offer when they are the least bit stressed, and it can become a real habit, very quickly. It doesn't take much to accidentally reinforce barking for some dogs - Papillons, Shelties, Border Collies, and many other breeds can have a real proclivity for barking, and it can become a default response when they feel the least bit of frustration, stress, excitement. So, to counter this, I try to make certain I never reinforce barking - never, never, never - during a creative learning session, or in refining cues - because it's so reinforcing and can attach itself to any behavior very quickly with a good many bark-prone dogs.

So in offering behaviors, yes - some impulse control - to keep over-stimulation responses from happening - can be very helpful and necessary. Asking for a settle, or "down" may well help in such a situation. It does for my dog, and there are times when I have to cue the dog into a "settle" or "down" and allow his adrenaline to stop surging.

What I find even more helpful, though, is to have a plan ahead of time, knowing at what point the dog is likely to get overly frustrated, and start throwing every behavior he knows. I try to work just behind the edge of that frustration, keeping a super high rate of reinforcement for

tiny bits of behavior, so that the dog can have very rapid successes. By clicking and feeding for these micro-offerings, rapidly, he doesn't have time to start offering spins, rollovers, and attaching barks to the behaviors. But, if he does, then I stop the session, and we have some quiet time.

Having a plan in place of how to re-direct, up our rate of reinforcement by clicking very subtle movements, or stopping a session when the dog is too wound up, works well. This way, we can keep up our dog's enthusiasm and creativity without suppressing behavior with a verbal reprimand, which can shut down creativity very quickly and teach a dog that offering behaviors is NOT rewarding.

There will always be times when OUR skill as a trainer is not at its best that day or that hour. There are certainly times when I'm just not able to keep up with my dog, and when I'm feeling a bit "off," I try to keep things simple for myself. I know that a creative learning session requires me to have very quick reflexes, be able to "think laterally" and not miss a very tiny behavior offered - which I'm most likely to do when I'm not at my best.

If I miss a behavior offered that deserved a click, my dog DOES get frustrated. So I tend to play free-shaping games - problem solving games - when I'm at my sharpest, and not when I'm tired, in pain, lacking energy or focus.

When I'm in that state, I consistently miss small behaviors and am looking for "BIG" behaviors. In order for the dog to want to continue in the problem solving game, I have to be able to offer a VERY high rate of reinforcement, and not miss a tiny head turn, a lean in another direction, a lift of the hind or front leg, etc. I can't always count on myself to be able to do this, so when I know I'm not going to be able to keep up with my dog (who is always more healthy, active and creatively keen than I am!), then I work instead on doing behaviors already on cue in rapid succession, and on behavior chains. This most often leads to the dog offering something a tiny bit different, which if I'm fast enough, I can capture and reinforce - and turn into a whole new behavior.

But I'm digressing a bit from the question within the question, which is "what do you do when you're NOT in a creativity session and your dog starts offering all sorts of different behaviors when you have just given a cue for a specific behavior?"

"Should I interrupt that training session, and cue instead a "settle"? This happens in daily activities, not just in training sessions. An example is if I ask Spot to turn on the kitchen light, sometimes he'll run to ring his go-out bell (they're close to each other on the kitchen wall). When the light doesn't come on by touching the bell, he doesn't think about what will make the light come on, but desperately tries sits and downs and spins and whatever else pops into his mind."

If the dog offers behaviors at times when you have asked for a specific behavior the dog already knows, and is on cue, then yes - absolutely - it's going to be counter-productive to reinforce anything he offers that is not what you cued him to do. Having a clear-cut prompt/cue for when you start and stop a creative problem-solving learning session is going to help a lot. That and remembering never to inadvertently reinforce him for offering creative behaviors when you have cued a specific behavior.

If you cue Spot to turn on the kitchen light, and he runs to ring his go-out bell, then the first thing I'd look at is whether Spot truly understands each cue. Is each cue really fluent? Often we think a cue is fluent, when it truly isn't. In order for the cue to be fluent, it has to happen each time, every time you give the cue, quickly, immediately, and correctly.

It's a bit like the old "Sit Test" Ian Dunbar thought up a decade or so ago. He mentioned that often we think and assume a dog understands a cue in every context, because human brains work differently from dog brains. We can generalize learned behaviors faster, easier than dogs can, and we often assume that dogs process information the same as human brains do.

Dr. Dunbar's challenge was to help us realize that our dogs often have no clue of what we are asking of them, when the context changes. Your dog may respond to "sit" perfectly, every time, quickly when he is in front of you, at your side, or in places where you have reinforced the behavior many times. But what happens if you walk/roll around in **BACK** of your dog and verbally cue him to sit? Will your dog sit, or will your dog turn around to face you before sitting?

What if you are lying down, instead of sitting up, with your face to the floor, with your arms over your face. Will your dog immediately sit when it hears the verbal cue when you're in that position?

What if you're in another room, or around the corner and the dog can't see you - will the dog still respond to the "sit" cue at that moment it was given, or will the dog come into your presence before sitting?

If you're lying on the couch, with your feet up over the back of the couch, your head toward the floor, and give the cue, will your dog respond immediately wherever he is when he hears the cue?

In that context, it might be really helpful to test Spot on just how fluent those cues are in different contexts for him. You can make it easier for him by putting up the door open bells so that's not going to be his default response. Or, you can go into a more neutral room, like the bathroom - whatever sets him up for success the easiest.

Then, give your cue to turn on the light as you normally would give it, from the position and distance it is most often given. Turn around and face away from Spot, then give the cue. Does he still do the behavior immediately?

Move into another room, give the cue. Will he move from one room to another and turn on the light?

Lie down on the floor, put your face in your hands, and give the cue. Will he still do the behavior instantly, upon hearing the cue?

Roll outside your front door so you can reach the doorbell. Give the cue to turn on the light, and immediately ring the doorbell. Will Spot still run and turn on the light, even if the doorbell rings?

Give the cue in the same room as the light switch, and immediately after giving the cue, drop a pan, a book, or open an umbrella. Will he still immediately run to turn on the light?

I strongly suspect that Spot is familiar with both behaviors - turning on light switches and ringing the door bell, but that the cues for each behavior are not yet fluent, and thus, the behaviors themselves are not individually fluent.

Judy then asks, **"If we're trying to encourage the dog to think about what it's going to do, how do we help him to "collect his thoughts" and direct them toward carrying out the desired behavior instead of toward a wild display of scattered thinking?"**

This is simply one of the BEST questions I've ever had anyone ask, and one of the most important for those whose dogs are service dogs, and expected to have reliable cued behaviors. It's something that often comes up with people question whether teaching a dog how to offer behaviors freely will lead to a breakdown in behaviors that have already been put on cue.

And again, it comes back to two important points:

- Is the cued behavior TRULY fluent and under stimulus control, reliable? Or only partially trained, and offered consistently only in known contexts?

- Are learning sessions done separately from daily cued behaviors for tasks and other expected behaviors?

There is a time and place for creative problem solving, and having an "off-on" switch - a clearly understood cue or prompt that a creative problem solving session is now about to start or stop - is important.

Once the dog learns how to offer behaviors during a creativity session, it will offer more and more behaviors - often subtle changes of behaviors it already has done to earn a reinforcement. This encourages creativity and trying new things. But a key to success is to have a very clearly understood "start the game/stop the game" cue for the dog, when you're first teaching the dog to begin offering behaviors.

It can be just as confusing for a dog to know when to offer behaviors and when not to offer behaviors - if we cue for one behavior, then reinforce a different behavior, when we're not in a creative learning session.

It becomes successively easier for a dog to switch back and forth, as time goes on, and come to understand that they can offer something that's related to the object you are asking the dog to interact with, but to do that interaction in a different way.

For instance, the other day at the library, I was about to cue Finn to hit the power door opener with his paw, as he was taught to activate it. But I saw that some kid had left a smear of ice cream on the opener, and I didn't want Finn to get sticky ice cream on his paws and track it into the library.

So, I cued him first to do a "paws up" on the wall, next to the switchplate, then cued him to "nose" - or touch the wall with his nose. I then cued "CLICKER GAME!", his cue to begin offering creative behaviors. While still in a "paws up" position, I held out my hand, clicked and fed him for touching the top, the bottom, the side of my hand, the wall, up higher on the wall, down lower on the wall, to one side, to the other side. He immediately offered changing the direction of his head, and I immediately started clicking for this offered behavior.

Why was I reluctant to just give him the cue to "nose" the switchplate? I realized a nose touch rather than a paw touch might confuse him in

this particular context, since I have reinforced the paw press for this task consistently over the past year, hundreds of times. I've never asked him to do this specific task with his nose before.

So, I cued a "paws up" in front of the switchplate. His cue for actually putting his paws ON the switchplate to activate it is "HIT IT!", so I didn't use that cue. Finn did a "paws up" on the wall, with paws on each side of the switchplate, as I expected he might, since he wasn't given the specific "hit it" cue to touch the switchplate.

I then cued a nose touch and Finn touched the wall above the switchplate with his nose. I clicked, fed, and he quickly offered another touch to the right of the switchplate, which I clicked and fed. Then he offered a touch to the left side of it. Then he touched the switchplate itself with his nose, and I was very careful to click that touch at the exact moment his nose touched the switchplate. I couldn't afford to be late with my click.

I was very aware that the ice cream was going to be an additional distraction, and that he would likely lower his nose a couple inches and lick the switchplate, so I was very quick in getting the treat to him immediately after the click for touching the switchplate with his nose, and delivered the treat while he was in position with his paws up on the wall, delivering the treat just above the switchplate. I then cued a "stand," so he'd immediately go into a standing position and not be tempted to lick the switchplate to get the ice cream.

Why didn't I just cue a "leave it" (his cue for leave it is "off") instead? Because I was pretty sure he would not know exactly what I was asking him to NOT do. Did I want him to not lick the switchplate? Did I want him to NOT do a paws up and interact with the wall anymore? Did I want him to stop interacting with the switchplate? The chances that he would be a bit confused about what he was supposed to stop doing seemed clear to me, so I wanted to bypass giving that particular cue.

Since his gentle nose touch did not put enough pressure on the switchplate to activate it, I repeated the whole thing again, and this time Finn did not offer to touch the wall or my hand or anything else

with his nose. He had been clearly reinforced for touching the switchplate, and knew that was what he was going to interact with.

I held off clicking the first gentle nose touch in that learning session, just for a second, when he immediately offered a stronger push with his nose - that DID activate the power door opener.

I ended the learning session with a "That's all there is, Folks!" - his cue phrase for ending a learning session, and moving back into regular "respond only to a cue" service dog mode.

I then cued him to "close", which is his cue to move close to the side of my chair in a heel position, then cued a "forward," which is his cue to move ahead of me, so we could enter the library.

At this point in our training, Finn really doesn't need a clear "stop and start" cue anymore - he picks up on my tone of voice, my body language, and to cues I may give that are fluent and nearly under stimulus control. However, because I can be inconsistent at times, I prefer to keep using those "on/off" switch cues.

Also, I don't rely on his service dog vest to be a prompt for a specific set of behaviors. I often work on a cueing session intensely with him in public, and he has to concentrate a lot. To relieve the brain drain, I will go outside or into a corner quickly, and do a little stress-relieving play session while he's still in uniform for 30 seconds or a minute.

I don't want to have to remove the vest each time, so I have purposely not used the vest as a prompt for a specific set of behaviors. Lots of people do, and that's great. It's just not practical for me, so I use a different "prompt" or cue to move in and out of normal service dog mode.

I have not had any problems switching back and forth between creativity sessions and service dog mode, once I taught myself to give very clear cues to my dog that offering behaviors is what is expected at this moment in time, or not what is expected at this moment in time.

"If the dog is doing stuff besides what is being cued, there's a problem with the stimulus control. "

So VERY true, and that's why in my excessively wordy post I did include testing for fluency, and asked, in summation, " Is the cued behavior TRULY fluent and under stimulus control, reliable? Or only partially trained, and offered consistently only in known contexts?"

I realize upon re-reading my response that I was discussing two very different things - creative problem solving sessions and dogs offering a different behavior than what was cued. I totally agree that when we cue a dog to do a behavior and the dog offers a different behavior, then that cued behavior is not under stimulus control!

The point I obviously didn't make well, is that I am hoping that those who are trying to branch out into doing creativity sessions with their dogs - won't just abandon doing this fabulous exercise for fear that it will lead to their service dogs "getting creative" and offering different behaviors when they have been specifically cued to do a certain behavior.

A lot of positive service dog handlers fear trying creativity sessions with their dogs due to this concern that creativity will lead to less fluency with needed behaviors.

I was hoping to offer some insight into my strong belief that one has little to do with the other, and that teaching creativity and problem solving can be done in a non-problematic way for service dog handlers, so that they can have both: a dog who can move back and forth from creative problem solving to responding reliably to a cue.

It really is SO great to have you on our list! Maybe you can teach me to be succinct! <G>

You're exactly right, IMO. Creative game-playing with dogs should not be a hindrance to getting cued behaviors under stimulus control. It might even be useful to create a "cue" that says, "Okay, right now anything goes!" Remember in DSTD where Karen Pryor writes about

her daughter's puppy who always barked when he had to be left in a room? He was taught that if there was a towel on the door knob no amount of barking would let him out, so he quickly gave up barking if the towel was on the door. But if there was no towel, he could Bark and someone would let him out. Of course the punch line of that story was that he learned to pull the towel off the door knob himself, so make sure the cue is something only you and not the dog can control! LOL!

"Debi, thank you so much for your VERY comprehensive answer about Spot's behavior-throwing! As I read it, I had one question, and planned to come back and ask it. I wanted an example of cuing an on/off for a creativity session. But there it was a little further into your post: a whole set of examples all wrapped up into that one encounter with the library door button."

You've given me a lot to think about and to work on, and already several AHA! epiphanies. One was about the light switch (among several about the light switch - that's a busy switch!). I realized that Spot is most certainly not fluent in turning the light on and off. Picturing myself giving the cue, I saw that I only give it when we're in the kitchen (I don't think about turning the light on or off unless I'm in there), and I usually point to the switch when I give the cue. Well, duh! the light switch and the go-out bell are right there within the range of one finger's point, so no wonder Spot is confused. It will be a wonderful lesson for both Spot and me if I practice giving it in other rooms, and remain very conscious of my nonverbal, non-intentional cues.

You have my mind working fast right now, listing all the other supposedly learned behaviors that are actually only learned in one part of the house or in one "attitudinal" context. I look forward to moving around the house (and outside the house, if we don't get the expected snow tonight) with all of them. Hmmm, how can I get the dishwasher into the driveway so I can ask Spot to close it there?

I appreciated your mention of border collies being one of the breeds that answers frustration (and just about everything else) with a bark. It makes me a bit more understanding of Spot's "need" to bark at so

many things. At least Spot's "border colliness" is tempered with some lab traits (if that's good - I don't know). Finn is pure border collie, isn't he?

"Your post is going into my treasure box of training aids, Debi. It might very well encourage me to go back and retrain everything with a more focused view on what I'm doing when I train."

Maybe you can teach me to be succinct! <G>

"Debi, there's a time and place for "succinct." Please, don't ever let your posts become one of those times or places."

Tug Games

I agree that full-strength tug games with uber-large dogs can be taxing to a human body and dangerous for children. I also agree with Helix that playing tug safely includes "giving up" as part of the game.

I do play tug with my 5 dogs, but before tug ever became a strong game, each dog was taught a release cue, and taught to fluency during high arousal. I'm not comfortable with games of competition until the dog understands the foundation behaviors - the rules that govern games of competition. Until that time, we only play co-operative games. The take, release, give and ignore behaviors are the foundations I count on before playing competitive games.

Virginia Broitman taught these strong behaviors to the only one of my dogs I didn't personally teach, (Finn, my BC service-dog-in-training), but took this a step further with Finn. Because Finn lived with small dogs, rats, kittens, he was taught as part of his foundations to play with little animals lying down, and to adjust his tug strength to accommodate the size of the animal. Totally cool!

Finn plays tug with my 10 pound Papillons, but never puts a lot of strength into it. He doesn't put them at risk. He doesn't care who wins, either. Just that one of the dogs will play the game with him. If I'm playing tug with him and he's too enthusiastic, pulling a bit too hard for me, I just cue "easy" and he pulls less hard.

Fortunately, this rarely happens as he automatically adjusts his tug strength to the strength of his opposition. He almost always lets the smaller animal "win." I suspect he also figured out that allowing them to "win" and gain control of the object insured the Papillons would continue to play the game with him, come back for more.

I have played "tug" with Finn with a thin strand of mohair yarn, just to see how far we could take the tug game with a delicate tug item.

Teaching foundation behaviors can change the game from truly competitive to cooperative. Many, many fine service dog trainers do not ever allow dogs they train to play games of competition. I'm not one of those who takes it that far. I love playing tug with my dogs, and wouldn't want to give it up, nor, I suspect, would they, since it's their favorite game as well. I think the key, as Helix noted, is that tug can be taught as a "Zen" game, that in order to get something they want, they first have to offer to give something up.

At that point, I really don't see it as a competitive game anymore, and feel it is an excellent exercise to practice lightning fast responses to cues, pull strength adjustments, and adaptation to the size/strength of animal or human playing the game with the dog.

Trick: Waving a Wand

"I would like to have Spot wave a wand.....and the pencil might look like a wand."

Have you considered having Spot wave the wand with his mouth, holding it and bobbing his head up and down, back and forth, instead of attaching something to his paw? Without prehensile toes, you'll always be forced to attach something to the dog's leg in order for the dog to do the behavior.

However, you can get the same behavior spontaneously if you shape a solid hold on the wand, shape the head turns, then attach the hold of an object, like a pencil or chopstick - to the head turning. I'm actually doing this right now with my dog, and it's great fun and very effective.

Just another way to think about the end behavior, and having it be as natural and quick to cue as possible.



OC and HUMANS

Cyber Agility

There are several great attention/focus exercises written up on the CS website, but you sound like someone who could really benefit from

Helix Fairweather's fabulous online agility class. In fact, it sounds like it was almost custom designed for you!

Helix goes in depth on how to build awesome focus amidst distractions, making it a very fun game for the dog. She has so many super ideas for this - and they work superbly! Plus, she has other fabulous exercises for getting the kind of focused response and precision you'll want for agility - but all in a very fun, dog-friendly way. I hope you'll check out her course and consider it - it's so good.

No, I have no financial interest, just took the course myself and loved it, learned tons, and recommend it without reservation.

Using OC to Diffuse Access Confrontations

I've had a few queries lately on how we can use OC to help diffuse potential access confrontations. Here is a story of how I used OC in two such a situations.

On the way home from a long airplane flight, my husband and I stopped at a restaurant for a bite of dinner. I had my service dog, Peek, with me and in full dress: vest and ID.

We come in the front door, and I spot the manager glance at us, then furrow his brow, and tighten up his body. Uh oh - he's about to come running to us and saying, "You can't bring your pet in here!"

I watch him approach, try to make eye contact and smile, but he's not looking at my face. Only my dog, who looks way too much like a foofy lapdog.

We're all hungry, tired, and in no mood for a confrontation, though I am prepared with my handouts of Federal and State laws, just in case.

I wait until the manager is almost to us, and quickly and noisily drop my keys. "OOPS!" I say, (my cue for Peek to go fetch the object). Peek quickly dips his head, picks up the jingling keys and does a "Paws up" on my wheelchair, holding the keys in his mouth until I am ready to take them. I take my time, wanting Mr.Huff and Puff to SEE this dog is doing something out of the ordinary, and perhaps have the first realization that this is no "pet."

The manager gets to us, and I see his face is still contorted, his hands are clenched, but that he's eyeing the dog with some curiosity. Before he can speak, I look up at him, smile and say, "Hi! Yes, I know - he doesn't LOOK like a real service dog, but isn't it amazing how helpful a dog of his size can be? This little guy also makes my bed and does the laundry. Don't know what I'd do without him. It was worth the thousands of hours of training we had to go through to get to this point."

The manager is mute, but clearly thinking twice about challenging me. But still, I can tell by his body language that he's still confused, and wondering just what the heck a "service dog" is, (it was written on Peek's vest), and WHY the dog was so tiny.

So I quickly add, "Yes, it's amazing to me that these little service dogs can do nearly everything the larger service and guide dogs can do. I'm just so thankful that trained service dogs of ANY size have legal access, because this little wonder sure makes my life liveable. Hah - from the look on your face, sir, I can tell you've probably never seen a legitimate service dog so small. Here, watch how he goes to fetch my cell phone!"

I go put the phone on the window ledge, walk 20 feet away, then cue Peek to retrieve the phone. Peek races to the phone, grabs the leather handle, then brings it back and does a "Paws up" on the chair and holds it for me to receive.

The first words now out of that manager's mouth are, "I can't believe that little dog just got that big phone for you. That's impressive. And you say these little dogs have the same legal rights as Seeing Eye Dogs?"

This gives me a chance to beam brightly, dig into my purse and fish out a copy of the IAADP's handout on service animals, and the access granted to their disabled handlers. I hand it to him, and say, "Here, you can have this. I have extras. It may help you in educating your staff about the many different types of service animals you might encounter. I can see you're already quite knowledgeable, but this may give you some more detailed information for your staff. They are so lucky to have you to help them, so they don't accidentally break the law and deny access to a legitimate team."

This has just given the man some very vital information, as well as allowed him to save face. I acknowledged that he was in the position to educate others, I gave him additional information to help him, and I didn't have to use any verbal punishers to get the job done.

But more, by letting him save face, I got him excited about service animals. This means, because he had a "good" experience with his first service dog, he will probably be more welcoming to the next team entering his doors.

I quickly added, "And I want to thank you SO much for not reaching down to pet my service dog, and distracting him from his work. This was so thoughtful of you, and I only wish others were as considerate as you are."

The manager quickly smiled broadly, thanked me, pocketed the handout, and asked us where we would like to sit. "Anywhere is fine, fine!" he quips.

I ask for a nice corner booth, where I can get out of my chair and put the dog under the table. He guides us to the table, and I quickly toss down Peek's settle mat and cue him to lie down.

The man is besotted. He can't take his eyes off the dog. "I've never seen such a well-mannered dog before", he states. I beam, sucking up his verbal clicks. He then leaves and brings back the three cooks and 5

waitresses and as we are waiting for our order, he "educates" them about service dogs.

He says, "See this little dog? He is just as smart and well trained as one of those Seeing Eye dogs and he can even do the laundry and make the beds! Now, whatever you do, don't distract him, and don't pet him. He's working and shouldn't be disturbed."

We had a lovely dinner, and left feeling we had made a new friend. I have no doubt that the next team to enter those doors will be treated like royalty!

In another encounter at a fabric store, I also used OC to diffuse a potential problem.

I rolled into the store, went past the fabric cutting table and heard the saleswoman say, "You can't have that dog in here!" I was shocked, but decided I'd use it as a chance to "shape" a behavior. Shoot, we die hard clicker trainers don't care what species we shape!

So when the lady said, "That's not a Seeing Eye dog, and pets aren't allowed in here so you'll have to leave". I ignore her rudeness, turn to her, smile brightly and say, "Oh, you're so right this isn't a guide dog! Could you imagine this little thing trying to guide someone?"

"But let me tell you what THIS little trouser can do! No, let me show you - you're gonna be amazed. I toss down my keys, Peek retrieves them, then goes back into a sit at my side. I add, "ohhh, and that's just one little thing. Isn't that just the coolest thing you ever saw?"

I don't give her a chance to answer, but continue: "I'm so glad I get to be the person to show you a service dog! You know, service dogs of all kinds have the very same access rights with their disabled owners as guide dogs have. They are so liberating for us, give us so much independence. Here, let me show you how he'll pick up your scissors and that hunk of material you just dropped. Fetch, Peek!"

Peek fetches the items, and I direct him to give them to the lady. She takes them, and is beginning to lose the pinch-faced look. I continue: "Yes, it's a Godsend to have my assistant with me. I'm constantly dropping things, and he picks everything up. Sometimes when I transfer from my wheelchair, the chair rolls away, so he also brings it back for me. Don't know what I'd do without him."

I pitch my glasses on the floor, and the lady watches while Peek carefully picks them up by the nosepiece. I can see her attitude softening, and finally give her a chance to speak. She says, "Yes I can see that's quite a dog, but honestly, we can only allow Seeing Eye dogs in here. That's the law!"

I counter with, "Actually, that used to be the law, but new laws now allow people with all types of disabilities to use an assistance dog in public. Here, let me show you, so you'll be able to teach everyone in the store about service animals." I whip out my Delta card, I whip out my IAADP flyer and point out the Federal and State laws and the many types of service dogs working in public. She is amazed. She didn't have a clue. She was embarrassed.

I knew at this point that if I allowed her to save face, she'd be a great supporter and **WOULD** educate the other store members and make it easier for the next team who entered those doors. She could be the hero.

So I said, "I'm so glad you are so open to learning new things. I wish everyone were like you. These dogs are true life savers, and you can help us so much by educating others. I'll leave all this info with you, and if you have any questions, my card is there as well. Give me a holler and I'll even be glad to come here and give a demo and talk all about service dogs, so you'll know what to expect next time you see one. And, I can help you know legally what you can and cannot ask by law, to save you possible litigation."

"Well," she says, "Our manager says only "Seeing Eye" dogs can come in, so maybe this would be a good thing for her to see. I'll see if I can

set up a visit. You say you'll bring the dog and show the others what you showed me?"

She never did call to set up a meeting, but I made a point of revisiting the store the following week, waltzing in with a big smile and waving hello to the staff on duty. No one blinked about access, but each of them came up to tell me that "we always welcome service dogs here". Hah!!!

Eliciting Cooperation from Other People

Thank you for the excellent operant response, and also, for the lovely click for me. To know that something I may have written helped you to explore ways to operantly respond in difficult human situations - really is just about the biggest gift anyone could give me. To know one may have made a difference in one person's life is just the warmest click imaginable.

You made some really fine points here, in asking us to look at how we can turn escalating situations around by applying clicker training principles. You also explained how we are normally compelled to ask people NOT to do something - it's part of our daily reinforcement in society, after all.

But you then asked us to think about how we could appeal to that person, asking his cooperation in doing something else in a training realm, that's incompatible both with the dog jumping and him kicking in response. Your plea was to abandon verbal leash pops, and model a better method for him. I just can't think of a finer approach, or one that has more potential to change unwanted behavior. By soliciting COOPERATION of a NEW behavior that has nothing to do with his kicking or your asking him to ignore the dog jumping on him - you gave him a way to save face, a chance to offer a more appropriate

response you both can enjoy, and a chance to help you help your dog learn.

There's lots of creative options for incompatible behaviors to seek cooperation with. One might be to ignore the kicking, immediately offer an apology for your dog's behavior, and follow up with asking the man to help by doing something totally different that won't trip the man's defense triggers.

Perhaps the man could be asked to stand and distract the dog while you walked your dog by him a few times on leash, getting closer and closer and keeping your dog's focus on you. You could explain that "obviously my dog finds you to be someone he really wants to greet, so would you mind trying to get his attention while I try to get him to maintain his focus on me?" Then you can do just that - starting out at a distance away, and slowly moving closer and closer to the target man. Then when the dog can pass by without being overly exuberant, you can ask for a sit 3 feet from the man. Then 2 feet. Then one foot. And finally when the man reaches out to pet. This accomplishes at least 10 very positive things here:

- Teaches the man who doesn't want to know - that there IS a different way to handle inappropriate human greeting rituals .
- Allows the man to save face .
- Sets the man up to be an accomplice at success, with him being part of the training solution. .
- Allows him to do a movement-oriented behavior instead of a passive one, which can be difficult for some people. .
- Gives information to the man in a visual form, that is far more effective than words. .
- Gives both of you a chance to focus on something happy and positive, instead of the emotion you both are feeling .
- Exposes the man to a whole new way of looking at extinguishing unwanted behaviors. .
- Leaves the man feeling like he is the winner: he got to do something to change the unwanted response, and he got to leave a hero.

- Prevents an escalation of unwanted human behaviors, and sets up a more positive communication environment for the next time you should happen to meet. .
- Buys you time to teach your dog proper human-dog greeting rituals.

Now, all this is assuming you still want to interact with this guy. I couldn't tell from your email exactly what happened, so please clarify for us. You said he kicked/knead Zoe "like three times." If he kicked her repeatedly for one jump, I would seriously avoid this guy and not try to interact with him in the future!!!

I agree this is likely not a fellow you'd like to cross paths with again. But if the man lives in the same community, and exercises his dog in the same area at the same times of day, then there is a likelihood they will meet again. So it makes good operant sense to try to at least keep the peace enough that there is no hatred being spewn from either party during future meetings.

But I agree - try not to get around him, and leash your dog if he is around until your dog knows a new behavior during greeting rituals with humans, when he's in happy excitement mode.

I think this is such an important topic for this list, and one we don't see enough posted on: Sharing ideas for ways to use the principles of clicker training with human interactions.

I don't want to appear to be jumping on the poster here - this is not about "...Should Haves" - don't you just hate that? "Should have" "Must do" "Gotta do" - ughhhh! It trips my triggers right away, and mentally, I'm already replying with, "Oh, yeah? Who sez?" even if I happen to agree with that person's advice! <G>

I just am looking for an excuse to open this thread again. And Jane's very effective idea got me all charged up. I didn't mean to do it at the expense of the original poster!

When the poster asks, "What **SHOULD** I have done?" I can only say that words are cheap, and it's real easy to say "You should have

done....." after the fact. Here on clicker solutions, we aren't really telling people what they **SHOULD HAVE** done, but rather, opening up new doors to other options available if they should choose them. Ideas they may want to try at other times.

Or not. <G>

GEO Dollars

I wanted to report on how OC (operant conditioning) in the high school geometry class was going for my husband Tim. To recap posts on this subject last fall, Tim decided that the punishment-based teaching methods and discipline preferred by his H.S. administration just weren't working.

He had the lowest passing rate for students, and would not bend on his principles of not passing a student who was failing the class. He tried lots of ways to motivate them, but most of them had fixed ratios of reinforcement, and the students soon got to expect more and more, but did less and less.

Finally he decided to incorporate operant conditioning into his classes at the beginning of the school year. All summer he planned his strategy, making up "Geo Dollars" (token money like monopoly money) and deciding how he would "click" the kids to give them their rewards. At first he planned to write everything down, let them know exactly what they could earn by offering certain behaviors. We discussed how this would not give them enough incentive because it was still on a fixed ratio. He decided to finally do random rewards, and with random reinforcement, success began rolling in the door.

For the most part, these are Barrio gang kids who are habitually late in getting to class, who ask for constant passes to go to the bathroom and

graffiti the walls, who have no interest in participating in class, who won't ask questions or help others.

He began handing out Geo dollars when he came to class to the students who were already in their seats, telling them only, "Hold on to these. you may find they will come in handy." For homework turned in, he gave out a Geo dollar, marking the moment with a "Good job". He looked for ways constantly to "click" them for good behaviors, and totally ignored the poor behaviors. The kids who staggered in late didn't earn a click and soon began to get a bit jealous. They wanted their Geo dollars too.

So what are Geo Dollars? Tokens that they can then hand back for a reward such as a pencil, a pad of paper, candy, bathroom passes, grade points added to test scores, etc. They became the most coveted thing in the math department. Before the bell rang, there was a scramble and all the students raced to be IN their seats when the bell rang, giving Tim their attention. They didn't know when he might reward them, but knew they had a good shot at it. And reward them he did!

At first, one behavior earned one Geo dollar. Then, on a variable schedule, he randomly reinforced for good behaviors. The unwanted behaviors began to extinguish as new behaviors shaped by Tim began to take their place. Bathroom passes used to be the hottest token in school until Geo Dollars took over. Tim noted with total shock that he has only been asked for 2 bathroom passes all year long. No one now wants to leave the classroom in case they miss a chance to be reinforced!

Geo dollars are kept in leather wallets, in fancy bejeweled folders, stapled inside notebooks, and are watched like Brinks deliveries. They are turned in mainly for grade points, or points added to a special project. Tim gives bonus Geo Dollars frequently, "Jackpotting" the kids for a really neat unexpected behavior, like asking an especially good question, or turning in an intriguing homework paper. He gave out \$5 Geo dollars to every student who could get a parent to come to open house, and Tim's class had the highest attendance rate in the school!

Last month, Tim was visited by the principal who came into class to commend him on how much his students grades had improved, and how his failure rate had been lowered substantially. And the principal could not believe that Tim had a whole roomful of Gang members paying attention and interacting in class. He gave Tim a verbal click in front of the class, then shook his hand.

OC works!!! This stuff is so awesome. In some ways, it works to our benefit that we live in a punishment-based society. When people start getting set up for success and rewarded for that success instead of punished for their mistakes, they really respond with incredulity, enthusiasm and desire to achieve. It almost makes me feel like I have a secret "peace weapon"...if there ever could be such a thing. The students, like our animals, feel THEY are in control, and that THEY are setting Mr. Loose up to reward them. We all win!

Humans and the Laws of Learning

I can see the topic of using OC with humans is one with which many people are distinctly uncomfortable, feeling it is manipulative, takes away choice. I think anything in the world can be misused. One can socially drink, having a glass of nice wine at dinner or one can drink until they are inebriated. One can use a computer/internet to research, to communicate and discuss important issues, or one can use it to find plans to build bombs and blow up schools. Yes, good things CAN be misused.

But I don't think that's what we're really talking about here. Each time we ignore a temper tantrum and smile at our children when they are displaying more socially acceptable behaviors, we are using the laws of learning. We are applying "negative punishment" by not responding to the temper tantrum.

Likewise, if some choose to holler at or spank a child having a tantrum, they are applying positive punishment. We use the laws of learning in our lives far more than I think we are even aware of. In this vein, we can choose to become *aware* and to hone and shape our own responses to emphasize more of the positive reinforcement and negative punishment rather than positive punishment and negative reinforcement.

I was raised in a (physically and emotionally) punishment-free home. It was non-structured, but my parents offered leadership, and unconditional love. My mother practiced +R and -P continuously, and I was carefully shaped throughout my childhood. I was not intimidated, scolded, punished. I was never hit or spanked.

Instead, I was given a tremendous amount of respect, was listened to and my input into conversations - my ideas were always given consideration and felt to be worthy of discussion. I was given responsibilities by earning that privilege. Yes, the privilege to be responsible. My mother and father used -P in dealing with my occasional childhood tantrums and always found tons of things to use +R on to help me to adjust my attitude.

My respect and admiration for my parents was so strong that the thought of making these loving persons unhappy was no fun at all. No matter how wicked I wanted to be. So to be wicked, I'd do things like creep down into the autobody shop my folks owned, at night, and fingerprint with enamels on all the cars in for repairs.

My punishment? Pure -P. Removal of what I loved, treasured the most: an audience. Yes, my favorite moments of the day had always been rushing downstairs, showing my latest singing or dancing routine to the boys at work on those cars.

My father drew a chalk line on the floor, near the door. I was allowed to enter the door, but could not cross that line until I had worked out a solution for the problem I had created.

My dad explained that every man at work treasured my presence, and wanted me there. But that they now had no time to listen to me, because they had so much extra work to do trying to fix those fingerpainting marks. But that once they were finished, they would again have time to spend with me. In the mean time, I was not to cross the line and bother them.

I spent three afternoons with the toes of my Mary Janes pressed right on that line, leaning over as far as I could and trying to catch the men's attention. They kept working, would occasionally look up and smile, wave. But they remained "very busy looking".

It was the most effective negative punisher for me, because all I wanted in the world was to have my friends listen and clap again. And I realized without any spanking, without any exclusion to my room or harsh words, that my own behaviors had caused me to lose what I wanted most.

Soon I was hollering across the shop, "I'll take your trash out!" "Can I empty your water bucket?" "I'll pick up all the shop rags so you can get done quicker."

I may have been only 6, but I knew full well that I was being deprived of what I wanted most because by my actions, I had caused those boys more work. And I was now taking responsibility for those actions.

When the line was erased three days later, I was taken to a quarter panel in the boiler room. My dad had several tiny pints of paint there on a little stool, and a bucket of brushes.

He told me that when I got frustrated, and needed a creative outlet in the shop, that I could come here to my very own "stall" and create a masterpiece. That in the morning, all the boys could come in to change their clothes, get their coffee, and look at the wonderful work I'd done the night before.

It was a very powerful lesson, and one I have remembered all my life. But there were many such lessons, which taught me that with creativity

and compassion, children can learn very well without physical or emotional punishers.

I remember my mother once had a PTA friend over for pie. The friend had a four year old son on a tether. The boy was active, curious, and trying incessantly to get attention, as four year olds are wont to do! The mother kept correcting the boy, "Jerry, no!" "Jerry, Don't!" "Jerry, put that down!" Jerry did so momentarily, but immediately began anew.

My mother finally asked the other mother if she could just take Jerry around the house and let him explore, with her supervision. The other mother was horrified. "But, he'll wreck everything!" My mom assured her that Jerry would be fine, and that there was nothing so valuable that its loss would matter.

So mom took the boy all over the house, lifted him up to the Knick-Knack shelf, and one, by one, took down every piece, let the child carefully hold it, feel its texture, explore every nuance of its construction. Inch by inch they explored the house this way, with mom telling short little stories about each object.

The child was thrilled, his curiosity sated. Mom then got old invoices - we were poor - and a can full of broken crayons, and set the boy to work scribbling on that paper. She showed him an empty spot on the wall and asked him if he could possibly draw a really good picture so she could put it up on the wall for everyone to see.

This entire interaction may have taken only 15 minutes, but it set that child up for success, gave him a creative outlet, and no physical punishers were necessary to get the behavior desired.

And this whole approach which shaped and fashioned my life was at odds with the way I had come to learn to communicate with animals. My frustration was supreme, but I couldn't seem to use my life lessons on my dogs.

It wasn't until I came to clicker training that I realized I had grown up being clicker trained, and that it was fun, and wonderful, and exciting,

and that it had given me a bond with my family that was oh-so-strong, based on respect, leadership, creativity and responsibility. That I was motivated to earn their oh-so-creative reinforcements.

When I really began to click with my dogs, it was as if I had come full circle. I felt as if my mother and dad, in some other dimension, were looking over my shoulder smiling, "Yep, you finally got it, Deb."

Personal Leash Popping Challenge

"I've been trying hard to learn a particular clicker concept. I think I've finally got it, and it's working great. I'm such an idiot for taking so long to figure it out!"

Ooooooh, if you say that, then you're leash popping yourself for learning. Is that fair to you? <G>

Instead, how about using clickerly thinking to rephrase that to "I got it! I figured it out!"

Though I know you wrote this as a joke, it really touches on something most of us do (I certainly do it way too much!) constantly. We will remain very positive in our communication with our dogs, but we have difficulty applying the concepts of clicker training to ourselves. We punish ourselves mentally when we make mistakes instead of giving ourselves a mental click and cyber chocolate for learning something.

We encourage our dogs to try, to make "mistakes" as they work to problem solve, and yet, when we try to work through things that we are just learning, if we don't get it perfect immediately, we punish ourselves for making mistakes!

I can't figure out why this is so widespread with so many positive people, or why we do this so often, when we know that as organisms

with brain stems, we're all subject to the laws of learning. I am perhaps one of the biggest offenders for seeing my "mistakes" as bad things, rather than wonderful stepping stones on the journey of learning. I know better, but I can't seem to shed the habit of mentally leash popping myself each time I don't "get it" quickly enough to suit my ego.

I am perfectly happy to watch the lightbulbs pop on for a dog, and don't think of their learning process as "mistakes," but as natural increments of learning. Yet, I can't seem to automatically do this for myself. It seems unnatural or something. It sure reiterates to me that we do live in a rather punitive-focused world, and that focusing on thinking positively about our "mistakes" is not something we are reinforced for doing often enough.

So here's my challenge to myself and to the list: next time you realize you're mentally leash popping yourself for making a mistake - pause for a moment, think about how you can turn that around and reinforce yourself for having just learned something.

I just did this a moment ago, when I went to the kitchen to refill my coffee. I accidentally splashed the hot coffee all over the counter for the umpteenth time, and mentally said, "STUPID DEBI!" Realizing I had just leash popped myself, I paused, thought about why I constantly splashed coffee on the counter, and realized that I could avoid that if I just adjusted the location of the coffee pot so I didn't have to stretch my arm so far to get it off the counter.

I told myself, "Brilliant, Debi!" and realized I'd just become aware of how to change a behavior that wasn't working for me.

I was proud of myself for a whole 10 seconds for figuring this out, knowing that by consciously taking the time to solve the problem, I was setting myself up for success.

Old habits are hard to tame. What do I do next? I add THIS thought: "YOU SHOULD HAVE FIGURED THAT OUT TWO YEARS AGO!"

Shedding that habit of punishing myself is such a challenge!

TAGteach

"My daughter often complained I used the same language and petting with her and the dogs. She said the treatment itself was lovely, she just hated that it was the same as the dogs."

I find myself doing the same thing to my husband - using the same "doggy" tone of voice to mark those moments of excellence I'd like to see him remember and repeat. And it trips me up each time!

Fortunately, he understands OC enough to get a good laugh out of it, and has a blast trying to mimic my "dog training" voice. But he also realizes I **did** notice something he'd done that I appreciated, and that no matter how it was vocalized, it was a whole lot nicer than nagging about what he'd done wrong.

We tag each other every single day, now, even though neither of us has been able to allow the "nags" to go into extinction. But the stress of nagging can be greatly reduced for us by remembering that we **DO** need to keep reinforcing each other for things we do right, and want to see repeated in our behaviors.

But you are so right - when we are used to working with animals, that, "GOOD BOY! GOOD GIRL!" stuff comes out almost unbidden, before we have time to think about which creature we are reinforcing - human or dog.

Reinforcement in Tag Teaching is a bit different from the type of reinforcing praise we use with our spouses and dogs, just as using a clicker in dog training offers us a kind of precision we won't get with

praise phrases because we can't get the words out quick enough to mark a moment with great precision.

For example, Tag Teach gives us a very clear way to teach humans to do most anything. I can remember when my friend Barbara was here visiting, and I wanted to learn how to knit the "continental" way, rather than the English way I already knew how to knit. But it was so foreign to me I couldn't pick it up from watching how-to-videos or books. So, instead, I had Barbara "Tag" me with a clicker, using very tiny incremental steps. I only had to think about ONE thing at a time, not about how to keep the yarn from rolling off my lap, how to keep it wound around my fingers, how to feed it out without cutting off my circulation, how to hold each of the needles correctly, and how to make a stitch.

All I had to do was think about ONE thing - the "tag" point. Everything else is unimportant, and mistakes are not counted. So our first Tag point was bringing the yarn up through my fingers, and doing it without looking. Barbara "tagged" (clicked) me each time the yarn was in the right position moving into my fingers, and when that became habit, and I no longer had to look to see if it was right, then we moved on to the next tag point. I no longer had to think about how the yarn wound around my fingers because it had become an automatic behavior for me. It was time for the next tag point.

The next tag point was to relax my hands while holding one needle in the right position. Barbara tagged me for that, and then we moved on to the second needle, then to the hand movement while making a stitch, etc., Each tiny incremental change was marked by the "tag" and each tag point then became an automatic part of doing the behavior without having to think about it.

In one 15 minute lesson using Tagging, I was able to understand and do the continental knitting style - not with the skill and ease of my teacher Barbara, but I could DO it. The big test was that evening when Barbara and I went to the theatre to see a play, and I was able to knit continentally in the dark without having to look at what I was doing.

Tag teaching - like clicker training - allows the student to forget everything else but the one tag point. It's liberating to not feel pressured to try to remember 10 things at one time, and screwing up when one of the 10 isn't right, and the whole building collapses.

By learning through concentrating **ONLY** one one tiny "tag point" at a time, the stress of learning is eliminated, and the whole process of learning turns into a really fun game - just as it does for our dogs!

The applications for service dog handlers are boundless. With knowledge of how to Tag Teach, we can improve our handling skills significantly - to the point where we can often find that a behavior our dog was offering that wasn't quite right was caused by our lack of handling skills, and not the dog's inability to learn the behavior properly.

For example, one team I worked with and tagged - a service dog and handler - had a problem with slow responses to cues. I had the handler just go about the normal way she cued the dog, and watched. When she gave only a verbal cue, the dog failed to respond, though the dog kept "checking in" with the handler. It was easy for me to see as an observer that the dog had learned to wait until "all the cues" came together - the cues the handler had no idea she was giving: turning her body just a bit, leaning over, etc. They were subtle cues she was not aware of doing - but to the dog, the cue wasn't complete until all the pieces of how the dog had learned the cue came together.

So, by using Tag Teach, we were able to re-teach the handler to give only **ONE** cue to make it quick and clear for the dog exactly what was being asked. I had her put the dog in a down-stay, and worked only with the handler, tagging her for standing still with her feet first, then standing up straight, then making a sound while keeping her body still, etc. Working on these subtle "tag points" helped immensely, and within the hour, she was cueing her dog with only a verbal cue, and the dog was responding immediately. The latency - or the lag time between giving a cue and the dog offering the behavior - was reduced to nearly zero.

We can use Tag Teach to help ourselves become better clicker trainers, and better handlers for our dogs - thanks to video cameras, where we can watch each frame in slow motion and see exactly where we may inadvertently add some body movement or tiny addition that we may never have noticed - but the dog noticed!

I remember when Virginia Broitman was working with me and Finn, my now service dog. Finn had been taught to respond to the most subtle of body movements, and I had a habit of tilting my shoulder back so I could look down at my smaller service dog easier. I wasn't even aware of it, but each time I looked over at Finn, I automatically tilted my shoulder back just slightly, as I'd always had to do to see the smaller service dogs I was used to having work at the side of my chair. And each time I did that, Finn stopped, as he'd been taught to do by his trainer.

Tag Teach is a way to "clean up" these little subtle mistakes we handlers all make - in a very clear and precise manner, without us having to worry about trying to do all the things correctly at once. We isolate one thing and one thing only we want to change and improve, and that one thing becomes our "tag point." For me, it was just rolling around in my chair - without the dog - and looking down at my side while keeping my shoulder still.

I have attended at Tag Teach seminar, and found it fabulous - mind blowing, even. I could see how it could apply to teaching anyone anything, in a quick and pleasant way, building one step at a time. I'd already been internalizing clicker thinking in my everyday life, but to see how the precision of tagging worked in a learning situation just blew me away totally.

There are video clips of how people can quickly learn with Tag Teaching up on the Tag Teach website: <http://www.tagteach.com> . The examples are of children learning gymnastics, but one can easily see how it could apply to teaching anyone anything. It takes away all the worry, the stress of trying to remember 10 things at a time. With Tag Teach, there is only ONE thing to think about at a time.

The only real difference I've found with Tagging, is that with humans, the primary reinforcer does not have to be given immediately, as it should be given to dogs. With adults, the click alone is often quite enough because the real primary reinforcement is that they are quickly learning something they want to learn. With kids, the primary reinforcer is still important, but each "tag" (think "click") can be saved up and cashed in later for real goods or privileges. Counting is done on a "tagulator", a nifty little cord with beads on it that are slid up and down to count the number of "tags" earned.

I loved participating in the Tag Teach seminar - it was so much fun, and it really gave me a way to use clicker training in teaching humans in a much more efficient and effective way.

Best of all, though I'm now very inactive in most everything in life due to health reasons, I still use my tagulator to "tag" myself for the little things I can achieve in a day, and the number of beads I count on my tagulator is added to my "bank". When I have so many beads added up, I treat myself to something I really love - a new audiobook to listen to on my iPod.

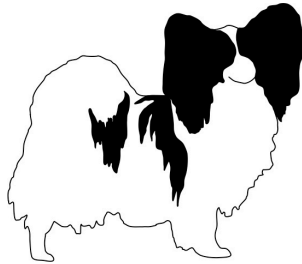
I find that though I still have to limit myself to what I can do each day, I am motivated by adding a bead to my tagulator bank - and I can almost always do one more thing to earn that extra bead before lying down to rest.

Oh, I forgot to mention how well it worked with the neighborhood kids - who were the greatest mess makers in our subdivision. Their home was also a wreck, and broken toys, weeds, junk littered the yard. This was a couple years ago, and I was still feeling well enough to go out and interact with the kids. I made a trip to the 99 cent store and stocked up on candy and cheapo toys.

Then I gave each kid a tagulator, and explained how it was going to work. For each handful of weeds they put into the big plastic bag Finn held open, they got to push add a bead on their tagulator. They understood that when they had all the beads pushed in a row, they would get a present. Boy, did they have fun earning their tags, and

cashing in for the goodies. And in return for the \$5.00 I spent on the junk they loved, I got to look across the street at a nicely groomed yard and no broken toys!

If I were young and healthier, Tag Teaching would be my passion, and my goal would be to become a tag teacher. I've never seen people learn things so fast as when they are being tagged - and enjoy the process of learning to boot!



PROBLEM SOLVING

Anti Static Helps

Living in low humidity Las Vegas, static electricity is an everyday problem. It's especially bad when I'm working with a shy dog, and the dog gets zapped when I give him a treat.

I use an anti-static spray that I make up myself, following these directions:

There are sprays you can use on carpet which you can purchase, and a good homemade static protection spray even recommended by the US Military can be made with one part fabric softener, like Downy, to

three parts water. Put that in a spray bottle and spray it over your carpet from time to time." (more about other ways to cope at this URL: <http://lowendpc.com/msgEEK/2002/0404.html>)

****Note:** I also spray this on my wheelchair seat and my clothing, and it effectively stops the zaps for many hours. I now carry a very small spritzer bottle with me in my backpack for refreshing later in the day. I've heard, but not tried using - Bounce or other dryer sheets and rubbing them on the chair and body - also works, but again, I haven't tried it.

There's also a wrist band anti-static device that's about \$15 you can wear, and it supposedly stops static. This was recommended on a website about working with computers in arid climates: <http://www.directron.com/1160125.html>

Here's a URL with TONS of helpful information on reducing those pesky zaps!

Humans and Sparks: <http://www.eskimo.com/~billb/emotor/zapped.html>

Interesting tidbit on service dog training, and how dogs can pick up superstitious behaviors: One dog constantly got zapped when taking treats - always delivered from my left side in the wheelchair. I'd quickly deliver another treat from the front, which wouldn't zap him since he'd already gotten zapped. Though it's been a couple of years since that time of zapping him, he still superstitiously believes the shock will happen if he tries to accept a treat on my left side, in heel position, so he refuses food on that side.

Click as Interrupter

It's very tricky stuff using punishment to "correct" any kind of aggressing behaviors. Because you never know what baggage you may be attaching, for one thing. For example, your dog begins to posture, to lunge, to growl and stress over an oncoming dog. The handler then ADDS a punisher - pain - to the scenario. But does the dog, when stressing, understand what is causing his discomfort? And what if the dog instead comes to pair the pain with the oncoming dog? It happens all the time. It's not a rarity in any way.

It's like the dog who accidentally steps on a thorn when a man with a beard jogs by. It is so easy for that dog then to pair the pain in his foot with the appearance of the man with the beard, and from that point on attach a "superstitious behavior" to his responses to any man with a beard. And if the handler then adds a punisher, it sure can confirm what the dog suspected: that when men with beards pass by, bad things happen.

These things happen in real life all the time. And each thing like this can be made worse, or it can be rendered harmless. It's totally up to us, and how we choose to react, and what we choose to reinforce. We have a choice. The dog has a choice. We can try to force the dog to accept our choice, or we can set him up so that our choice is the only choice he wants to make, from his own volition.

So what can we do to change the behavior Jane is seeing? I think Sue outlined this well, but I'd like to expand it even more. Go into more detail. Cuz I've been there, and shed all the tears myself, spent all those sleepless nights wondering if I should euthanize my out-of-control dog. I know how much this concern eats at you, colors every moment of your life. And I know how much an experienced handler like Jane can begin to feel like a failure when the tried and true methodology of praise and correction falls short. Been there, done that, and burned the t-shirt.

First, Jane, have you seen the Turid Rugaas video "Calming Signals"? Or read the little \$10 book of the same name? Several have queried on what observable behaviors you are seeing, and when you are seeing them. This little gem of a book and equally wonderful video can be an

amazing help in training you to "spot" behavior so barely perceptible, most people would never notice them. I found this to be a major "key" in my being able to reshape Peek's aggressive responses. First, I had to know what I was seeing. I was so busy trying to MIND READ and figure out WHY he was aggressing I missed all the obvious clues. Turid Rugaas' book helped me to forget the whys, and just move from observable behavior.

So I first established WHEN my dog would begin to show signs of stress. He'd first perk his ears up, and then they would slowly move backwards, held rigidly, at about 60 feet from an approaching dog. Then about 5 feet later, I'd notice that his body posture was also getting very rigid, his gait choppy, his steps purposeful. He was gearing up for the confrontation to come, as I interpreted it.

I then noticed that at 50 feet or so, he'd begin to lick his lips, his eyes would narrow and he became oblivious to things he'd normally look at: birds, squirrels, people jogging by. He became totally focused on the approaching dog.

Then at 25 feet, his body became rigid. He began straining at the leash, he could not focus on anything but the oncoming dog. His hackles were upright, his tail lowered, his ears tilting backwards, and every few steps he'd slow down, kick his back legs out rigidly. Then, when the dog was nearly upon him - even the mildest, sweetest dog - he would begin the lip lift, the low growl, the lunging behaviors. At that point, he was oblivious to my presence, or to any other environmental distraction. He was focused ONLY on the approaching dog.

So to counter this, I had to start my desensitization program at a point waaaaay back, before he would display his stress signals. He began stressing at approximately 60 feet, so I began capturing his attention at 75 feet.

I would pull out my clicker, and my most high-powered treats, knowing there would be a point he'd refuse them, but wanting still to reinforce whatever I could before that point in time. I would then ask for

attention behaviors: I'd do quick stops and starts, so he would pop in and out of an automatic sit. And each one I would reinforce heavily. I kept him very, very busy for 10 feet.

Then, knowing the real obsessing part was coming at 50 feet, I began a wide arc, moving INTO his space. Just enough so that he'd be forced to give me his attention, or get run over. Of course, I wouldn't have run him over, but by moving into his "sacred space", he was compelled to pay attention to me, momentarily. I used that moment to reinforce the attention. Click/treat/click/treat/click/treat - all the while moving one step at a time - onne wheelchair stroke - INTO the arc, INTO the dog's space.

Gradually we were facing the other direction, and I kept clicking and treating for attention to me, for stopping and starting. I kept "the bar open", though I did use a clicker. I'm very good at fast clicking now, thanks to Sue. In the "open bar" concept, the goodies flow freely and nonstop as long as the scary object is in view, and as soon as it's gone, the bar closes. I use this same technique, but I add the clicker because it is SO good at capturing his attention. The click itself now means "good things" and is far more powerful than my voice.

So I'm clicking and treating rapidly - maybe getting in 20 clicks in 30 seconds, just constant click/feed, click/feed. I don't care what position he's in, whether he's straight or crooked, whether he sits or just crouches - I just want him focused on ME and not at the object he stresses over.

So we are now at about 40 feet from the approaching dog, and my dog is beginning to tune out to even the clicker, and is no longer accepting treats. I ignore this, keep clicking, offering the treat, whether it's taken or not. I keep marking that moment of attention, and I keep circling INTO the dog's space, coercing him to give me that attention.

I keep this up, tightening up the arc into a circle as the dog continues to approach. What happens is that my dog is so busy side stepping my wheelchair, which is moving into his space, and precariously close to his

toes, that he doesn't have TIME to stress and agress posture toward the other dog.

By the time the dog has passed by, he is again taking treats and I note the hackles are down, the tail is coming up, the eyes are widening open again. At that point, I do something FUN. Yeaaaaa! Funnnnnn! Let's play!!! I might give him something to tug on, or a ball to chase, or just throw myself on the ground and wrestle with him. ANYthing to show him that all his attention on me netted him GREAT FUN and that paying attention to me meant good things will happen.

And that was more than enough for those first few lessons.

Gradually we were able to move forward, instead of in a circle. Normally, I don't like approaching the feared object head on. I think it becomes a difficulty in capturing the dog's attention and focus. So I make it happen. I set him up so that he can ONLY have success, not fail. There is no way he can fail. I keep him too busy.

So the message here is that when scary things come closer, good things begin to happen. The handler's job, as I see it, in the desensitization process is to:

Recognize the stress signals the dog is giving off and at what distance from the feared object they are being given.

Work backwards, reinforcing what you DO want and ignoring what you don't want. So what if you see the hackles come up, the body grow taut? Ignore it. Circle into the dog, capture his attention, reinforce heavily, rapidly.

Make yourself faster and more enticing than the approaching object of fear. Use your body when necessary to get the dog to stop eye contact with the approaching dog. Coerce attention if you can't ask for it. Relax and don't tighten up on the leash, don't add stress.

Make daily trips to environments where you will meet the object of his fear, and use each trip as a training opportunity. Plan ahead.

Use a Gentle Leader, not a prong, not a choke. Why? Chokes and prongs will ADD discomfort, and will ADD to the stress. It can backfire on you when you least expect it to. And, it's not necessary to physically suppress behavior here, only to re-direct it. You're not "correcting errors", but instead, teaching the dog what you DO want and making it impossible for him not to succeed at it.

You can also turn into the dog and begin walking the other way. The Gentle Leader will ensure you that the dog follows, and will do it without the addition of pain, without added stress. The ticket is to start BEFORE the dog begins to stress, to continue heavy reinforcement until the "thing" has passed, and to never, never add physical pain to a dog who is already stressing. It's too easy for them to misinterpret where that pain is coming from and why.

I have come to realize that dog teaching never stops. Never. There are so often little superstitious behaviors that crop up, or new combinations of distractions that can trigger long-nearly extinct behaviors. But when we learn to use operant responding to reinforce what we DO want, and totally abandon correcting for what we don't want, we can forge a strong, indomitable partnership. We can't foresee what may one day trigger our dogs' fear responses, but we can have a plan of easing him through it, of helping him to look to us for leadership and direction. One thing that will help you here is to teach your dog right now to "check in" with you without being coerced. It won't hold over, in the beginning, when the object of his fear comes into view, but the more you practice "checking in", the faster he will bounce-back and again look to you for leadership.

To teach this, just ignore your dog while reading a book, watching tv, talking to someone. In your peripheral vision, wait to "catch" him looking at you from his own volition. The moment you see him look up at you, click and toss a treat. Then go back to reading, or whatever. No big deal, just teaching him that "checking in" means **GOOD THINGS HAPPEN**. Do this in every room of the house. Then add distractions. Then take the show on the road, outdoors. Even on relaxing walks, be ready to "mark" that moment he "checks in" of his own accord. It

doesn't take long for the dog to realize that "checking in" is a very, very good thing to do, and very rewarding.

Good luck and I hope our posts have give you a place to start. I know you can do this, Jane. It's just a very different mindset, learning to be **PRO**active instead of **RE**active, and there will be moments of supreme frustration. All of us who have "crossed over" have experienced this, and wanted to quit. But those of us who have persevered, have found our skills of communication greatly expanded, and the behaviors we once felt were horrid problems begin to grow extinct from lack of reinforcement. Please don't give up!

This is hard stuff to understand. It's easier for the dogs to learn than it is for us. Everything in our lives, in our culture is punishment based, so that's what's being reinforced in us. We have to step aside, become thinking people, acting people instead of reacting people. And it ain't without frustration.

We get tickets when we speed in our cars, but it doesn't stop us from speeding anymore than retribution of going to prison stops a person from committing another crime, once out of jail. We get "caught" speeding, we get our punisher - our ticket - and we toe the line for a little bit. Maybe a week, maybe a day, maybe an hour. But eventually, if the punishment is not kept up, we will drift back to our old ways of speeding.

Now how about if instead of getting stopped for speeding, we instead randomly got stopped for **GOOD DRIVING** and were given \$500 vouchers? Do you think we may be motivated to exhibit good driving habits more often, with the motivation of perhaps being richly rewarded? I know I would! I'd work **HARD** to get "caught doing it right." My dog is now the same way. And that's how operant training works. It's very, very proactive and very little reactive. Totally at odds with what is reinforced in our lives every day!

So expect frustration. Expect aggravation. Expect exasperation. And watch your **OWN** behaviors start to change as you change from a reacting person to a pro-acting person. You're already well on your

way, Jane. I see this all the time with your responses on various lists, where you work to be a peacemaker, to educate instead of confront. You instinctively know that gaining someone's cooperation is far more effective than confronting them, and will change more than the behavior at hand - it will set them up for success to offer more of the same in the future.

I believe that this much more thinking, scientific approach to communication is going to be a natural for you, Jane. As I see you reaching in this direction all the time, in not only dog issues, but life issues. Good luck and don't hesitate to ask questions, ask for clarification, or let us know when you're confused or upset or flummoxed. We do the same thing. No one has all the answers, so that's why idea forums like this are so valuable. We can get someone from the outside to look at our situation, and assess it without emotional baggage. Sometimes we get incredibly creative ideas from just throwing out a query. None of us are in this game alone.

Flotsam and Jetsam

"Certain very basic obedience skills, and to a lesser degree his assistance tasks are still quite dependent on food incentives/bribes. Spot's attitude changes by leaps and bounds when he sees the clicker come out and even smells the presence of food. I have NO doubt that he knows what "down" means.....to him it means "stare at Mom, until I am sure she's got the treat ready, wait for her to say it at least two more times, see that she is getting annoyed, and then lie down"."

There you go! "Wait for her to say it at least two more times." This tells you what you need to work on. Go back to square one and build up duration. Work on single cues and speed downs. Let Spot hold that down, not pop back up. Don't keep food in sight, if at all possible. Also,

since you are giving more than one cue in distracting environments, or when food isn't present, go back and try to give clearer signals. Start working to get Spot to respond to **ONLY** the verbal cue. Walk behind Spot and cue to down. If Spot turns around before downing, the verbal cue is not generalized. Get Spot used to responding to a single cue from across the room, from behind, out in the yard, on a busy street, when in crowds.

But if he's off chasing a squirrel, or barking at the neighbor who has the audacity to walk along our road, none of those recall commands will work, until Spot has said his peace to the neighborhood.

How have you shaped him to ignore these mighty enticing distractions? I have had much the same experience with Peek, and have found ways to work with it. For example, Peek was **SO** obsessed there was no focus on me whatsoever, no matter **HOW** high powered the treats were or how hungry he might be. Worse - all the work I did trying to desensitize him backfired when my husband took him out for nightly walks on the Flexi, and allowed him to chase squirrels and rabbits and react to other dogs and people to his heart's content.

Yet, today, Peek can walk by a squirrel without obsessing. He's still **VERY** aware of them, and at a **HINT** of a cued release, would be on them in a hotflash. **BUT**, he is now able to give me attention, and I consider that a major success.

To get to this point after all the wrong reinforcing which had already been done (and we're talking 3.5 solid years of it, daily), I had to back up, begin my work in a less-stimulating environment. The squirrels **RUNNING** were the biggest problem - kicking in his prey drive.

I went to pet shops daily, got him used to first watching the ferrets, hamsters and mice run around in their confined cages. I worked to capture his attention with the clicker and treats. I worked on this daily until he could sit there, give me attention, and not drool buckets on the floor in front of the cages.

Then I began short outdoor sessions in areas where there were squirrels, but not "squirrel central". I did not allow him on a Flexi at this point - he would be too far away for me to capture his attention, and I didn't want him to variably reinforce the squirrel obsession for any reason.

I had Peek in heel position, and kept up a steady rate of HIGH reinforcement - 12-20 clicks a minute or so, while passing the "squirrel trees". I marched back and forth, then around and around the tree in each direction. If he began to focus on the squirrel, I did not give him a chance to tune out to me, to obsess - instead, I moved IN toward him, moving into his personal space.

At some point when this is done, the dog WILL give you his attention. I got it, and c/t'd, then kept moving INTO his space, in a wide circle, forcing him to concentrate on me so he wouldn't get run over. During this time I kept up a rapid rate of reinforcement, and because I knew this particular dog was very responsive to the TONE of my voice, I added verbal praise profusely after each click, really helping charge him up to WATCH ME.

I did this only for a couple of minutes, so we could leave on a high note, on a real success. I immediately took him to an area where there were no squirrels, and allowed him to move out freely on the Flexi, sniff, run.

After each short session of concentration on me, around the objects of his obsession, I finished with a "free walk" in a safe environment.

Incrementally, we moved from just a few squirrels to more and more, and we just kept working on it every single day.

Now, I can walk him down the riverwalk and get his attention even when he spots one or two, rabbits as well. BUT. I still know he has a real taste for this, so if I note we're in a squirrel or rabbit rich area, I begin out on a short leash, and c/t for attention and other behaviors he will offer.

Will he ever be able to pass them by on a Flexi without obsessing, when they are running and kicking in his hardwired responses? Maybe. Maybe not. But what I now have is workable, and I can live with this. It's enough that on a short leash he is not straining, is not obsessing, but paying attention to me. And quite frankly, I find this utterly remarkable.

This didn't happen with punishers. I tried punishers for at least a year before I came to clicker training. It only exacerbated the problem. The more I punished, the more he focused on HIS obsession. It was clear I would either have to really escalate the punishment or find something else to try. I could not, just could NOT do the Koehler string-up, no matter how inappropriate his behavior.

So when we began clicker training, I realized the same tool I used to shape new behaviors in neutral environments would probably help me with this problem as well.

It's time consuming, but it's so worth it. I now have a partner I can rely on to even do a retrieval when a squirrel runs by. A cat. A rabbit. I find this simply unbelievable, and that it happened without so much as a leash pop is thrilling beyond belief.

I'm sensing that you may just need to go back and do some more controlled shaping to get the focus back on you. You work in so many different heavily distracting environments with Spot - not just for service, but for your agility, obedience and all the fun stuff you do together. And each time Spot is reinforcing himself for those behaviors, they are getting stronger just as if you had intentionally trained them. Management, and working a bit less off leash in those highly stimulating environments until you have the responses you want, may be the key to get the focus you are looking for. BTW, what kind of response do you get to calling Spot's name?

I'm thinking of that Doctor's office visit, where Spot didn't respond to your "down" cue immediately. You may want to first get Spot's attention, some eye contact, then deliver the cue.

Now we are still talking about Spot the wiz kid, the same little guy who learned scent discrimination in half an hour, and how to open hp paddle doors in five minutes. So clearly HE is not the problem. I have always said Spot is the fast learner in this partnership, NOT me. Clearly I've missed something.

You have a very intense breed of dog, with a high ability to problem solve. This can be both a blessing and a horror. My pup is like this - learns at warp speed, whether I'm trying to teach him or not. His ability to open any zipper on the planet was NOT a taught behavior!

I am fairly certain I need to come up with brand new cue words for both "down" and "come", and retrain the behaviors with clicks and treats" but I am having a failure of imagination when it comes to thinking up new commands, and how to train these behaviors again from scratch.

Hmmm, I don't know if you need to change cue words, as much as get the cues to be generalized and responded to when the primary and secondary reinforcers are not in sight. I think it's a real tendency for those of us who came from luring to use food as "bait" more than as a reinforcer, following the marker. We hype our dogs up with the food, and that can sure work against us. The more we work to quiet our unintended coercing, overcuing, food bribing - the cleaner the dogs responses will be when that food is not present.

Please know I too am working through this same thing. I default all the time. And each time, I realize far too late that I have just reinforced exactly what I didn't want. That I end up bribing way too often. Hey, we're all learning here. And we take a few steps forward, a few backwards. I realize I will probably not live long enough to become the handler I want to be, but that won't stop me from trying!

Licking

"It especially irritates my husband when he (my husband - not Spot!) has just gotten out of the shower, and Spot sneaks in for a surreptitious slurp. How can I teach Spot not to lick people unless requested (give a kiss)?"

You have options here, and several different approaches. What comes to mind is teaching your husband to exit the shower anticipating Spot's licking, and to open the door or curtain and give Spot a cue to do an incompatible behavior, such as lying down at the doorway.

Or, he could use Spot's "leave it" cue if he forgets the proactive approach, then cue an incompatible behavior.

What I have found is that dogs who are manic about licking - and I do have one of them like this - can be very prone to picking up displacement behaviors when they can't lick. The intensity of desire to lick is so profound in one of my dogs, that when I cue an incompatible behavior or use a re-direct cue or a "leave it" cue with this one particular behavior, the dog begins immediately to show stress. He lifts his chin, does rapid air licks, and then his chin will drop, and his jaw will "chatter". If he's near anything fabric in nature, his head will drop down and he'll start nibbling rapidly with his front teeth.

This is a dog who has never had an aversive applied to suppress the behavior, other than an interrupter word of a neutral nature, when it gets too irritating to put up with. But given his druthers, he'd lick nonstop every human he came into contact with.

I've tried a lot of behavioral approaches to reduce the stress, including offering calming signals, TTouch, Anxiety wrap, massage - but that desire to lick just resists all attempts at extinction. It is very obviously a stress-related behavior in this particular dog. I try to allow for some licking as reinforcements, as well. But his type of licking is particularly obnoxious - he'll go for the mouth and nostrils every time, and with his narrow long tongue, can quickly hit the tonsils or sinus cavities. A bit of hand licking I can handle. But that nostril/tonsil stuff is obnoxious to me.

The only re-direct I've found at all successful with this particular dog (who is a nonstop movement machine, a nonstop talker, voracious in his acquisition of food, just manic in general) is to ask for a very fast movement behavior, such as chasing a toy. Otherwise, no matter what behavior I ask for, the displacement behaviors come out every time.

I'm beginning to wonder about the possibility of a thyroid imbalance, and will likely get my vet to take a blood sample and send it to Dr. Dodd. I just hadn't seen a lot of the other normal signs of thyroid imbalance, such as hair loss, splotchy coat, lethargy, etc. But I cannot get the excess weight off of him, he always acts as if he's starving, and tests I've had done have him well within normal tolerances. But we have not tested for thyroid levels yet.

I'm curious if anyone has ever had a dog with thyroid problems that had a behavioral change, once thyroid replacement was begun. I come from a family where all of the women are hypothyroid and our levels are regulated by meds. We all had behavioral issues that disappeared once we were put on meds. Our anxiety levels reduced greatly, and our abilities to focus improved dramatically.

More Sniffing Questions

"Spot has found a new love of his life... SNIFFING... everything. We have to go to puppy class a half hour early so he can sniff every centimeter of the floor and surrounding area before class starts if we want him to pay any attention at all."

Ooooh, I know how much our Paps love to sniff! <G> Your arrival early to puppy class is fantastic! YESSS! I did this with Dandy, as well. He was so hyper when we first got to class that this was the only way I could get any attention from him. I ended up stopping at a park for

him to run for a half hour, then arriving a half hour early for him to get used to it, sniff it all up, and get ready for work!

"So I'm trying to shape a "no sniff" type command. I'll tell you what I'm doing and you can all let me know what I'm doing wrong :) When we first get anywhere new, I let him roam about on his Flexi if we are at the park or regular lead if it's a "people place" like the mall entrance. Once he has checked the area out once I then wait until he lifts his head and immediately c/t him. It *seems* to me that he is keeping his head up more and more, but maybe that's just wishful thinking at this point."

You're doing grand! You can also ask, once he picks up his head, for a sit or down or whatever behavior he likes to do. Just keep reinforcing when he is not sniffing. But also, you now need to shape a "leave it" so that when he begins to sniff at inappropriate times, he will cease and desist. Have you seen the "leave it" posts on ways to shape this behavior? It should go really fast, and you can practice it in puppy class as well. He needs to get a clearer picture of what you are asking. Clicking when he is not sniffing is good, but he needs to learn a clearcut signal for ceasing the behavior.

"The one thing that helps us is that he LOVES to go for walks and he can't walk fast enough with his nose stuck to the ground so when we are walking he doesn't sniff nearly as much and I get more good clicks in for keeping his head up."

GOOD! Pick up speed in your chair, and that will help too. But remember, this is a really natural behavior and not to be discouraged. You can use this as a reinforcer. Sniffing while on a loose Flexi is great, and this is the time and place to do it. He needs to do this. It's good you are not depriving him of it. But once in class, or on a shorter leash, you can ask for attention and if he then begins to sniff instead of pay attention, you will be able to cue him "leave it" and have him focus back on you.

A good thing to practice while he is sniffing in the park is to just call his name brightly. Then when he looks up at you, click and treat. If he refuses the treat, no biggie. Just offer it. The real primary reinforcer may well be the chance to sniff more. So don't worry if he refuses it: you offered, and he chose a different reinforcer, that's all. It won't diffuse the power of the click! That will only happen when you have nothing motivating for him after you have clicked. In this case, Spot is getting his primary reinforcement by sniffing.

Using Circles to Regain Lost Attention

Jane has a 3.5 yr old lab who had extensive early socialization, but who has been frightened by rough play with other dogs, and now exhibits stress behaviors with some dogs. Jane notes that she has "space issues" when on leash, and begins to react once the other dogs comes into her "safety zone." Jane has been trying to ignore the aggressive behaviors and reward the positive interactions, but the situation is only getting worse. In part, Jane states, this could be due to the neighbor's off leash dogs who run up to them when Jane and her dog go for walks. She asks for suggestions.

Jane, I think the key will be to become even more pro-active. You are doing a great job, and I think you have to click and treat yourself for your commitment to this lovely dog, and how hard you are working to bring her through this and out the other side. So my first suggestion is to pat yourself on the back and take a well deserved bow.

Second, you can see a very visible shift in her behaviors when the advancing dog gets close to her "space", or comfort zone. So, back up a few yards, and begin shaping what you DO want many feet from the edge of her comfort zone. This is what I mean by becoming "pro-active." You begin your program of systematic desensitization at a point before you begin to see the stress reactions, not after they have

begun. If they have begun, then you have no choice but to react. So to set yourself up for success, become very pro-active in your approach.

For instance, if the oncoming dogs trigger calming signals in your dog at 40 feet, begin your program of shaping what you do want at 25 feet, at a point where the dog is not already throwing off calming signals.

One trick I use constantly with this is circling and arcing. I don't make the dog face his fears head on - usually, this only leads to intense focus on the oncoming dog and less attention on me.

Instead, I note that a dog is coming, and I begin continuous heavy reinforcement, getting the dog focused completely on me, and asking for well-known behaviors, such as sit, down, shake, - whatever.

Then, I begin arcing or circling INTO the dog. Why? When you move INTO your dog (and I don't mean a tight circle, or stepping on him), you force him to focus on YOU so he won't get stepped on. And each step he moves away from you, with his attention riveted on you, you can do heavy, rapid reinforcements.

Moving in that arcing circle, you incrementally get the dog closer and closer to the object he fears, but still totally attentive to YOU, because he doesn't have TIME to focus on the other oncoming dog. If he begins to focus on the dog, you move into him again, causing him to give you full attention so he won't get stepped on. This again gives you the opportunity to reinforce heavily, and re-capture his full attention.

I realize this is a bit of a stray from allowing the dog to always move of his own volition, by moving into the dog. He really doesn't have a choice but to move away from you. However, with dogs who are exhibiting fear aggression, throwing off calming signals like mad, I find this particular technique extremely effective, and well worth straying from total volition for the results it gives.

I have now done this with at least a dozen dogs who have had fear aggression issues, and I have never had it fail me. My service dog Peek was the worst of the lot. A kennel raised dog, he never learned to

communicate with his own species except to do major territorial guarding while in his kennel.

At first, I tried punishers (this was pre clicker), and brother - did the problem escalate. With each tightening of the leash, with each correction - he got more and more anxious, stressed - it just exasperated the problem and I had to abandon trying to socialize him. At that time I thought it truly was hopeless. He was a monster, a total monster and very close to being euthanized by my family when I had to spend a month in the hospital.

Once we began clicker training, things got a bit better but we still had the same problem with other dogs. And unlike Jane's dog, my dog had no use for ANY other dog. Enter Turid Rugaas and Jean Donaldson. Once I realized the power of observing behavior, and moving from purely observable behaviors, our progress truly began. I was able to get him focused on me, and incrementally move him past his worst fears.

I circled and arced him down many a footpath, and he finally got to the point he could pass another dog without going into terror mode. This was a **BIG** step. Then we began using the same technique to allow the other dogs to come closer and closer. The hardest part was not tightening up on the leash. It's an automatic for Peek that he wants what he most fears: he would strain at the leash to get to the other dog, but they also terrified him.

So I kept moving into him, keeping that leash slack, and reinforcing any kind of attention to me. Finally, he was able to go nose to nose with another dog without sending off calming signals, and without stressing. It was like a miracle, and one I never thought I'd see. He's a different dog today, and though he still is learning how to play with other dogs, he can now pass and re-pass quietly and without stress.

Good luck and I hope you will try this. It's worked so well for me!

Reactivity and the Two Reward Method

Jane, if you'll email me privately, I'll send you a copy of John Fisher's "Two Reward" method of working with reactive barking. It's non-aversive, and very easy to follow. I appreciate that you'd like to work with non-aversives first, in changing this response. It may help if you rephrase it in your mind, and instead of focusing on what you don't want, focus on what you Do want the dog to do instead.

The Two Reward method works so quickly, and it just takes a short while and having someone to help you. But, if in the meantime, you find yourself in a situation that triggers your dog's reactivity, you can use a few different approaches to handle the situation:

- ask for a different behavior, something simple and quick such as targeting your hand, and reinforce with good treats until dog has give you back focus again
- play tons and tons of attention games during the day, so that you'll have a word that means, "Stop whatever you're doing and give mom eye contact because something great is going to happen."
- turn away from the approaching dog, and move in the other direction until focus is regained - circle INTO your dog's space and keep the dog moving until you regain the dog's focus. Don't stop moving, as this just gives the dog more opportunity to react.

By circling into the dog's space, the dog is forced to pay attention to your body and drop focus from the other dog. The dog already knows how to avoid your feet or chair, so this is really not aversive - it's just causing him to shift his focus for the moment and pay attention to where YOUR body is.

A couple more things that can help reduce reactivity:

- Don't let your dog out in the yard where he can bark, unsupervised. Until the behavior is controlled, take your dog out on leash so you can

re-direct if she gets started barking, or better yet, re-direct when you suspect she's going to start barking.

- Work on systematic desensitization from a distance, moving closer and closer to another dog when the opportunity presents itself. This is called "classical conditioning" and basically, you start giving treats and keeping the dog busy focusing on you at a distance from the other dog where your dog is not reacting. If your dog starts reacting at 20 feet, start at 30 feet away. This is outlined in several posts in detail on the <http://www.clickersolutions.com> website.

Good luck, and good for you for wanting to address this immediately before it becomes a default behavior

Separation Anxiety

You can work with this by rewarding her very incrementally - teeny, tiny steps of time - to accept the absence of your presence, and that by doing so, she will be VERY well rewarded.

But you need to keep the steps very small - if she starts whining and fretting when you have been gone 20 seconds, then back up, and only leave for 10 seconds. And build a second at a time from that point on.

A remote trainer could REALLY be a big help here, and there are some listmembers like Barbara Handelsman who have really developed fabulous ways of using them. I'd think this would be one of them. If you can use your remote control to trigger the click and drop of food, then the dog is getting an instant reward for remaining quiet and unstressed even when you are not there to do it in person. The lesson will be the same: remaining quiet and unstressed means good things happen.

But, if you don't have one, you can just come back in and give her a treat, and then repeat the exercise. The only concrete thing to remember is that you can't ask for big chunks of behavior (quiet, in this case) when you are dealing with that kind of anxiety. However, this can be a bit of a trap too, because it can also teach a dog that when you come back, all good things happen and when you're gone, nothing good happens. Thus, my choice would be for the automatic remote trainer that you can activate without being in the room or coming back into the room.

However you choose to work with it, just be sure you are not coddling the dog when she is anxious or stressed. If you do, then you are teaching her to rely on you for extinguishing her anxiety, when what you want to do is get her to be incrementally more and more comfortable with you leaving for increased amounts of time. But only **SMALL** increases, or you will be "lumping" and asking for more than she can handle. Keep it slow and steady, don't coddle or cuddle when she's feeling anxious, practice the exercise of leaving in very short sessions, but often, and you have a better chance of making real forward progress.

How do you convince a dog that it's okay to be w/o out me? she does great on her stays at home out of sight, but terrible in public.

She's not ready to generalize this in public yet. And if you can't leave the room for long and go into the garage without her getting anxious, then she's really not anywhere near ready to try it in public. Get the behavior first in the known environment before you take it on the road, add diversity and distractions. Or, you'll just be adding to her stress, not reducing it. You have a lot of work to do before you go out in public and ask her to be calm and relaxed when you are not around!

I think solving this issue might help with several other issues, like jumping up (she gets so hyperexcited at the prospect of affection).

Perhaps, but you can also use negative punishment very effectively to quash jumping up on you. You don't have to be nasty, you don't have to **ADD** anything aversive, just ignore the jumping and turn away from

her. Give her NO eye contact, don't say, "no" or anything, just turn away and wait for 4 paws to hit the floor. Then turn and give her a pat. If she jumps back up, turn away again until she has 4 on the floor. It should not take but a couple very short sessions for her to learn that jumping up doesn't get her what she wants, but keeping 4 on the floor gets her exactly what she wants.

Good luck!

Shark Correction

You already have gotten great tips on working with your client on "Doggie Zen," which I consider a "core" or "foundation" behavior for any dog to learn.

Your client still will likely have the over-enthusiastic taking of treats, even after learning doggie zen, so helping your client teach the dog to take treats without mauling her hands is the next step. We had a recent discussion on the list on this topic, and there are tons of posts in the archives addressing the behavior and different approaches for changing the "shark" behavior that fall within clicker paradigms.

You also noted that during the teaching of loose leash walking, the dog is hyper-focused on the treat bag. This is a really common problem, one I saw during workshops at the Clicker Expos constantly. As you noted, one good approach is to keep the treats out of sight. Also, keep the treats coming from different places - sometimes from behind the back, from pockets, from shirt and pants pockets, from shelves - whatever is available.

Since the fanny pack is what the dog focuses on when walking next to the client, it may be helpful to have the client move the fanny pack to to the far side of her right hip, where the dog cannot see the bag at all. Or put the fanny pack on the fanny at times - change where the treats

come from often. Dogs pick up on patterns very quickly, and if the treats always come from the same place, then opportunism is likely to happen.

Also, it may help to change types of treats often, and how they are delivered. During one session, treats may come from the pocket or treat bag kept on the far side of the handler; other times, the handler could perhaps carry a food tube in her right hand while the dog walks on her left side. I have even used a bottle of meat baby food duct taped to my right side or on the counter, and used a small cocktail fork to deliver a bit of the mixture - it helps teach the dog to pay attention to taking the food carefully.

One caveat: if the client also tosses treats in the air for the dog to catch, this may reinforce a really hard chomp. I am not anti treat-tossing, but I do like to be proactive and use other delivery systems, mixing them up so the dog doesn't pick up the hard chomp behavior. I don't think we have to avoid any particular treat delivery way, only keep a step ahead of the dog picking up on a pattern. Delivering food sometimes with a fork, spoon or chopstick can be very helpful in reinforcing that soft mouth for taking treats.

For speed and simplicity during training sessions, many people keep their fanny packs up by their stomachs constantly, and this can slow down and even stop the learning process - especially the offering of novel behaviors.

I remember at one workshop, we were having the class capture head dips. One team was having no luck at all, and the dog just sat there staring at the treat bag - the fanny pack on the trainer's tummy. Once we had the person turn the bag around so it was on her fanny, not there in the dog's face, the dog was able to begin offering behaviors and quickly learned the head-dip behavior.

Your client has two unwanted behaviors to change: over-enthusiastic treat taking and hyper-focusing on the treat bag. I'd suggest having her work on each issue separately, and it should be a fairly quick fix for both problems. Even so, with many enthusiastic treat loving dogs, the

behavior may come back if the handler goes back to always getting the treat from the same place. I have one like this - so at least twice a week, I deliver his treats on a cocktail fork.

Shy Papillion

I have been a young pup for socializing/shaping for the show ring for a dear breeder friend in Washington. I agreed to take the pup in because my friend had just lost her father, and during the final months of his illness, had no chance to train this pup.

The pup was living in a sheltered environment, and became scared of new people visiting as well as strange sounds, sights. My friend realized the window of opportunity for easy attainment of socialization skills was fast closing, so shipped the dog off to me.

A lovely, well-bred Pap who might easily finish if it gained some confidence outside its "monastery". The pup was 7 months old when it arrived at the airport, after a 5 hour flight in the cargo hold.

Traumatized, stressed - the pup came out of his crate snarling and challenging everyone to a duel. He was shaking as if he was sitting a jackhammer, his ears laid back and low, hackles erect eyes bugging out of his beautiful head. Could this possibly be the "sweetest puppy you will ever meet" that my friend promised to send to me to spend a few months at Clicker Camp? The first night home was a horror story - pup was so traumatized it could do nothing but try to defend against unknown terrors. I put the pup in an ex-pen in the living room, and sank down on the floor next to the pen, letting him snarl and growl at me. I made no attempt to touch him, to make eye contact - I merely wanted him to realize that at least one thing in the house was not a threat - ME.

I sat there an hour reading a book and humming quietly, watching him watch me out of my peripheral vision. He seemed to relax visibly, and

came out of his crate (inside the pen) and lay down about 3 feet from me quietly, almost peacefully. The other dogs - well socialized Papillons - lay quietly in the doorway, heads on their paws, making no move toward the pen holding the new unhappy camper.

When the pup was finally looking much less stressed, and had finally agreed to take a few sips of water, I got out my clicker - not my loud one, but my quiet baby-food cap clicker - and c/t'd many times. I could see the pup was beginning to realize the click meant "something good is coming", and would look up into my eyes as soon as I had clicked, and again after I had treated. Eye contact! Yesssss!

I c/t'd a few more times, just delighted the dog would take food from me, then decided to call it a night. I made no attempt to pet him, to touch him in any way. He was clearly not ready for any physical contact.

The next morning I lured him with a treat to exit the X-Pen, and then showed him the back yard, where he gratefully did his business. Just before he finished, I c/t'd him, and he stopped abruptly - looked up into my eyes and his tail came up into a plume over his back, then wiggled. He's obviously not really sure about me most of the time, but has come to see the clicker as a "security blanket" and knows that as long as I have my clicker, nothing bad will happen to him. And, interestingly enough, as long as I hold that clicker so he can see it, he will allow me to pick him up. If I put the clicker down, he runs and hides. I thought about having my clicker surgically implanted that day.

In 3 days, he was out of his terrorized funk, and socializing with my boys. He was joining the crew for c/t and learned to sit in about 5 clicks. I lured him into a down, c/t'd him several times, then began to work these behaviors all over the house, not wanting him to think he was safe and happy and could sit and down only in the kitchen facing north. I take my two dogs out daily for a long walk along our Rillito, which is a wide, dry gulch that fills up with water only during rainstorms. My husband Tim handled our two Paps on Flexi-leads, while I struggled with the again-terrified pup. The pup would not leave my side, would not sniff the ground, mark a bush - nothing. Each

time it felt the least amount of pressure on his neck (from a number one Flexi!) he would quickly come back into heel position and his tail would drop to the ground, ears go back. Seemed obvious to me that this pup has had a few leash pops in its past, so I vow to set him up for success in our next attempt at a relaxed walk along the Rillito.

I take him to Petsmart, fit him with a harness. That night we try the Rillito walk again, and it's like night and day! The pup, feeling no pressure on his neck - begins to relax and lower his head to sniff. By the end of the walk he's finally forging off, exploring his environment, marking bushes, having a marvelous time. Then a cyclist whips by and he's a cringing mass of terrorized pup again, belly to the ground, refusing to move, barking all the while. (Yes, dogs bark fine lying down - growl just fine too!)

I wait for a nano-second of quiet, c/t, gain his attention and we're off - he's forgotten the terror of the bicycle. Soon a jogger is seen in the distance, and I take a moment to set the dog up for success, take out my "big guns" - nuked garlic chicken laced with Gruyere Cheese - and c/t for everything I can think of. As the jogger gets closer, the pup catches sight and begins to growl, hackles rise, belly begins to lower to the ground. I quickly, in a happy voice turn around, get him to floor 2 steps, then c/t and praise, make it into a wonderful fun game - turning circles. He's so involved in it he does not see the jogger pass by at first, but finally sees him and realizes it's old news. We all continue on our walk.

Soon a pet owner with a couple of Cocker Spaniels on Flexis come into view and I begin the stepped-up clicker work again, gaining the fearful pup's attention. I know that in his fear, he has become what looks like "dog aggressive", but what I realize is simply a fear reaction, very shapeable. The Cockers are well socialized, pay little attention to our dogs. The Cockers pass by while I'm clicking the pup, who has this time displayed only minimal fear behaviors - licking lips, a bit of posturing - but this, in between clicks, is very minimal.

By the end of the week and 7 walks later, the pup is now allowing strangers to give him treats without growling or doing a belly-flop.

Joggers are able to pass by with few fear behaviors showing. But we still have major problems with cyclists, skate boarders, inline skaters. So again, I set the pup up for success by gaining the assistance of a skateboarder, a cyclist and an inline skater who agree to help me get the pup over his fears.

The cyclist stops, holds his bike and ignores the dog as we try to pass. At the point of our approach where I realize the dog is stressing, I turn around, c/t for attention, then keep c/t'ing as we make wide arc passes by the bicyclist, coming closer and closer each time. By the end of the session (5 minutes), the dog ate a treat off the slowly spinning pedal of the monster bicycle!

We did the same with the inline skates - which for some reason terrified him as well. A skater agreed to remove his skate for us, and set it next to him. We kept making wide arcs, passing closer and closer, and again, before the session was over (another 5 minutes), the pup was taking a treat off a slowly spinning wheel.

Little by little we used the laws of learning to reshape fear behaviors, and today - 3 weeks later - the pup is not at all fearful of the strange dogs, humans and contraptions it encounters while doing our park walk.

Socialization and exposure to new environments is the major reason the dog is here, but in the interim I've managed to put a nice little clicker retrieve on the pup, and have him joining in with my crew to do "doggie pushups". Soon we will begin more serious work at "shaping for the show ring". The pup has responded to the clicker so well it just makes me weep. And because he has such confidence that the clicker always means good things, he really uses it for his "security blanket" in new, scary situations. Just it's mere presence has a certain calming quality that absolutely delights me.

I have no doubt that this pup will gain enough confidence in the next two months to attend the Papillon National Specialty in May and show like a charm. How heartwarming it is to see a shy, reticent, fearful dog come out of its shell with OC and +R!

A big thank you to everyone on this list for the wonderful postings which have given me so many ideas for working with this little guy. It's truly a shared success.



BARKING

Barking at Other Dogs

Wish I had a magic behavior modification pill for every dog who has learned to bark incessantly. It would be worth a king's ransom!

Because the reasons for barking are so varied, modifying the behavior can get a bit tricky. And then, sometimes if the behavior has become obsessive, one may seek both medication and behavior modification working in tandem to shape new responses, different behaviors. But it ain't easy.

Especially if you have an adult dog who has been reinforced for this behavior from birth. It's no picnic to try to reshape this behavior in a dog who has baggage from puppyhood. Many dogs kept as puppies in kennels extensively, and not allowed to communicate with their own species except through a kennel grate will have the barking behavior classically conditioned by the time that first early window of learning closes at about 16 weeks. I have one of those dogs.

I tried, at first, punishers. I squirted, I bonked, I used verbal punishers, the citronella collar: I tried everything to no avail. When in obsession

mode, only death would stop the behavior. I wasn't ready to shoot the dog, so I backed off on the punishment, and decided to try shaping an incompatible behavior.

I now have my yappypap coming to me in a flat out run as soon as I say "Thank you", which means, he is allowed to alert me once, but then must come running to me. I did this only because from a distance, I simply have no control. When he is nonstop barking manically, he can't even HEAR My cues. He's totally obsessed.

On leash, this is much easier to counter-shape. And on leash, my boy is now offering an alternative behavior. But off leash, it's manic city and it's simply not worth the energy to keep this dog tethered to me all the time.

So I have a dog to whom barking was innately rewarding, and to whom barking is simply the greatest joy in the world. But it's also a precursor to other behaviors, such as posturing, hackle raising, etc. So I work and continually reinforce other behaviors when he begins to obsess. I usually also have to physically turn myself around in my chair, to break the eye contact. Once broken, the dog is focusing on me, and it's easy to ask for other behaviors.

How would you use the C/T method to eliminate nuisance barking at other dogs? What would be steps/milestones to eliminating the behavior?

There are those who have had great success putting barking on cue, then not asking for the cue. I have never had a lick of success with this, but know others do.

There are those who train an alternative behavior, such as lying on a mat, sitting, getting a toy, etc. This works fairly well 80% of the time. But let a strange dog wander by the car window and my dog goes into spasms. Lip licking, eyes non-blinking, stiff posture, drooling, growling and spasmodic barking. Click to get the dog's attention? sometimes this works. It does not work with my dog. Yet if I open the door, and let

Peek out, he will sniff the other dog and totally cease the behaviors. It's maddening.

It does not help that my efforts are sabotaged nightly by my husband, who walks to dogs and allows them to bark and obsess at animals. This is why I promised to bobbit him if he EVER allowed the puppy to begin doing this. His idea of managing the situation is to stand still and holler at the dogs hysterically, which, of course, only adds to the cacophony.

Spot is training to be a hearing signal dog and she is doing beautifully with her signal work, but unfortunately she barks around other dogs. The barking does not bother me as much when we are out walking for enjoyment or playing, but she will occasionally misbehave in a store parking lot (for example) if she sees or hears a dog in another car. In these situations, I do not know that there is a distraction until she is misbehaving. Fortunately, this has not happened very often, but it remains a problem.

If the barking does not bother you when you are out walking for enjoyment, then remember, you are **REINFORCING** the behavior variably each time it happens! You are, in those relaxed times, training her to do this! So it's no wonder she, like my dog, is then reluctant to stop just because she is in a less appropriate environment. It's all the same to the dog, in most instances.

Currently, I am taking Spot to the armory on Wednesday evenings where there are fifty to seventy-five other dogs involved in various training classes. She has her good and bad days, but generally does pretty well there because we are typically involved in a class of some sort that focuses her attention away from the other dogs.

This is **GOOD!** I'd keep building on this, and going for continuous, rapid reinforcement for quiet, attentive behaviors. Like Spot, my dog also tends to do better in these large class situations. It's the lone dog approaching the window, the car, that sets him off.

However, when we go for walks or to the park where the presence and behavior of other dogs is unpredictable and where we may or may not be involved in another activity, Spot goes completely nuts. In other words, she cannot sit and watch other dogs without barking.

This is so reinforcing for her, and feels so GOOOOOD to do. You will have to find motivators strong enough to compete with the off-leash animals. Do you use a head halter on Spot? This may help immensely to keep her focused on you, and give you far more opportunities to reinforce anything BUT barking and hyper behaviors. I'm about to do this with my dog, though I don't need it for anything but the barking.

Obviously, the key is continued exposure to other dogs in a variety of settings while enforcing a sit and silence. This is definitely easier said than done. I would appreciate suggestions about how to specifically accomplish my task.

Yes, so true, Jane. But perhaps you are asking for more than Spot can give, at the outset. This behavior didn't develop overnight, and it probably won't go away overnight either. You will have to be diligent, prepared, and always vigilant to begin heavy duty rapid reinforcement for ANY behavior that is not related to the obsessive barking. I wouldn't look for "enforcing a sit and silence." This is strong arming, again, it's coercion and force. It is not reshaping the behavior, and the moment you are not there to force compliance, the behavior will be every bit as strong. Instead of forcing compliance of a sit and silence, how about clicking and reinforcing a head turn in your direction at the sound of her name, or broken eye contact? Just little steps, instead of asking for the impossible: a silent sit. That's just too much for an obsessing dog to handle. I'd work very incrementally, heavily reinforcing for anything that takes the eye off the other dogs, and I'd also try the head halter. If the dog does not respond to her name, you can "wiggle" the lead with your finger, and be ready for the moment that head turns just fractionally.

My sense is to lower the criteria a bit, and not ask for too much too soon.

Problem with Barking

I have dealt with this same problem in dogs with tons of enthusiasm and little patience to wait for anything. What I have found helps immensely is to feed in position, instantly, before the dog can get a bark in after the click. This means bypassing any type of distance work until the dog has generalized that barking after the click isn't going to help the food arrive any quicker.

So, with my little enthusiastic and impatient Papillon who looooves to talk - I first approach every session with a bit of mellowing out exercises beforehand, to keep the adrenaline rush down. I make sure I am alone with the dog, without other dogs around to compete for attention, as this can exacerbate the anxiety the dog is feeling.

I might do a bit of touch, and also, I really like using Anxiety Wraps with enthusiastic, impatient dogs - in my experience, it has truly helped to reduce the signs of stress I'm reading in their body language. Next, I'd bypass the clicker during these exercises, as I'm more interested in helping the dog get to a place within himself where he is relaxed but alert, as opposed to hyper and excited. I tend to use calming signals myself - stretching, yawning, slightly closing eyes a bit, and just chucking food while the dog is there next to me becoming more and more relaxed.

I might do belly scratches, and use whispered marker cue words - a soft "good" if I ask for a cued behavior that can be done in a stationary position, such as targeting with nose or paw, especially with nose or eyes. In this way I can help the dog maintain a low key, relaxed but alert demeanor, and still offer a marker that is not as bright or crisp as a clicker.

Then, when we've done some relaxation exercises, I'd continue with stationary behaviors but I'd also continue using either a quiet verbal

marker or one of the very soft plastic bug clickers that emit a click, but a very muted one. I think the bright box clickers can be very startling to excitable, enthusiastic dogs at certain times, and I let the dog tell me what he's ready to handle. Often just the difference in the loudness of the marking click can make all the difference with really effervescent dogs.

Next, I do think there are times feeding in position is very useful, especially with effervescent, enthusiastic dogs. It can be very hard to get the treat to the dog before the click triggers the bark reflex, so by just accepting that this will likely happen, you can hold the clicker in your other hand, and be in a position close enough to the dog's face that you can get that treat to him instantly after the click.

It's a bit tricky, and takes dexterity, but practicing your click and delivery privately first without the dog present is really helpful. If you have to stop and think about it before you act, then chances are you will miss that nanosecond of opportunity to get the food to him before he barks.

I also use a lot of food chucking for quiet behaviors offered, so that I'm constantly reinforcing that there is no need to ASK for the treat, because it's going to be there as long as the nice quiet behaviors are offered.

If I see from my dog's body language and behaviors that he's just too wound up to be able to bypass that added bark after the click, I just use soft whispered verbal markers rather than the clicker. I save the clicker for those times when I can see he's much more relaxed and unstressed.

In this way, I've been able to work with the two enthusiastic dogs I own who love to offer feedback to the clicker - and still use the clicker when I need it. I build up slowly to the bright sound of a standard clicker, and I'm very careful never to click it close to the dog, as it can be irritating for them. I keep the clicker a ways away, behind my back, in my lap or pocket.

I have found that working outdoors on loose leash walking with an anxiety wrap on reduces the barking feedback, especially when I can use both verbal and clicks interchangeably. I might mark the moment with a verbal or a click - and always, I have that treat close to the dog's nose immediately following the marker sound.

With most dogs, I don't have to go to these lengths. But with some adolescents, or with some really enthusiastic dogs, it has helped immensely to relax them to a point where the barking is no longer something they feel they need to offer, for whatever reason they may offer it.

“He also will get vocal on a walk if we stop and talk to long to another person. You can really hear the frustration and impatience in his voice.”

This is also very normal for an enthusiastic dog, and especially for adolescent dogs. Since you know this is likely to happen, being proactive is your best defense! When you stop to talk to people, keep your dog in your peripheral vision, and keep reinforcing wanted quiet behaviors. Don't push him past his limits of patience by ignoring him for a minute at a time - or you'll get the bark. Catch him being quiet and reinforce it every 20 seconds or so throughout your conversation.

Good luck!



DESENSITIZING

Dealing with Scary Things

Ahhh, Dick and Jane are singing my song!:

"I often feel like the expert on what not to do."

"I wish I had had this list when he was a pup so I would not have had to struggle and figure so much out on my own."

Ain't it the truth? I weep for the year I lost with Peek. If I could change one thing, it would be to start all over from the beginning, at puppyhood. I caused so many of the problems, unknowingly. I listened to my trainers who told to me Alpha Roll him, to choke him, to punish heavily at the first sight of transgression.

What happened is that every behavior I was working to change became worse - far worse. He became a marathon barker and no kind of punisher I could level on him would stop the obsessing. He'd be SHAKING so hard when he was barking, so into it he totally tuned out to me.

And his fear aggression was a major problem, as he'd never been socialized with other dogs. Oh, how difficult this became before I found out about OC and the power of the click. The more I corrected, the more leash pops I leveled on him, the more I tightened up on the leash, the more I fought with him - the worse I made it. I could cry now, but it's much easier living life with hindsight. <G>

BUT, when I finally abandoned the punishers, began thinking proactively, I began seeing little changes, then bigger changes, then real livable responses.

Is he now offering only acceptable behaviors? Pretty much. We can now pass and repass with another dog, cat, squirrel or rabbit without obsessing (though I can tell it's right there under the surface, waiting to surge!), and there is not a human he does not enjoy spending time with.

He will stop manic barking at a cue word, and offer a different response.

But I spent 3 years shaping this in him. Three years I could have been spending doing other wonderful things with him. I created every single headache behavior my dog exhibited. The realization of this just blew me away and gave me a case of the guilts I couldn't believe.

Especially now that I have a partner in life who is so devoted to me, who prefers never to be more than 5 feet away from me at any time. How forgiving dogs are, and what they can teach us!

And he's still teaching me, every day.

Desensitizing Dogs to Other Dogs

"My dog is a little lacking in the social graces. This really only seems to be a problem when we have him on lead, and encounter other neighbourhood dogs. The issue we have is with on-lead aggression, and therefore we have unfortunately not been walking him as frequently since it is nearly impossible to avoid meeting another dog in our neighbourhood."

The law of learning tells us that what is reinforced, remains and grows stronger with each reinforcement, and what is not reinforced, will eventually extinguish. Each time now you walk your dog and he is given the opportunity to stress over other dogs approaching, the behaviors you DON'T want are being reinforced just as if you were purposely teaching them to the dog. So, working within the laws of learning, there are many things you can now do to set your dog up for success. Youth is on his side, and yours.

You will find approaching this problem with a clicker will help immensely. The clicker works as a "marker", like a camera click, to tell the dog exactly when he is doing something right. This way, we do not have to "correct" for things wrong.

And correction is probably the thing you need least in this particular scenario. If, each time another dog approaches, you become tense, knowing how your dog will react, you will unconsciously tighten up on the leash, and your body language and scent will REINFORCE just what the dog now thinks: that the approaching dog is something to be worried and stressed about! We so often unconsciously reinforce what we don't want. It's just so natural.

So, I'd begin a program of systematic desensitization, and I'd begin with your own human posturing. Set yourself up to give off 'calming signals' to your dog. These are dog language signals dogs use to communicate with each other. Like, sniffing, head turning, lip licking, turning sideways, freezing in position, yawning. Practice giving off these signals, and LOOSENING the leash.

When you see another dog coming in the distance on your walks, immediately begin to yawn, stretch, stop and give Tobi a scratch. Give him a treat. Get him relaxed, ho-hum. As the dog approaches closer, note your dog's calming signals. (Carol Whitney on this list knows LOTS about Calming Signals, and can help you here greatly. This is an important part of desensitization and becoming proactive - learning to SEE when your dog stresses, and just what signals he gives off.) He will begin to display them.

He may freeze, he may hold his ears very erect, his gaze steadfast on the approaching dog. Note any kicking of back legs, and any hackles raised. Note at what POINT this begins to happen. Is it 100 feet away? 75? 50?

Find the point, and you will begin your desensitization a few feet BEFORE the dog normally exhibits his stressing behaviors. Why?

You don't want to **TRIGGER** the behavior: this will force you to be reactive. Instead, you want to **PREVENT** the trigger from being activated. You become **PRO**active and catch your dog doing something good instead, and you reinforce this.

Keep your pocket full of the most succulent, marvelously smelly, **TINY** treats that are soft enough to be gulped down quickly. You don't want the dog to have to stop and chew, and now is not when you want to give him any boring kibble or milk bones.

Use your high-powered treats, like **POUNCE** cat food, or nuked garlic chicken (heartily recommended!). The object here is that you want to make yourself out to be the most fascinatin' bitch in town. You want to be the goddess, the giver of all good things, the person to turn to when stress begins.

Watch for approaching dog, and when dog is just about in the range where your dog begins to display his inappropriate reactions, turn slightly **INTO** your dog so he'll have to look up at you to not get stepped on.

Click or say a crisp "**YES!**" and give him a delicious treat. Then move into him another step, say Yes or click again and give another treat. Keep doing this, moving in a circular manner into the dog, and away from the other dog.

When you're going the opposite direction, begin turning back toward the oncoming dog, who will now be well into your dog's comfort zone. Keep reinforcing attention to you, and use your happiest voice, constant clicking and treating, and throw off a few calming signals - like yawning. If your dog begins fixating on the approaching dog, turn into him again and continue to click and treat for attention. That's **ALL** you want at this point. To keep him from obsessing. As the dog gets really close, keep turning circles, and moving a few feet in the other direction, to keep your dog's focus on you, all the while madly clicking and treating.

The dog will probably make it past you and your dog without giving your dog time to stress. Continue to do this, and set your dog up to practice in places where he will encounter other dogs on leash. The more you reinforce the quiet behaviors, the sooner he will come to realize there is nothing to fear, there is no reason to challenge other dogs, that he can look to you for leadership and for ALL GOOD THINGS!

In this manner, I have successfully desensitized many dogs exhibiting major fear-aggressive behaviors. One Pap came from a breeder who had kept him in a very cloistered environment, where he never saw any joggers, skateboarders, runners, bicyclists, etc. Every single thing was a trigger, and would set him off into fits of barking, into posturing and nonstop shaking. It took nearly 3 months to desensitize this dog, with daily walks. If I'd upped the walks and done two daily, I probably could have halved that time.

But I kept doing this as terrifying things approached in his space, and finally I got cyclists to help me, by laying down their bikes so I could click and treat the dog for coming closer and closer to it (using circles, again - so valuable!), and finally sniffing it, then touching it with a paw, then eating a treat off the pedals!

Same thing with inline skaters. Got one of them to stop, sit down, pull off a skate, and I kept clicking and treating the dog to get closer and closer to the skate. Finally, the dog ate a treat off the spinning wheel!

Systematic desensitization early on can save you a multitude of problems down the road. A few things to remember: Never, Never tighten up on your leash when a dog approaches. This reinforces that there is something to worry about.

Never correct the dog for acting aggressively toward other dogs. Yes, I know this goes against everything you have ever heard. But we know that using aggression to diffuse aggression is very tricky stuff, and rarely works unless the handler is extremely experienced in the methodology, and even then, can exacerbate the problem. You are far better off

distracting the dog, then rewarding - reinforcing the **GOOD** behaviors he is exhibiting.

Remember to circle. If the dog is fixated and freezes into position, you don't want to have to pull hard on the leash to get him to move. Move **INTO** the dog and he will automatically give you his attention. Don't give him a chance to obsess, to start the stare down with the other dog. This is really a key here: be proactive and keep his focus on **YOU**, the goddess of all good things! Finally, I strongly recommend two absolutely marvelous books which will make all of this so much easier, and give you a glimpse into how dogs think and react, and how you can 'shape' any behavior you want.

First, is a tiny gem by Turid Rugaas called, 'On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals.' It's only \$9.95, and is about 30 pages long, but it is absolutely eye opening. It will clearly illustrate what each dog behavior you are seeing means, and make it so much easier to understand what your dog is thinking. A true **TREASURE** and one of the most valuable books on my shelf.

Next, "Culture Clash" by Jean Donaldson is my strongest recommendation, and is my all-time favorite professional dog behavior/training book. I have read it at least a dozen times, and keep getting more from it with each read. It never ceases to blow my mind. It won the Maxwell award for best dog training book of '98, but it may be the best dog training book ever. This is my very biased opinion! I learned more from this book in one read than I learned on my own in 25 years. It has **MUCH** about systematic desensitization to dog-dog aggression. Very strongly recommended!

Finally, there are some wonderful videos to help get you started, but Deb Jones "Click and **FIX**" may be very, very helpful to you on working through the behaviors you want to change. It's available at www.ctsproductions.com and worth the \$29.95 price a dozen times over. Good luck, and keep us posted on your progress!

My monster, Peek - who was so severely undersocialized as a Pup with other dogs, now walks beautifully on leash past other dogs without a problem. Systematic desensitization is a WINNER all the way!

Desensitizing to Squirrels

Hi Jane,

Please don't give up on Spot! Yes, you're tapping into some hardwired behaviors, but he is not so obsessed that he won't respond to the clicker or treats, so I do hope you will keep working on this, and perhaps try a few new approaches. Spot is still a puppy, and I have seen really, really obsessive dogs come around. My Peek, for one!

Peek was a hundred times worse. I nearly retired him from service work a hundred times. I cried on every friend's shoulder. I felt like the world's worst dog handler. Peek was SO obsessed there was no focus on me whatsoever, no matter HOW high powered the treats were or how hungry he might be. Worse - all the work I did trying to desensitize him backfired when my husband took him out for nightly walks on the Flexi, and allowed him to chase squirrels and rabbits to his heart's content.

Yet, today, Peek can walk by a squirrel without obsessing. He's still VERY aware of them, and at a HINT of a cued release, would be on them in a hotflash. BUT, he is now able to give me attention, and I consider that a major success.

To get to this point after all the wrong reinforcing which had already been done (and we're talking 3.5 solid years of it, daily), I had to back up, begin my work in a less-stimulating environment. The squirrels RUNNING were the biggest problem - kicking in his prey drive.

I went to pet shops daily, got him used to first watching the ferrets, hamsters and mice run around in their confined cages. I worked to capture his attention with the clicker and treats. I worked on this daily until he could sit there, give me attention, and not drool buckets on the floor in front of the cages.

Then I began short outdoor sessions in areas where there were squirrels, but not "squirrel central". I did not allow him on a Flexi at this point - he would be too far away for me to capture his attention, and I didn't want him to variably reinforce the squirrel obsession for any reason.

I had Peek in heel position, and kept up a steady rate of HIGH reinforcement - 12-20 clicks a minute or so, while passing the "squirrel trees". I marched back and forth, then around and around the tree in each direction. If he began to focus on the squirrel, I did not give him a chance to tune out to me, to obsess - instead, I moved IN toward him, moving into his personal space. '

At some point when this is done, the dog WILL give you his attention. I got it, and c/t'd, then kept moving INTO his space, in a wide circle, forcing him to concentrate on me so he wouldn't get run over. During this time I kept up a rapid rate of reinforcement, and because I knew this particular dog was very responsive to the TONE of my voice, I added verbal praise profusely after each click, really helping charge him up to WATCH ME.

I did this only for a couple of minutes, so we could leave on a high note, on a real success. I immediately took him to an area where there were no squirrels, and allowed him to move out freely on the Flexi, sniff, run.

After each short session of concentration on me, around the objects of his obsession, I finished with a "free walk" in a safe environment. Incrementally, we moved from just a few squirrels to more and more, and we just kept working on it every single day.

Now, I can walk him down the riverwalk and get his attention even when he spots one or two, rabbits as well. BUT. I still know he has a real taste for this, so if I note we're in a squirrel or rabbit rich area, I begin out on a short leash, and c/t for attention and other behaviors he will offer.

Will he ever be able to pass them by on a Flexi without obsessing, when they are running and kicking in his hardwired behaviors? Maybe. Maybe not. But what I now have is workable, and I can live with this. It's enough that on a short leash he is not straining, is not obsessing, but paying attention to me. And quite frankly, I find this utterly remarkable.

This didn't happen with punishers. I tried punishers for at least a year before I came to clicker training. It only exacerbated the problem. The more I punished, the more he focused on HIS obsession. It was clear I would either have to really escalate the punishment or find something else to try. I could not, just could NOT do the Koehler string-up, no matter how inappropriate his behavior.

So when we began clicker training, I realized the same tool I used to shape new behaviors in neutral environments would probably help me with this problem as well. But unlike you, Courtney, I didn't start trying until at least a year after I was already full-time clicking. You're way ahead of me.

Please don't give up on working through this. It's time consuming, but it's so worth it. I now have a partner I can rely on to even do a retrieval when a squirrel runs by. A cat. A rabbit. I find this simply unbelievable, and that it happened without so much as a leash pop is thrilling beyond belief.

BTW, it was the same with obsessive barking. I did the very same type of approach - which September Morn outlined in her splendid post called "Over-Barking" (September, how about reposting this to the OC-Assist List? Great post, would be so helpful to those with this problem). Just like September did, I began heavily reinforcing recalls,

playing tug, etc. and using negative punishment (good things end) when he wouldn't play the game.

Again, I now have a dog who will still tense up, alert bark - BUT, he will instantly respond to my cue of "thank you" and come running to me for something - usually a treat, a game of tug, a game of fetch, whatever.

Keep up the good work Courtney. I have no doubt it would be much easier just to give up, start with a puppy who had been shaped from birth (oh, it IS easier!), but Spot is such a GRAND dog with such a lovely temperament, so many plusses - that I don't want to see you give up on him. I believe you CAN move past this and get it to a workable situation. You have the skill, the motivation and certainly have a dog who may be one of the best teachers you will ever have.



SNIFFING

On Extinguishing Sniffing

Jane writes:

" this subject was raised a few months ago, but I didn't get a satisfactory answer on how to break a dog from sneaking sniffs."

It's possible you may not get a satisfactory answer on the OCAD list. This is not a place where people gather to share instructions on how to "break a dog from sneaking sniffs," or how to "make a dog mind in a crowded store." These phrases in themselves indicate a correction-based approach, which is not something you'll be likely hear much of on a clicker training discussion list.

Responses you are more likely to get will ask you to consider what you ***DO*** want your dog to do instead of what you are presently seeing your dog do. Clicker responses are going to focus on what you ***do*** want your dog to do instead. The approach to even thinking about changing a behavior needs to be shifted to the positive - what you **DO** want to teach the dog to do - and this first has to change in your mind. It's not easy to do! We are very much a punitive-based society, so by switching our thinking in this way, we're swimming against the tide that comes into our lives strongly each day, in a multitude of ways.

So, let's switch the questions around so they reflect a more positively reinforcing approach to learning something new. First, sniffing at living beings is not "bad behavior" in the dog world. It's only considered bad behavior in a human world. It's a natural dog behavior, and chances are you dog may never understand ***why*** humans don't choose to engage in this normal, natural dog ritual that tells them so much.

I love to play the "imagine what my dog must be thinking" game, not because anthropomorphizing is something I want to encourage, but because it helps me think about how differently dogs interpret things in their world than humans do. I can visualize a teen coming home late and a bit bleary-eyed and the mother asking her son, "Have you been drinking?"

I can visualize the dog standing there, (and understanding the nuances of the human English language, of course!) thinking, "How do I tell my clueless human that all she has to do is 'take a whiff on him'? I could smell alcohol before the door even opened. She's 5 feet away from him and she's so intent on talking that she isn't paying any attention to the smell that's so obvious!"

When dogs sniff, they are connecting to something within their genetic makeup that immediately answers questions for them. Think of how helpful and effective this incredible behavior is for a dog! We will never be able to take this ability away from them, and we will never stop them from using their scenting abilities. Of course we can't expect a dog to understand why sniffing of humans is not acceptable in human culture.

It's not **bad** to sniff, and they are not being **bad dogs** when they sniff - they are just being canine, not human. All we can really do is to teach them a behavior we **DO** want them to do instead of sniffing, when they are in human-rich environments.

What is it you want your dog to do instead of sniff humans? Do you want him to offer you eye contact? Do you want him to turn his head and target your hand? Do you want him to sit and touch your leg with his nose? Do you want him to back up two steps and sit?

Do you have a "leave it" cue already established? Some word that is very neutral sounding - not commanding or harsh, that you can give as a cue to let the dog know that whatever he's doing at that moment he should stop doing, and instead, offer you eye contact.

It actually will help you if you pick a word that we don't normally use in human communications as a punisher word. "Leave it!" is a common cue, but think about it: How easy is it to say this word phrase with a punitive tone when we are agitated, stressed, short tempered, or exasperated? In practice, while teaching this phrase, we may well be able to deliver it neutrally, without harsh emotion. But will that phrase or word hold up with neutrality of tone and pitch when we are under stress? If the answer is no, then that's reason enough to change the cue word/phrase, and find a word that you will never accidentally use in a harsh, punitive manner.

Let's say, you choose a word like, "Ambrosia." Or, "Strawberries." These are not words we are likely to use punitively, when we're under stress. Finding a word or phrase that won't trigger our human punitive response is so incredibly helpful, because it helps us to remember that

we are using ***CUES,*** not commands, and that when we give a cue, we don't make it more effective by using a harsher tone, saying it louder or adding stressful body language to it.

If we use words/phrases we can't control in our own verbalization of them, then we are setting the dog up to expect that those words mean nothing until said harshly, or accompanied by threatening body language. The dog learns to ignore the words until they are given as a reprimand, and the cycle of "untraining" begins.

Let's say the cue word for the "leave it" behavior is "EGGPLANT."

To teach the dog to respond to the word "Eggplant," you first choose what you want that word to mean to your dog. A good behavior to pair with a word is to stop whatever they are doing, look up at you and offer eye contact. This is a helpful behavior because it can easily be taught at a distance, for those times when you realize the sniffing behavior is about to happen, and you need to capture your dog's attention and re-direct him immediately.

Note: Many trainers teach the dog to respond to its name as the "focus on me" cue. I think this can be problematic, because we use the dog's name so many times in a day when we do not ask for eye contact and focus, plus others in our house probably do the same thing. Neighbors use the dog's name. I think the dog's name can be "neutralized" too easily in normal life. I am guilty of cooing my dog's name in his ear when I feel a wave of affection come over me. At those times, I'm neutralizing that word - his name - as a cue. I use his name too often for it to be a distinct, effective cue.

I like a separate word as a "stop what you're doing and give me eye contact" cue. I won't be using this word in everyday language very much, and it will not lose its distinctness as a cue. Let's say I choose the word, "EGGPLANT."

Here's a simple outline of how I might teach the dog to respond to the cue word, "Eggplant."

I hold smelly treats in my hand and let the dog come up to sniff. As the dog sniffs, I close my fingers around the treats so the dog can't eat them. When the dog gives up trying to get the treats, and looks up at me questioningly, that's the moment I click, then give the dog the treat he wanted.

I practice this without adding any words or body language prompts, until each time I hold my hand out with the treat in it, the dog quickly looks up into my eyes.

I practice this in different rooms of the house, when I change position, when I sit, stand, lie down. When the phone rings. When the doorbell rings. When the vacuum is on. When the TV and radio are on. I keep adding little changes - distractions and diversity - until I know that the dog understands the word with the behavior.

Then, I attach a cue word with the offering of the smelly treat in my hand. The pattern is: I hold out my hand with smelly treat, say, "EGGPLANT" softly, neutrally - dog looks up into my eyes, and I click the moment his eyes meet mine, then deliver the treat to him.

I continue pairing the cue word with the distracting scent, adding more distractions. By this time, the dog has little interest in what's in your hand, because he already has a history of being well rewarded for ignoring what's in your hand, and looking in your eyes to get the treat.

I up the distractions and diversity, by putting the treats on a couch or chair, and walking the dog on leash up to the treats. Just before the dog gets to the treats, I give the cue, "EGGPLANT." I'm ready for the dog to look up into my eyes, and I click and give a great treat from my hand.

I continue incrementally upping the distractions and diversity - I put the treats in paper plates on the floor, and walk the dog around and through a maze of treats, using the cue as needed and rapidly marking the moment when the dog looks into my eyes by clicking and quickly treating.

I continue upping the ante by starting off-leash, and backing up on the intensity of the distractions. Even though the dog responds well to the cue when he's on leash, and working at my side, it's a different ball game if the dog is off-leash and the succulent treats are in piles around the floor. I back up, set the dog up for success by lowering that temptation.

Instead of piles of treats on the floor, I'll put a few treats on a higher chair or end table, cue my dog to sit, move away from the dog about 6 feet, so that the treats are between me and the dog. I cue the dog to come to me.

As the dog starts moving, I give the quiet, neutral "EGGPLANT" cue before the dog gets to the area where the pile of treats are lying. I click the moment the dog makes eye contact with me, even though he's still coming towards me. I deliver the treat when the dog gets to me. It's actually reinforcing two things: the "recall" cue and the "Eggplant" cue. Two for the price of one.

Before I take the newly established cue into new environments, though, I want to teach the dog that the cue applies to things other than food! If the dog loves balls, then that will become the object to ignore and offer eye contact instead. Or Squeaky toys. Or kids wanting to play and interact. Or the tug toy lying on the floor. Someone outside ringing the doorbell. Whatever the dog finds stimulating and of great interest - becomes an object to use in teaching the new behavior.

When I have done enough sessions with the new cue word in the dog's everyday indoor environment, upping the ante to the point where the dog will recall through piles of treats on the floor, bypass the ball, the tug toy, the cat, the ringing doorbell, etc., I then plan for "taking the show on the road" and into new, more challenging environments. Outside in the back yard, the front yard, on the sidewalk, in front of a store, at the periphery of a baseball game, etc.

Each time I add a new, challenging environment or a distraction, I back up a bit and re-teach the cue with the treat in my hand again, so I can control what happens.

If sniffing at humans is the biggest challenge, then I am not going to take the dog into crowded situations until I have built up an instant, zero-latency response to the new cue word. Latency is the time between when you give the cue and when the dog responds. Zero latency is what we are working towards in fluency - you give the cue, and the dog immediately responds. There is "zero" or no latency.

I take the dog into lesser crowded areas first, and set the dog up to find only one or two people there when I turn the corner of an aisle. I give the cue word just before I get to the people, and as the dog looks up at me while passing the people, I click and feed.

Before I go into crowded elevators, crowded stores where the temptations are extremely abundant, I prefer to practice more in situations I know I can control. Check-out aisles are difficult, so I might instead choose to work near the customer service desk, a wider open area normally, where I can have more control of setting up the amount and intensity of the temptations. At first, I may choose to keep my body between the temptation and the dog, then slowly move backwards, so the dog has more opportunity, but is already very engaged in responding to the new cue and getting rapidly reinforced for doing it, and doing other known behaviors such as "touch," "sit," "down," etc.

I'll keep it at this level and wait for distractions around me - such as a group of kids noisily moving by, or a squeaky shopping cart, or a child whining. I don't stop the dog from looking - I allow the dog to look at the distraction, then I give the cue word. I'm ready with that click and treat the **MOMENT** the dog chooses to offer me focus/eye contact instead of the great distraction.

This is the tricky point, because it's easy to set the dog up to be variably reinforced if the distractions/diversity get too high, unexpectedly. Let's say I see an empty check-out line, maybe only one person ahead of me. I know I can keep my dog's focus on me and reinforce eye contact instead of sniffing at that person, because there is only one person. But

all of a sudden, a mom and two little kids come up behind me, and I now have major distractions both in front and in back of me.

This is why, in a recent post, I mentioned that when I am in a situation like this where I know I can't control the intensity and amount of distractions, plus I know I'm going to not be able to pay total attention to the dog, because I have to pay the cashier - that I choose to use a head halter so I have some insurance that the dog won't accidentally have a chance to get reinforced - getting a chance to sniff a human is strong reinforcement, and very self-rewarding. So that this doesn't happen, I use the head halter so I can absolutely, positively control where the dog's nose is. It teaches the dog nothing - but it buys me a bit of time to get through a sticky situation, and keep the dog from being variably reinforced.

I also think it's tricky to rely on an incompatible behavior - such as asking the dog to "sit," or "down." It's plum amazing how creative dogs can be in keeping that behavior - let's say, a "sit" and stretching his neck out at the same time far enough to get a good whiff of a human. Finn can become the incredible elastic dog - stretching his neck further than I could ever have imagined, while still maintaining a stationary position.

So, while I do use incompatible behaviors, I also buy insurance by where I position myself, and by using a head halter while I'm conducting a transaction with the cashier or loading my purchases into my backpack, etc. I may only need that head halter for 60 seconds, but I know that during those 60 seconds, my dog will not have an opportunity to sniff someone.

I'm ready for some concrete ideas on how to make a dog mind in a very crowded store. The store itself is part of the problem, that particular store is tight, and it's hard to keep his nose away from people all the time. He does well MOST of the time (due to aforesaid training), and some places he is about as perfect as can be...but it's the times he doesn't that needs to be improved.

If you've read this far, Jane, then hopefully you'll have an idea for how to teach your dog what you do want, a plan for achieving this, and some ideas for how to handle unexpected situations that invariably will come up and set back your training plan. Focus on what you Do want rather than what you don't want, plan for the unexpected with "insurance" and keep your dog out of situations that are still too tempting for him, when you don't have "insurance" handy to keep accidental reinforcement from happening.

If the dog does get a chance to sniff, and does sniff - then it's not the dog who's made a mistake. It's the human. It's a training error, one of asking too much, too soon, when the dog already has a history of finding the unwanted behavior very reinforcing. Each time that behavior has a chance to get reinforced - it's as if we are teaching the dog to do that. Variable reinforcement is powerful stuff! Plan for the unexpected, and buy "insurance" for those times when you know you can't be in two, three, four places at once so you can reinforce a **DESIRED** behavior before the unwanted behavior happens.

I let him play with some new kids yesterday, and I'm thinking maybe it has something to do with his increased desire to approach strangers.

I think it's impossible to keep your dog from interacting with other humans! It's going to happen, so your plan needs to include what behaviors you want to reinforce when the dog IS interacting with other humans. Your plans for teaching your dog should include "checking in" with you first, before interacting with humans while in work mode.

You can use the universally understood "Stop" hand signal of holding your palm up to keep people from interacting with your dog before you set your dog up to interact appropriately. It's not the interacting with other humans that is the problem. If you want to avoid it becoming problematic, you just cue your dog to "eggplant" - give you eye contact - first. Use the hand signal to the approaching humans to keep them from coming closer or touching your dog, and teach the dog that approaching humans is a cue in itself for the dog to do a wanted behavior - it could be sit, or stand, whatever - but it should include giving you eye contact.

I do allow people to greet my dog, and I find that when I follow the "good greeting ritual" plan, it does not lead to more unwanted interaction: just the opposite. It sets a new default behavior - the dog instantly sits, gives me eye contact.

When I believe the dog can maintain that sit position while being petted, then I will allow for petting. But first, I tell the humans that "yes, you may pet the dog, but only if he remains in his sit and doesn't get up or sniff at you. If he gets up or sniffs you, then stop petting and turn away from the dog. " This is easy enough that even the kids can do it, and I have yet to meet a person who wanted to pet my dog that wasn't eager to help me teach my dog appropriate greeting manners.

Everyone wants to help train a service dog, and bringing them INTO the picture is quite an honor to them. It also buys you "insurance" that your dog won't have a chance to sniff and maul the person, and instead, will be set up for a "good manners" lesson.

It gives you a chance to also practice responding operantly to humans who don't know you should not distract a service dog. By using the "stop" hand signal, then asking the human to take a moment to help you in training your service dog, you have also bought a few seconds of time to THANK them for their help, and explain that it takes a long time to teach a friendly dog to keep focused on their job.

Then you can THANK them again for helping teach your dog, and thank them for not petting the dog without asking permission. This allows them to "save face" and brings them into your world, allows them to help you and be a hero, and gives them important information the need to know so they don't just reach out and try to pet the next service dog they meet. Everyone wins!

So, when people want to pet Finn, I will use it as a learning session to reinforce what I DO want Finn to do when people approach him.

1. I want him to immediately go into a sit position

2. I want him to immediately offer me eye contact

3. If he does not immediately offer me eye contact, and is too distracted by the approaching people, I use the "stop" hand signal keep the people from continuing to approach. When the people stop moving toward the dog, invariably the dog will offer me eye contact.

4. I have the dog wait until I give the distinct cue to "make friends."

5. "Make Friends" means the dog can receive attention from the humans as long as he remains sitting, and as long as he doesn't lean into the people or sniff. If he begins to lean or starts to sniff, I ask the people to stop petting, turn around, and totally ignore the dog.

6. Interaction ceases until the dog then offers me eye contact again.

7. When I give permission again to "make friends," the same rules apply - if the dog does anything other than sit quietly while being petted, then I ask the humans to turn around, back up, ignore the dog.

8. I am not shy about asking those who want to interact with my dog to help me set him up for success! If they are interested enough to want to pet the dog, then they will invariably be willing to spend a few more seconds helping me in training him to have good manners.

Trading objects a puppy picks up is a terrific idea. But I don't think teaching "leave it" with clicker methodology will make it harder in the future for the dog to retrieve those objects.

"Leave it" when taught by a clicker is not the same as teaching "leave it" with a punisher. "Leave it" taught by clicker is just another great game, not something that will build painful or aversive memories.

This is why I so often talk about using a very neutral sounding cue word instead of "LEAVE IT" or "OFF!" - it puts one more buffer between the cue word accidentally becoming a fearful command - "leave it or I will hurt you!" The more neutral a word is, the less chance

when you have to deliver it under stress, that you will accidentally deliver it as a commanding conditioned punisher, and end up inadvertently "poisoning the cue."

Try saying "eggplant" or "ambrosia" or "broccoli" or "tissue" or "gardenia" in many different ways - with different tones of voice. Any way you say it, it's less harsh than one of the "commanding" sounding words.

Then say "leave it" or "no" or "off" in different tones of voice, and notice how the words can change from a neutral cue sound to a harsh, commanding tone when you are under stress. It's very, very hard to keep words like this neutral in sound as our emotions ebb and flow. On the other hand, if we choose a nonsense word that has no baggage in our language of sounding harsh or commanding, then we are far less likely to deliver that cue word as a commanding punisher by accident.

If you choose a neutral cue word, teach the behavior via clicker training protocols, then there is no baggage attached to asking the dog to stop whatever its doing and offer you eye contact instead.

Karen has the right idea with doing trading of one thing for another - it's a great exercise, and learning to 'give' up an object in the positive way Karen mentioned - is another great exercise for a puppy.

I think we see problems like Karen mentioned when we look at the baggage that can come with using aversives in training. Since this is not part of clicker training, we can bypass that particular problem.

If I were getting a new puppy, I would be very, very careful about what cue words I chose to use, so that under duress, I would not accidentally end up poisoning the cue.

Realistic Approach to Hoovering

Hi Jane,

Obviously, there are solutions that fall outside the bounds of clicker training that could be offered to make a dog never never never touch any food items you have not given him directly yourself. We won't go there. It's not within the focus of this list, where we look for "clicker" solutions.

But I hope you will think about the opportunistic nature of dogs. They are scavengers, and as such, expecting total reliability when you are not there to allow them to focus on you, may be a bit unrealistic. While it's certainly simple enough to teach a dog to respond to an "ignore" cue without aversives, and to focus on you instead - which we have discussed in great detail here on the list many times, it's a different ball game to expect the dog to bypass opportunities to get food items when you aren't present.

We're tapping into hardwired desires - food and scavenging, very natural doggy behaviors. Add to this the tremendous power of accidental reinforcement when the dog is successful at getting food items not offered to him - even if it's only on rare occasion - that's still a powerful random reinforcer for the dog.

We can work harder on management, and lessening those opportunities for the dog to have access to those food items, and continue to reinforce ignoring those food items and focusing on us instead. But it may take much longer for the dog to "give up" wanting these items, and finding creative ways to get them when you are not present to re-direct his focus.

In this particular instance, I don't feel it's asking too much for the dog to learn to bypass the urge to clean off your plate when you have left the room for a few minutes. This is a normal part of most service dog certification testing, and well within the dog's ability to learn.

In the certification test I took, the testers put down bits of steak and cheese on low tables, on the floor, and I had to cue the dog once to

ignore them, then leave the room for three minutes. The same scenario was set up in a restaurant situation, with a bit of food dropped in front of the dog's nose on the floor. This was expected to be ignored for the entire time in the restaurant. These are tangible, realistic expectations.

But if you left that plate on the floor full of food and left for the day - now that may be well beyond the dog's ability to bypass that temptation.

What I see is that this incident gave you some very valuable information! I think it will be helpful to begin 'leave it' exercises again, and to continue to work on them consistently in every possibly environment, every day you possibly can. The behavior you asked for was still not fluent enough to hold up when you were not right there in the room.

But if you do the 'leave it' exercises, Q will learn to bypass that temptation for longer and longer periods of time. We have to think in terms of incremental pieces - tiny baby steps here - and build duration by "splitting" instead of "lumping." It's really not much different from building duration in a down-stay amidst distractions.

If we have a 10 second stay really solid, we don't jump to a 20 second stay the next time - it may well be asking too much of the dog - it's too big of a leap. But if we ask for a 12 or 15 second stay, we can expect that these tinier pieces will set the dog up for success.

Each time we change the criteria - such as putting food on the floor when we have mainly been doing hand or table exercises to teach the dog to leave food alone - it requires us to back up just a bit, and start out with baby steps, so that the dog is always set up to succeed.

Or, let's say we have been doing food on the floor ignoring exercises, but we have never left the room yet, or we have only left the room a few times, but the dog really hasn't generalized it yet. To then leave a plate of people food on the floor and leave for several minutes is upping the criteria too quickly - the dog has not yet become used to ignoring such sumptuous temptations for such a long length of time.

Maybe he could go 30 seconds, but at 60 seconds he wouldn't be able to resist temptation. But if we work incrementally toward 40 seconds, then 50 seconds - then that 60 second mark is going to be a lot easier to reach without frustration. And then 70 seconds, 80 seconds, etc. comes in time. And of course, the reinforcer for ignoring those sumptuous food treats should be as good or better than what's there on the floor.

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I think we often have trouble with teaching this behavior reliably when we "lump" in our expectations, asking too much too soon-rather than "split" the exercises down into tiny baby steps. Or, if we teach it in one environment and don't take it on the road to other environments, and adding more and more distractions and temptations.

While we are teaching what we DO want, and allowing the dog opportunities to generalize the new behavior, we also have to manage the environment so that the dog's opportunities for accidental reinforcement are eliminated. So if the dog is a garbage scavenger, we could put baby-locks on the trash can door. And we can pick up our plates and put them out of reach when we leave a room, until we are certain the dog isn't going to eat the food when we're not present.

How will this likely hold up when you are gone for long periods of time, or when the dog is loose outside and exploring its environment, and may come across a piece of poisoned meat meant for a coyote? (I'm trying to visualize what may be a concern for you, living in the wilds of Montana, very different from the suburban city environment I live in). Can we realistically expect the dog to always bypass the hardwired behaviors when on its own?

This is a question that has no easy answers, and has been debated on clicker and other training lists for years. "Can you really reliably snakeproof or poison-proof a dog without using aversives?" There will be many people who will be able to answer in the affirmative, and give you lots of anecdotal examples to support the efficacy of training the behavior to their dogs without having used an aversive.

There will be an equal amount of people who will share horror stories of dogs they thought were reliable, but given the right set of variables, at that moment of that particular day in that particular environment, didn't respond as taught.

The truth may lie in some murky grey area, because we can't know how effectively the trainer taught the dog, nor about that dog's previous reinforcement history, and how successful he'd been in the past at scarfing up food or pestering snakes when the owner wasn't present, nor are all breeds or individuals within each breed the same. Too many variables to consider, and it's just one of those really murky areas of debate with no easy answers, and many strong individual opinions.

I do think that you have already found Q to be fairly reliable on this issue, and that the answer may lie in just going back, doing some more training to help generalize the behavior for longer and longer periods, and with bigger and bigger temptations. Incrementally.

But for me, all bets are off when the dog is in an environment I can't control. I would not count on my dog's ability to bypass a steak lying on the ground if he was out sniffing in the woods on his own, and I wasn't there to give the "leave it" cue, or to have my presence be the cue to not eat anything I didn't directly give to him.

I would also not count on my own ability to effectively get this behavior under true stimulus control. Doesn't mean others can't do it, but only that I doubt my ability to be able to do it, especially if my dog's life may be at risk.

But I do trust my ability to be able to teach "leave it" in a fun and positive manner, and for my dog to be able to ignore food when I give that cue for the period of time I have taught him to ignore it. This may be a hour or two in a restaurant, where there's a succulent morsel of hamburger on the floor next to the dog's nose. And I may expect it to hold up if the dog is in a cued position, and I leave for several minutes to go into the bathroom. These are realistic expectations for me, and with incremental teaching, very doable. But I don't expect it to hold

over when my dog is out scavenging in the fields and I'm not there, or if I leave a plate of cheese on the floor and leave the house for the day.



PUPPIES

A Trip to Wal-Mart

Hi All!

This morning hubby Tim had to go in for a follow-up fasting blood test, so while he was getting poked by the vampires, I took 7 month-old Cappy the service Papillon in training, on a nice river walk and into Wal-Mart for a short field trip.

It has been a while since I've done much with Cappy: life has had far too many time demands on me, and I was harboring tons of guilt that I was letting this little boy down. I couldn't imagine how he would be in the store, and since he's been home-bound so much lately, I thought I may be setting him up for failure.

I decided to just take him IN the door, around the registers, and out the other door, if he had no attention span, was too distracted. But, instead, we got inside the door and the greeter was someone we knew,

who also knows service dog etiquette well. She spoke to me, not my dog, and of course, didn't make any noises or try to distract him. Cappy recognizes her, wiggles his tail and sashays in place next to my chair, picking up his feet like a dressage horse.

He's clearly not ready for stationary exercise practice at this moment, so I ask for only a quick sit, then click and treat him and release him to go "make friends" with the nice greeter. He does, and licks all her fingers. The greeter asks me specific questions about his progress, and I answer them, while glancing down at Cappy, who is now back at my side in a heel position.

Shoppers pass by and he ignores them, intent on making ME click and treat him for offering some behavior. I ignore Cappy a bit too long, more than his attention span can handle at this point in time, and out of my peripheral vision, I see him flop into a down. Then jump up into a sit. Then wave his paw. Then down again. Then try to pick up a piece of paper on the floor, balance on two legs and get me to take it. Then he grabs the loose leash, tries to hand me the slack. When this nets NO attention, he sits back on his haunches, lets out a morning Rooser wake-up call - - Cappa Roodle-Rooooodle-Roooooooooooooooooooo!

Right there in the store, with a zillion people buzzing around, my boy does his chicken imitation. Thank GOODNESS he is in full service dress, wearing a visible "In TRAINING" sign. We had been working on putting that cute Banty Roooooster Roo-roo on cue, so Cap figures this is one of the behaviors that might net him a click and a treat.

I immediately excuse myself from the greeter, and take Cappy through the store. He wants to move, has already run a mile, walked a second mile on the riverwalk, so I think he'll do okay. We move through the store and I randomly reinforce Cappy with a click and treat for walking nicely at my side, amidst all those distractions, on a loose leash.

I drop the leash and Cappy picks it up, hands it to me. I drop a pen, and he repeats his retrieval. Yesss! He hasn't forgotten, after all! Even with no practice, he remembers what to do. It's a lot easier for him to

remember, to concentrate when he knows my bait bag holds nuked garlic chicken.

I walk Cappy through the toy department, and he passes by a gaggle of kids, and flips them a tail wag, but keeps his attention on me. **CLICK** and **TREAT**, Cappy!

I'm delighted that this little boy has such confidence in public. He is little. He'll not go nearly as big as my other two, and may top out at about 10 inches. A bit on the tiny side for working on the ground in crowds, but this boy has no fears, and has an incredibly well-developed skill of observing big FEET. He knows how to dodge 'em, and no longer goes for the shoe laces.

Cappy let a toddler stick her fingers in his mouth, and nibbled and licked gently. I was instantly grateful for having worked at developing bite inhibition in this pup, (Thank you Jean Donaldson!) as it's sometimes impossible to be quicker than children when they are intent on putting fingers in puppies' mouths. In public, it's something we can't always stop quickly enough. So the dog must be prepared for every eventuality.

The toddler then grabbed his ear fringes, but did not pull, just sort of held on to them. Cappy didn't mind at all, and licked her hand when she was done. Oh, thank you early learning and manipulation! All that daily handling, manipulating of body parts paid off. Cappy knows human hands never, never deliver pain, never cause fear, but are always "good things". At 8 months, this is now a "default" behavior, and he has no hesitation about hands coming toward him from any direction, or hands pulling gently on his ears, his fringes, poking at his mouth, lifting his lip up. He just accepts this as normal now. Yesss!

The big kids with the mom and toddler want to see him "do a trick", so I drop the leash and cue Cappy to pick it up. He does, beautifully. Then I drop a plastic covered group of three ink pens. Again, he retrieves them, stands on his hind legs and gives them to me. Then I put him in a down, a sit, and cue him to wave. I let the big kids cue him to shake hands, then give them all little treats to give Cappy.

Cappy is in ecstasy. Garlic chicken, kids, attention, games he knows how to play - life is good for a service puppy in training!

We move through the store, practicing WAIT at every display counter, practice "leave it" through the lunch bar, and "OUT!" when I didn't catch him quick enough to cue "leave it" to a french fry on the floor. He immediately spit the french fry out, but looked up at me with starving waif eyes. Hey, spitting the object out on cue is all I can ask for at this point, and more than I ever could get with Peek at this age.

I'm stoked. I'm thrilled. This puppy is just wonderful beyond words, especially for having been cooped up so much the last month. We head out the door, and going to the van come across a lizard scurrying across the hot asphalt. Cappy wants to chase badly, but I cue him to "leave it", in a whisper - in a WHISPER - , and he looks up to me for attention. Of course I click and treat. That was a BIG distraction for a puppy to bypass and nets him a jackpot and chance to offer several behaviors I can also click and treat him for. He has long forgotten the lizard, and is intent on keeping me clicking as long as possible.

At home, however, he is not quite the little gentleman he is out in public. He's on leash, watching me closely for the next cue in public, but at home, he's Mr. Wild Man, and intent on satiating his curiosity.

I have already taught him how to open and shut doors. MISTAKE. I will never again teach a puppy to do this before they have matured a bit more. He now knows how to open the door, pull out the garbage, strew it on the floor and pick through for goodies. He knows how to open the hamper, pull out the best used underwear and snack on the crotches. He even knows that after he's finished the crotches, he can drag my pantyhose out to the living room and get the other dogs to play a three round game of tug. Obviously, management is in order here!

Yes, I have removed all the dirty clothing from his access, have put the garbage on the counter, have put every waste can up on tables. He will outgrow this soon enough, just as Peek and Dandy did. Cappy discovers, during dinner, that I have moved all his treasured waste

receptables, when he quietly sneaks into the kitchen and opens the cabinet door. Finding nothing, and smelling the bag on top of the counter, he lets out a Cockaroodle-ROOOOOO that would wake the dead.

I really had to put a "frustration" behavior on cue, didn't I, and reinforce it well, so he couldn't forget it? Color me airhead.

But the ever-creative Cappy has "stash" in places I have not even discovered. Under the bed, he has Mt. Trashmore. All the pieces of panty crotches, the pockets that once held treats and used to be attached to shirts, pieces of kleenex, feathers - you name it. One by one he drags them out, shreds them up and deposits them in piles on the living room floor. I know I'm going to have to clean out under the bed, like it or not.

Cappy began nibbling on phone wires and the edges of the carpet during his cabin fever time. Of course I crate or ex-pen him whenever I'm not there for long periods, but because he was getting so reliable, I let him run free most of the day when I am there to somewhat supervise. But the phone wire and carpet nibbling is not good, and I don't use physical punishment on my dogs. So I took liquid soap and rubbed it on all the phone wires, the lamp wires, the edges of the carpet. It WORKED! He gave up those pastimes.

I put a couple of mini-carrots on the floor in the "yes" zone. He loves his veggies! But he still wants his attention. Since the cupboard no longer holds the trash bag, he tries to entice my attention by opening and closing the door rapidly, closing it with a loud THWACK! Then he runs in to where I am, spins in a circle, sits up, flops down, roo-roos. Hahhh! Puppies are so doggone creative, aren't they? These little things don't bother me, because every dog I've had has eventually outgrown this, and I know Cappy will too.

Happy Clicking, all!

Adolescent Pup

I have an adolescent pup who also loves to carry his leash and at times, play tug of war with it. I have not tried to extinguish this, because he only does it on a relaxing walk, and not on a short leash, when in service dog dress. However, I don't put up with pulling and tugging, even if I allow him to carry his leash. He starts the tugging thing when he's frustrated, and wants to go faster.

I counter by halting all forward movement. When the tugging starts, I stop. I move when he stops tugging. If he begins again, I stop moving. Even when he's got cabin fever big time, and is desperate to boogie, it doesn't take but a couple times of stopping all movement for him to realize tugging gets him nowhere, and walking quietly without tugging allows him to move.

I never have to say a word - I don't say "leave it" or give any verbal correction. I just stop moving. Dogs will do what works for them, and what has worked in the past. I don't want to suppress that puppy enthusiasm, but I also don't want him to be playing tug of war with the leash.

Have you tried giving your dog something to carry in his mouth? When my pup was younger, this worked well for me. I now don't bother because I don't mind him carrying his leash - he holds it very gently, and never even marks it. He just likes something in his mouth when he's on a pleasure walk, and this also worked to help diffuse reactivity to barking dogs behind a fence, etc.

I can tell immediately his stress level - he picks up that leash in his mouth when he's frustrated. Again, he only does this on a long leash, never on a short leash when we're in service dog mode. This works for me as a compromise and I can always cue "LISA" which is his cue word for releasing something from his mouth, if I need to.

It would never occur to me to push a cotton soaked aversive substance into his mouth for any reason. The last thing I'd want to do is teach him that my hands deliver nasty stuff, or to learn to avoid my hands on his face, opening his mouth, or checking his teeth, or giving him a pill. When we use aversives, we have to be very aware of the kind of fallout it may have.

For exuberance around people, a similar approach can be used: no petting from that person until the dog stops trying to solicit that attention. Petting commences when 4 paws are on the floor and the body holds still. Treats happen at the same time, from the new people he's greeting - but again, only when he is offering an appropriate human greeting response.

If a puppy is too exuberant, then I'll sometimes walk him in a few circles and try again. It helps if you have people not try to pet the dog on his head - the automatic response. Also, if you explain to them not to use baby talk or high pitched voices to coo over the dog - this can sometimes be a trigger for the excitement. Instead, I have people wait and make no eye contact, say nothing, do nothing, until I let them know it's time to pet the dog - then I ask them to give him a treat, and extend their fingers to scratch his chest only.

I don't require my dog to sit to be petted or greeted by another human. I may require this when the dog is mature, but in adolescence, it's enough that he keeps 4 on the floor, and remains in one place. That's still a very appropriate greeting stance.

I don't ask for "absolute obedience" from an adolescent dog. I expect certain things to be met before I permit new things to happen, but I also realize that adolescence is a time of great learning, and most of all I want a dog who enjoys his time with me, and enjoys his time out in public. I try to think of what I DO want him to do rather than to focus on what I don't want him to do. And I do compromise on some behaviors - such as not requiring a sit while greeting, and instead, allowing him to stand, as long as he stands quietly.

In time, that youthful exuberance will diminish, but for now, I want to keep each outing safe and pleasant for both of us. I realize that by the time the dog is 4 years old, I'll be pining for that youthful exuberance again! So during adolescence, I just try to be consistent and not allow things I don't want to be reinforced. So if he is tugging on the leash in frustration, I stop or I give him a ball to carry. If he attempts to jump up to greet a person, the person moves away. I just reinforce what I do want and try to be consistent about it.

This is a dog who was so exuberant at one time about meeting other dogs he couldn't contain himself. He can now walk by any dog on long or short leash without tugging my arm off, without barking. He's not to the point yet where he offers me a "check in" of attention in really, really, distracting environments, but since he will do that in 80% of the environments now, I am happy with the progress. The remaining 20% will come in time, as youth flees and maturity settles in.

For offering you attention, we have some wonderful posts on this in the archives. Attention is the one behavior I reinforce constantly, whenever possible. The "Find my eyes" game is terrific for this.

Bite Inhibition Training

Here are some resources that offer excellent information on the whys and teaching of bite inhibition, or rather, how to control the intensity/force of the bite. It is most often thought of as one of the basic foundations for temperament training. Note: Some people confuse "No Bite" with "Bite Inhibition." They are totally different approaches.

Here is an essay by Dr. Ian Dunbar on teaching bite inhibition: <http://www.roycroftcavaliers.com/manualbiteinhibitionarticle.htm>

Here are several more articles about Bite Inhibition training: <http://www.crickethollowfarm.com/biteinhib.htm>

"Does Bite Inhibition Training inhibit and destroy a retrieve?"

I don't have empirical evidence to offer, or any substantial scientific data other than what is widely accepted by behavioral experts such as Ian Dunbar. I do not doubt that such data exists, only that I do not have access to it.

I do have a plethora of anecdotal evidence, but of course, that is not exactly scientific. However, this is not a scientific listserve, and we are not required to footnote all our claims.

We are welcome to use anecdotal examples, and as such, we rely on our listmembers to realize that we may have differing opinions and anecdotal 'evidence' that contradicts what another member may claim. As such, we certainly recommend that listmembers examine contradictory anecdotes by doing web searches to research opinions, data and empirical information that may be available.

My anecdotal experiences have been this: all my service dogs as well as my pet dogs have had bite inhibition training in the last 15 years. All of my service dogs and pet dogs are excellent retrievers, and learned quickly through clicker backchaining how to take, hold, release items on cue. They also learned how to hold items that require a strong, firm hold, such as a heavy kitchen mallet, and how to hold items that required a very soft but steady hold, such as a potato chip, a raw egg, or a piece of paper.

I can play tug with my finger with any of my dogs, and they will adjust the intensity of their bite/hold so that it causes me no pain, leaves no marks.

I have found absolutely no correlation between the teaching of bite inhibition with problems with retrieve training, nor have I ever seen it happen with the hundreds of service dogs I have encountered in public and in teaching situations, who have also had bite inhibition training.

Fearful Pup and Exposure

I've worked with many small Papillions that have had very sheltered beginnings, and never had opportunities to communicate with others of their own species, let alone be exposed to the rich array of changing environments in the world outside their crates, x-pens and houses. Breeders typically keep these pups until they are 3-6 months old before placing them, and for some, it's like living in a nunnery and being thrust onto the strip in Las Vegas. They go into instant overload and shut right down.

Unless the breeders have spent copious time providing enriched environments, exploration and problem solving games, opportunities to interact with children, dogs of all breeds, sizes, experience traffic and crowds, people in costume, uniform, loud cars, sirens, etc. - then it does tend to make it much harder for the owner to provide these opportunities at an age long past when the pup could have most optimally have been exposed to them in a very low-key, non-stressful, incremental way.

I am well aware of the advice veterinarians give routinely to not allow your puppy to be exposed to disease, and while I am respectful of this advice, I think there are ways to minimize exposure to dangers and maximize exposure to the environments, dogs and opportunities to explore the world.

With service dog puppies in training, I do not take them to parks where I know many dogs have been until they have been fully inoculated, nor let them sniff on sidewalks and weeds and sides of buildings where I also know many dogs have visited. I don't take them to Petco, PetSmart or other places where dogs I don't know come to routinely.

Instead, I take them to places where dogs are not likely to have been, such as the benches outside malls, the parking lots, the police station,

the fire station, even working with local parochial schools to use their outdoor fields for safe dog training after school hours. My little dogs ride on my lap, securely latched in a chest-belt so they won't fall off the wheelchair, as we move through areas where there may be health dangers. They get down on the ground/floor in areas where I think it's safe for them to be.

They get ample opportunities to greet people while sitting in my lap, or on the ground at a mall outdoor seating area, where I can educate and control how each person interacts with the dog. These places also allow for exposure to a rich array of distractions - traffic, cars with booming rap music, doors opening and closing, shopping carts rumbling by, children crying, laughing and giggling, skateboards flipping off sidewalks, teens running by, people arguing in loud voices and people carrying crinkling bags that sometimes WHOMP to the ground. These are not areas likely to be rich in distemper, parvo, etc., but do provide the dog with lots of opportunities to explore new environments in a safer manner.

You've received some very excellent and thoughtful suggestions on how to work with the behaviors you are seeing, and I'm assuming you already have Emma Parson's book, "Click for Calm," right?

I agree that if a dog will not take food, then neither classical nor operant conditioning is going to work at that moment, so we have to back up a bit, and allow the dog to find the distance at which it can begin interacting with you again.

And I totally agree with the poster who suggested that the dog is just not ready yet for the kind of "flooding" of what it most fears. That doesn't mean not to expose the dog to these things, but to do it from a distance where you can closely observe the dog's body language and from a point where the dog will still accept treats, and can still offer you a bit of focus.

One really great exercise that helped my Papillon Peek immensely was to find a training partner with a quiet, mellow dog who would agree to meet me someplace quiet - like the church playground, and just walk

their dog back and forth and in circles, while I found the exact distance away from them where my dog would not react.

We started out at about 40 feet, because at 35 feet, my dog started staring, refusing food, panting, and his body posture became stiff, and he was clearly showing stress. So we backed up to about 40 feet and just walked around at that distance as normally as we could, totally ignoring the other dog. Just walking, relaxing, with me feeding treats pretty continuously.

Once the dog was clearly showing no stress at that distance, I changed the reinforcers to squeaky, fuzzy toys the dog adored and used the clicker to engage the dog even more, in an operant way. This allowed us to move around at that same distance from the feared object, in large arcing circles.

Peek could still see the other dog from his peripheral vision, and no attempt was made to try to get him not to focus on the other dog. The only criteria I had at that time was to just get him to relax in many different ways, while he was aware the other dog was in the vicinity. This included using the clicker with food, toys, playing tug, belly rubs, t-touch, and just walking on a loose leash, or just sitting down reading a book and sprinkling treats around the ground and on my lap.

Very incrementally we decreased the distance between the two dogs, with my friend walking her dog back and forth, around in circles quietly, but at a distance of about 30-35 feet. The same "ho-hum, no big deal, yes there's another dog, but so what, want another treat?" approach, until my dog was no longer showing signs of stress or arousal .

At that point, rather than bring the dog any close, the friend started doing more active things at a distance - putting the dog in a sit stay and walking away from her dog, then recalling her dog, so that my dog could see her dog gallop toward her at a distance. Then she'd toss a frisbee, and the dog would jump up to catch it, or run after a ball and bring it back to her.

Once my dog was totally non-stressed by this happening, my partner made a quarter turn in one direction and did the same thing, so the angle changed, and the dog looked like it was slightly coming toward my dog as it returned to its handler.

A couple times we had to back off just a couple of feet to keep my dog on the edge of arousal, but not overwhelming it so he'd move into full blown arousal. It was a dance of sorts - each time we "upped the criteria" by having the distant dog move toward us, or run slightly toward us, or jump up in the air facing us - we had to lower the criteria for my dog, allowing him just a couple more feet of space away from this.

Then we'd move in larger arcs a bit closer, and a bit closer, while the other dog played with its owner.

In this way, we managed to close the gap from comfort for Peek at 40 feet to comfort for Peek at 20 feet, in just one session. But in other sessions, we may not have made that same amount of progress. It really depended on what the environment was offering, and a hundred other things that may have affected how much he could handle on any given day.

The one thing I made sure of was that I controlled the situation, and put him in no situation where a dog could just come up and sniff him, run up to him, because that would have flooded him with fear he was not yet ready to face.

But this distance work helped very quickly, enabling us to use forward movement in wide, wide circles to move Peek closer, so that he didn't have time to obsess on the other dog, but was busy moving away from me in wide circles. Each time the circle started to close, he'd have 1/4 of that circle to be able to see the other dog. Then he'd again have to pay attention to where my wheelchair was and concentrate on avoiding getting bumped by it as we moved around in inside circles, wide but consistent.

We moved to figure 8s, and slowly moved closer and closer to the other dog while rapidly clicking and treating. The other handler slowly upped the activity of the other dog as we did this, so my dog could see that even when that dog was moving a bit toward him, or barking, or jumping in the air, Peek wasn't in any danger.

We progressed in a week to being able to walk our dogs past each other in large circles, and crossing over between the circles in straight lines, with my dog on the left side of me, and her dog on the left side of her, so the dogs saw each other, but were not forced to cross paths in close proximity.

By the end of that week, we were able to move toward each other with our dogs, stop about 5 feet away, put our dogs in a down-stay, and just stand there talking with each other. Then we sat down on the ground next to our dogs. In this way, my fearful dog got used to a very large dog in close proximity, to the point where they actually nearly touched noses while the other handler and I were sitting on the ground just talking naturally.

We then walked together, dogs at our sides, and all signs of stress were gone from my dog's body language. His tail was up, his ears were relaxed, he wasn't panting, his body posture was relaxed, and on his own - he actually moved toward the other dog who was put into a down-stay, and sniffed the dog's paw.

After this initial, very slow and incremental approach, Peek was able to meet other dogs and close the gap between them distancewise, much faster.

I was just very careful about allowing him to be exposed to environments where a friendly, but rude dog might come rushing toward my dog and start sniffing him - he clearly told me in his body language that he wasn't ready for that kind of familiarity yet. By not allowing him to be "flooded," I could work him on the edge of his reactivity, without crossing the line so much that it would turn into full-blown stress.

It was a dance between classical and operant conditioning. I'd use whichever approach the dog's responses seemed to indicate was appropriate at the time. If the dog was too stressed to just accept food, then the whole "open bar" classical approach was useless - but I could start moving my dog around in wide circles, and engaging him operantly with the clicker and squeaky toy, until he would accept the treats after the click.

I have discovered with my own experiments with desensitization and behavior modification with fearful dogs, that the clicker can become so much more than an event marker, once a dog comes to pair that click sound with good things. That crisp click, I suspect, becomes such a recognized "comfort" signal, something that has been paired classically with "good things" so many times, that it can help with the desensitization far more than relying on classical conditioning alone. I have seen it "break obsessing focus" on another dog, and cause my dog's head to quickly swing toward me, seeking eye contact.

Obviously, I have no data to support this - just experiments I've done with dogs who show reactivity and/or fear, so it's just anecdotal and I could be totally wrong. I can't explain why it seems to work so well, only that the dogs who have come to pair that crisp cli-click with good things, seem to be able to translate that sound in a way that helps them de-stress quicker than just chucking food and incrementally closing the distance between them and the scary thing in a classical conditioning approach. It's not that I abandon the use of classical conditioning, only that I tend to integrate it, and let the dog tell me by its body language what to do next.

In class situations, at first I had to stay well away from other dogs with my dog - I'd work the edges of the room, or in some cases, work outside the door, just moving back and forth, getting closer and closer, until we could pass that door without my dog showing signs of stress / arousal.

Most times, just this extra work on the far periphery of all the other dogs for a few minutes helped him to relax enough that we could

actually enter the door without him exhibiting stress signals. Or we'd spend 5 minutes just moving into and back out of the door.

Once in, we did stay working in wide arcs around the outside of the room, and did not join the group until we could walk by other dogs with me as the buffer between them, with my dog showing no displacement behaviors. Then to walk by another dog without me as a buffer between them. It also helped to sit on the floor when others were sitting on the floor with their dogs in down positions, but far enough away that the dogs could see each other, but not quite touch noses.

Quite often they would creep a few inches toward each other, sniff a nose, and then just forget about each other.

In this way, we incrementally worked to change my fearful dog's perception of other dogs. But I was always ready to take a step backwards, lower my criteria when the environment threw out something new and unexpected.

I want to add that my dog also had a bite history as a puppy. The "clicking for calm" was so incredibly successful that within a year, this dog was so used to people of all ages, both sexes, people in uniforms, people in wheelchairs, on crutches, canes, people who staggered, people who shouted, people who ran toward him. But each new thing was added by stepping back, finding the edge of the dog's comfort zone, and working just within that zone with clicker and reinforcements until there was no visible stress.

The dog was allowed to choose WHEN to move toward the people, and the people were not allowed to swoop down on him, bending over him, trying to pet him or make eye contact with him. Instead, the dog made the choice and little by little, found that humans were pretty wonderful, and that other dogs were tolerable, though not nearly as wonderful as humans.

This same dog passed a phenomenal test one day when he was visiting with me in a nursing home where my mother was living during rehab from a hip replacement. I went into a large room where residents were

all sitting around in wheelchairs, and one-by-one Peek greeted them, enjoying the interactions. At that point, he'd become very comfortable around humans and being touched by them.

One lady living with dementia reached out and snatched Peek off my lap, then started crooning to him while squeezing him tighter and tighter. I was panic stricken. She would not loosen her grip, and it began to get so tight that Peek began to whine. As I tried to pry her arms apart, she tightened them even more, and Peek was visibly stressed. At my wit's end, I didn't know what to do, but knew that every dog has its limits - and when threatened sufficiently, it will react to defend itself in the only way it has - by using its teeth.

So I did the only thing I could think of at that moment - I pointed to the door and shouted "Ice Cream!!!!" 14 heads turned to the door, looking for the ice cream cart, and the lady holding Peek was momentarily distracted, loosened her grip enough that Peek could jump back into my lap, and we could back up quickly out of her reach.

Of course, I made sure they all got ice cream! But it also taught me a powerful lesson. I had set my dog up for failure by taking him into a setting that I couldn't control. It could easily have had tragic consequences. And at that moment, I realized that if I wanted to do therapy work with my dog, I'd better get training for both of us so we'd never find ourselves in a position like that where my dog might have to go on the defensive to defend itself. That's just what we did, through intensive training with the Delta Society.

But it also showed me that when we "click for calm" (Thank you Emma for writing this MUCH needed book!) and never push the dog past its limits, take the time to allow the dog to make the choice of how close, how much interaction, etc. it can handle, that we are also building strong default responses and trust. That Peek didn't bite that woman who was squeezing him was just amazing to me.

Jane is so right in her suggestion that you waste no time in working with your dog NOW, and not letting any more time pass before that window of opportunity starts closing so much that counter-

conditioning is going to be much, much harder. It may be a nearly full-time job and focus for you the next few months, but what you do right now is going to have the biggest payoff down the road.

I sure don't have all the answers, and most of the time, I don't even have all the questions! I am acutely aware of how much I don't know, and how much experience I lack. The more dogs I work with, the more I learn because each dog teaches me something I didn't understand before that dog came into my life. So please take my anecdotal sharings here as coming from someone who is still actively learning all the time, and in no way considers herself an expert on anything.

New Puppy

"I have a new puppy. When can I start his formal training, and what should I teach him first?"

Congratulations on your new puppy! I think the 8-12 week old period of a puppy's life is my favorite. At that age, they are total sponges, and learn so quickly. Everything is a game to them, and it's so much fun to watch them explore their world.

You don't have to teach just one thing at a time! Right now, the puppy is constantly learning - every minute of every day. Every interaction you have with him is teaching him something, even if you are not intentionally trying to teach something specific. He's learning what behaviors are rewarding and which ones aren't. He's learning how to wait at doorways instead of barging through, and that eliminating outside means "good things happen."

He's learning how to appropriately greet visitors who come to your door. He's learning how to wait just a bit patiently and not maul you to get his meals. He's learning to look at you when he hears his name

being called. He's learning that that funny click sound is the best thing he could ever imagine. He's learning how hard he can manipulate human skin with his little needle teeth. He's learning how to be handled on every part of his body. He's learning to give up things he wants to get better things. It's all learning, and learning does not need to be formal. Especially not at 9 weeks - this is a **VERY** young puppy!

But at 9 weeks, these puppy sponges can learn tons. Just keep in mind that the pup's attention span is very small, that they can be rushing about crazy-like one moment, and fall asleep in the middle of the floor the next. If you do teaching sessions, keep them **SUPER SHORT** - just 1-2 minutes at a time.

I love to teach puppies that age to do "doggy push ups" where they sit and down quickly - they seem to absolutely love doing this. And Doggie Zen - ignore treats in the hand or on the floor to get something even better. Targeting is a natural to teach at this age - targeting with nose to hands, target sticks or other objects. Targeting with paws on objects. Learning to offer paw to you.

It's the learning at this point - learning how to **LEARN** that's important, not the behaviors themselves. Teach anything. Teach silly things. Teach things like letting go of toys when you ask. Just let the puppy enjoy the process of problem solving a little bit and discover the joy of learning with a clicker.

Utilize 'unused time' - such as the few minutes you may spend in the bathroom several times a day - as opportunities to shape some behaviors. It's a great place to train puppies. Small, quiet, few distractions and has a built in seat. I believe there is an article in the shared files section of **OCAD** about things you can teach puppies in the bathroom. "Teaching in the Loo."

Visit the **OCAD** files section and read through the suggestions on things you can teach puppies. There are many wonderful old articles there that may give you great ideas.

The most important thing is just to remember this is a puppy, a very young puppy, and that structured learning is not important now - that every interaction teaches the puppy something, so don't think the puppy is not learning. He's always learning - either to do things you don't want to see him do, or things you DO want to see him do again. So every interaction you have really IS a learning session, a training session. Even if it's just 5 or 10 seconds long.

Don't worry about teaching any structured walking on a leash right now - you can teach OFF LEASH in your living room that staying next to you, stopping and starting - is rewarding and fun to learn. Then, when you put a leash on, the puppy already knows how to remain walking close to you, and the leash is no big deal.

Most of all, enjoy his puppyhood - it's gone in a flash, and you'll long for those days when he's about 9 months old. Take LOTS of pictures - you'll never have too many, and you'll appreciate them later on.

Have FUN with the puppy, and savor watching him explore his world.

Puppy Shaping Again

It's so much easier when you can shape from a young age. I have seen daily changes that just amaze me, cognitively, and only wish I had a camcorder to tape it all. It's incredible to see how few repetitions it takes in a clicker savvy young puppy before they realize exactly what will net them the click and the treat. Though their attention spans are short, they give so much, think so hard. And they put themselves in the most bizarre positions, like miniature yogis.

I find observing the puppy develop cognitively totally fascinating. And the responses are so very different from the older dogs. Even the pup I last got at 4 months was very different to shape from the 8 week old pup. The little ones just eat it up, and the enthusiasm is incredible to

see! They do all these pogo stick jumps and spins, will try anything to get you to click them. I love to see them thinking.

Just yesterday my pup entered into a new phase. I could see it beginning a couple of days ago, but yesterday something clicked internally and he has begun to be fiercely independent. Also, he's challenging me when I don't click what he thinks I should, and emits this wondrous Roo-rooo-rooooooooooo!, then turns sideways, tries another behavior.

Overnight, it seems, he has begun to make that transition from immaturity to maturity. He now gallops with the big dogs, always trying to beat them outside to the spot where they piddle. When the big dogs come inside, he's no longer following them like velcro. He's still digging holes in the gravel, rooting and having a delightful time. And, now, overnight, the universe holds much more excitement than my voice. He is, as of today, ignoring his name. Hah! But he doesn't ignore the click yet. <g>

I'm having one of those tearful epiphany moments today, watching my very precocious pup process information, grow cognitively.

This pup has no fears, is bold and pushy - very much like my first Papillon service dog, Peek. I think back on my experience with Peek as a pup, and how I reinforced the very things I didn't want, out of ignorance to the laws of learning.

And why I did this, I still don't understand. I was raised by a mother who practiced positive reinforcement and negative punishment exclusively. I knew better, but I just didn't have a clue as to how to switch what I knew worked in humans to the dog world.

I kept going back to the books: Saunders, Koehler, Cecil & Darnell, Benjamin, McMannis. Each book told me I had to get tough, get hard, let nothing slide by. I followed this advice against my better judgment, because I lacked the confidence to forge a new direction based on my own experiences in life.

I nearly ruined a wonderful dog. I used copious amounts of +P to diffuse obsessive territorial guarding, object guarding and forging on leash. What resulted was a dog bent on challenging me at every juncture, who learned to withstand all that punishment to do what he wanted in the long run.

I now look at this pup, so like Peek, but responding oh-so-differently to +R and -P training. I look at the same behaviors that in Peek, had me in tears constantly, stressed to the max, and I now see the behaviors with new eyes, new wisdom.

What once filled me with fear and loathing, now simply gives me giggles. I watch how quickly the pup responds to counter-conditioning, and how well I can shift the focus with him. I see a much happier pup, who has not had to learn by putting up with my tearful, emotional positive punishers. I see a delightful dog who is learning at a rapid rate, exploring his world with gentle leadership from me, and it's as if I have been given a gift of understanding that far exceeds the value of any gift I have ever received in my life!

I watch in awe as the clicker and primary reinforcers give me the ability to do gentle restraint without panicking the dog, stressing him. I watch him melt into the palm of my hand upside down, yawn and then BOUNCE straight up when he hears the click. (talk about having to have good dexterity - I could drop him so easily when he does this! And in a 2 pound dog, this would be a broken something).

What a joy it is to learn from my dogs, from my peers and mentors. And what a different person I am today then I was 6 years ago, when I struggled with such anxiety over my inability to change behaviors in Peek.

Puppy Shaping

"I have a new puppy. What sort of things should I be teaching her, and how? I've been told that shaping is good, but that I can't do it until the pup is mature. Is this true? What do I need to know to get started?"

First, congratulations on your new pup! Puppies take enormous energy, and this is to me, the hardest part. It means a probable 3 year commitment to close supervision and extensive stepped-up socialization in public. It can be extremely difficult for some of us with non-static disabilities to meet the needs of the puppy, who still needs those daily outings no matter how lousy we are feeling. The task training is truly the easy part.

But getting that puppy out every single day is really draining, so gear up, my dear! You will need energy in abundance. But it's oh-so-worth it. There is nothing better than shaping a puppy. It's a clean slate, a sponge waiting to be filled, and there is something about puppies that seems to GIVE us that extra energy we need, even when we think we're too tired and sore to move one more finger.

I want to share a few thoughts about things to teach early and things not to teach early. I made a few major mistakes with this pup, and hopefully you can use them to bypass the same problems I created.

First, Have a plan! I didn't and I paid dearly for that. I just trained what felt right at that moment, helter-skelter. I'd shape nearly anything the puppy offered. He learned at warp speed, but some things worked against me.

For instance, I taught a retrieve before I taught targeting. I would not do this again. It was hard to get behaviors NOT mouth-oriented after this, and he wanted desperately to bite the target stick or use his nose instead of his paw for other behaviors, such as pressing buttons. Next time, I plan to have a plan, follow it as much as possible, while still being flexible and adjusting it as necessary. Targeting first, then retrieving!

Next, I will never again teach a young puppy to open and shut doors until they are out of adolescence. It is a super fast behavior for them to learn, so no need for me to teach it early on. Puppies can be very smart, and learn to open those cupboard doors and drawers on their own, help themselves to garbage and goodies. They can even learn to open the childproof locks.

I'm not the only one who has learned this the hard way. Yesterday, Rita, my training partner, came to visit. Melissa had been here visiting for a week, and we were talking dogs and shaping behavior. Rita told us about how when her service dog LaLa was a pup, she shaped Lala to open the refrigerator door. Rita came in the kitchen one day and found Lala and the cats inside the fridge, just having the greatest time checking out all the neat smells.

Next, I'd teach "checking in" with eye contact first thing, and keep reinforcing this daily. It's an excellent behavior to teach your dog. This way, it will become automatic to "check in" and make eye contact without having to call the dog's name or otherwise coerce his attention.

One easy way to do this was demonstrated by Melissa yesterday, and is very similar to what Dr. Deb Jones did in her seminar a couple weeks ago at the Papillon National. Hold out a really smelly wonderful treat in your hand, with arm outstretched by your side. Let dog mug your hand, try to get the treat. The moment the pup stops mugging, looks away, backs away even a tiny bit, you click and treat. Incrementally, you up the criteria until you have the dog looking at you before you click. This gets the puppy quickly to focus OFF the food and to look to YOU for leadership and direction.

There is no limit to the amount of behaviors a young pup can learn - they are truly behavior-offering fools at 9 weeks. But they have the attention span of a gnat, of course. Just be very careful about what you shape, and think all the time about how the behavior you are teaching will affect other behaviors you will want to teach down the road.

Do tons of bathroom training. I'm sold on it, truly. The bathroom is one of the best places to teach in the world: it's small, it's quiet, there

are few distractions, and you can easily keep their attention and keep the other dogs and distractions away. And since you use this room several times a day, it's a natural for short training sessions. Keep clicker and treats in your bathroom all the time!

Some things you can teach a puppy in the bathroom:

- attention
- targeting
- sit
- down
- retrieve
- tug
- release
- bite inhibition
- touch
- wave
- roll over
- front
- settle on mat
- head turns
- 101 things to do with a box
- flush the toilet
- put object in trash container
- leave it

I think one of the most important early behaviors to teach is the tug and release. And the bathroom is just the perfect place to teach it! It's a small, neutral environment, low stimulus and distraction. You are GOD in the bathroom and don't have to compete with any other stimulus.

On Bite Inhibition training:

There are a good many traditional trainers and breeders on my chosen breed list who vehemently disagree with me on teaching this behavior. They feel puppies should learn never to mouth human skin, and begin adding aversives at a young age to discourage the pup ever touching human skin.

I totally disagree, and want all my dogs to know and understand just how hard human skin can be manipulated. I want that to be a default behavior, for those emergency times. I follow Jean Donaldson's methods of teaching this behavior as outlined in "The Culture Clash" and it has served me well. My dogs have all developed a very "soft mouth" this way, and learned to control the intensity of their bite so that they never bruise or lacerate human skin.

This is helpful for any dog, I'm convinced, but especially helpful for dogs who may need later on to learn to lift human legs, arms or hands and place them in different positions. If they learn as puppies how hard to hold human skin, it will be with them for a lifetime.

On Targeting

Now is your chance, with a fresh puppy, to use more and more targeting and less and less food luring. This will be SO helpful down the road, when you are asking your puppy to ignore tantalizing smells out in public. Get the puppy working for the click, not the food lure from the get-go, and your job is SO much easier. You set yourself and the pup up for success this way.

Why lure a sit with food when you can get the pup to follow a target instead? Same for down, front, right, left, behind, over. The less you lure and the more you target, the less food-focused your dog will be. Food motivated, we want. Food focused can work against you.

If you do lure with food, fade that lure really fast or it will come back to haunt you. Again, get the pup quickly targeting and working for the click, not the food.

I blew it on this one, folks, and I'm paying the price now. Targeting is one of the most helpful behaviors you will ever teach, and you will use it for the rest of the dog's life. It's one of the "key" behaviors!

Another helpful thing you can teach a young pup to do with a target stick is to longe like a horse, around you in a circle. This is excellent for trips and controlled areas, where you need to get the pup exercised, but have little room or energy to do it. It also teaches the dog to balance, especially when you longe the dog in both directions. You teach this with a target stick, gradually increasing the distance the dog is circling your body. It's SO handy!

The most important lessons, however, are those you will teach in stimulus-rich environments. From the time you get your pup to about 4 months of age is absolutely crucial: what they learn in these few months will be lessons they have for life. And never will they learn as quickly or be more sponge-like than during this period of time. This is your key window: use it well, have a plan, and make each outing a teaching game.

Make daily outings routine, and each day up the criteria (the distractions) just a little bit, and teach quiet acceptance. This is the time I like to teach the puppies that it's okay to watch the squirrels scampering in the park, as long as they are sitting or standing quietly and not lunging on the leash to get them. If you teach this during that first 4 months, you will be well-rewarded for your efforts.

I have two manic rabbit-lizard chasers (my un-trainer husband taught them well), but not the pup. He just quietly takes it all in, because he was heavily reinforced for those quiet behaviors as a youngster. Every single day. It's default to him now, and he wouldn't think of chasing a squirrel, lizard or cat. And that's amazing, considering these Papillons are quite birdy, coming from a Spaniel background. They are highly

reactive, so teaching them how to react early on sure helps with service behaviors!

One thing I did each day was take a trip to Wal-Mart, just 3 blocks from our home. They have two resident cats in the garden department, and each day we'd go say hi to the cats and reinforce quiet acceptance. And each day we'd work on attention in this very distracting environment. Gradually we moved INTO the main store, first making only sweeps through it, and then extending the time in the store minute by minute.

Because I have a lap-sized dog, I started this very early. I didn't have to worry about elimination mistakes, because the pup was on my lap. For those with young pups who cannot be held or put on laps, it's a good practice to get the pups to empty out just before going into the store, and to make very short trips, keeping them moving. Be prepared with a spray bottle and towels just in case, though!

Those early trips were fantastic for my pups. They learned that carts rumbling and screeching by were just ho-hum, and that loudspeakers blaring were no big deal. That kids rush in from all directions, and that looking to mom for direction means good things happen. That ignoring funny sounds other humans make means more good things happen. That sitting still at the cash register for just a few seconds means really good things happen. And that walking on a loose leash in a stimulating environment means really, really good things happen. And that smelly stuff ignored on the floor means superduperreallygoodthings happen!

Get the puppy out early as possible to safe environments. Expose him to skateboarders, joggers, cyclists, inline skaters whizzing by. Reinforce quiet and attention. Teach safety behaviors for being around loose dogs.

Teach elimination on cue from day one! Don't wait. It will be another "best lesson" you ever taught. We have many posts on this as well in the archives, which are searchable by topic. Jean Donaldson's elimination training program is excellent, as well.

Be sure you give your adult dog some "down time" away from the puppy. Puppies can be so full of energy, like little mosquitoes, and can really tax the patience of adult dogs. I love to use ex-pens to keep puppies contained, but still allowing them to be part of the family hubbub.

Once the puppy knows a few stationary behaviors, such as sit, down, settle, touch - go ahead and click both dogs at the same time. Find several things you CAN click at the same time so that little learning sessions happen all during the day, and so that the adult dog also gets a chance to earn your clicks and treats. You are also teaching the adult dog that though puppies can be extremely aggravating at times, when they are around, mom plays fun games with Miles too!

What videos do you have on hand? Do you have Karen Pryor's "Puppy Love"? Deb Jones three "Click and Go, Click and Retrieve, Click and Fix" videos? Virginia Broitman's "Take a Bow Wow and Take Two" videos? I think these would be very, very helpful to you in helping shape new behaviors with the pup.

Also, "The Culture Clash" by Jean Donaldson is one of the most helpful books I have ever read. Add to this "bible" another "bible" by Turid Rugaas, "On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals" and her video on the same topic, and you have some very powerful and effective information at your fingertips.

Good luck! I'm so envious. I love working with puppies!

Reputable Breeders

"I am so disgusted with "reputable breeders" and their stupid rules about what I can or cannot do with a puppy I buy from them. They're breeding to make a profit. How is it

their business what I do with a product I purchase from them?"

It's certainly true here in the USA that large corporations, such as the HUNTE Corporation, produce and sell dogs in a manner very similar to General Motors. And we also have other commercial breeders who are considered darlings of USDA and even AKC, who will make it very easy for anyone with a credit card to purchase one of their dogs. It matters not what the owner plans to do with that dog. There is no advocate for the fate of the dog purchased by uneducated buyers.

In contrast, there are also hobby breeders who have spent a lifetime showing their dogs, studying the pedigrees and working hard to better the breed. Their reasons for breeding are not wrapped around profit-making. I don't know any serious show breeders who make profits like General Motors, Hunte Corporation or the multitude of commercial home breeders who will sell to anyone with a credit card. Their reasons for breeding and showing their dogs is to better the breed, to help establish non-carriers of genetic disorders, and to be certain their dogs do not end up with people who end up mating their dogs to the neighbor down the street, knowing nothing about what they may be contributing to the gene pool of that breed.

Serious hobby breeders are those who are working hard to keep the bar high, and they wouldn't dream of letting their dogs go to a pet shop, or to some wacked out celebrity who has no time to spend with a dog, but only wants the latest designer trend. A good breeder wants to be certain that dog will have a good life, with humans who have the time, energy and desire to meet that dog's needs, physically, mentally, and emotionally - for life.

Online suppliers are now in great abundance, and one thing they all seem to share, no matter how enticing their websites may be, is that they all accept credit cards and are eager for a sale, no questions asked aside from "what's your card's expiration date?"

Sadly, too many poorly bred purebreds end up harming the breed tremendously, but I sure can't put the blame on the serious hobbyist

breeder whose rules may seem way too strict, but in the end, are certain that pet owners who do not have their years of experience, knowledge aren't going to be breeding fluffy to the neighbor's pet shop dog to earn extra pin money.

As Karla stated - her contracts spell it out clearly what she expects of those with whom she entrusts her puppies. For those who feel her rules are over-the-top, then so be it - there are thousands of online breeders more than willing to take your credit cards and send you a dog sight unseen, and of course, there is always a ready-supply of Hunte Corporation puppies for sale in your local pet shop. The clerks don't care what you do with your puppy once you've forked over your credit card.

Think about if we had contracts to buy other things the way we have contracts to buy puppies! Maybe I'd have to buy a specific brand of batteries for my power chair, or wax my cane regularly, or the manufacturer could repossess it!

But we already have that! Have you seen "Sicko" yet? I've lived "Sicko" before, and came close to losing my life because the HMO at that time would not allow for powerchairs nor the medical care required to keep me alive. My current HMO - the one that now actually allows for 60% reimbursement of durable medical equipment - has specific brands they require me to buy, as well as specific dealers I must purchase from, if I'm to be reimbursed for the 60% allotment.

Further, the powerchair industry itself limits me from buying a powerchair that is fast enough to meet my needs. The fastest stock powerchair on the market only goes 12 mph, and costs somewhere in the range of \$15,000 for a stripped down model. Yet, if I had legs and could stand up, I could rush right down to my neighborhood scooter store and buy a scooter that will allow me to cruise along at over 20 mph for about \$3,000. But because I'm "disabled," and have to sit down in my vehicle, I have no choice in the matter but to buy what is available to me. I'm disabled, and therefore, I'm not able to make the same decision about the speed of the vehicle I would like to use.

Further, if I choose to adapt part of that vehicle to meet my needs - financially or otherwise - I can then expect my warranty to be voided. Recent example: I needed armrests for one of my powerchairs. A couple of years ago the company quoted something in the area of \$300 for the armrests, which was way out of my league, so I kept repairing the armrests with Duct and Gorilla tape. But Voila - I was recently able to find a set of new armrests that are absolutely identical to the ones that came on the chair, and would have cost \$300 through the company to replace. Through the hobbyist who made them, I paid the ridiculous amount of \$20, including shipping, for the set. Now if I were to take my chair back to the company for whatever repairs, I'd have to put those old taped up armrests back on or risk voiding my warranty.

I don't see this in the same light as entering into a contract willingly - of my choice - with whatever breeder I feel has the best interests of the breed at heart. I'm always free to choose another breeder. But I appreciate knowing that the breeder I chose has standards that are high, and since my standards are equally high, I enter into such contracts feeling confident that I'm not just another credit card number to them.

I do find that good hobbyist breeders can be flexible on some contractual points, and change the contract slightly to accommodate on issues we both can agree upon. With one of my dogs, the breeder's standard contract stated the dog must be returned to her should the time come when I could no longer care for the dog, or for whatever reason, decided I no longer wanted the dog.

Through discussion with that breeder, and providing two excellent back-up homes with excellent references, my contract now stipulates that should I die or be unable to care for my dog, that as long as I (or in the case of my death, my husband) contact the breeder to let them know, the rehoming to the people of my choice will be accepted. They have already been pre-screened. If I didn't have this particular contractual agreement, I would still prefer my dog went back to the breeder, whom I trust would rehome my dog with an appropriate

family, and follow up with them just as she followed up on me to be certain the dog was healthy, happy and safe.

I've found that my contracts with reputable breeders have been much more satisfactory than the contracts I've had to enter into in buying durable medical equipment, cars or home mortgages.

The law may see animals as only products, but my conscience would not allow me to purchase from someone whose only concern is that I have a valid credit card. A concerned and involved breeder is my back up, my source of genetic/ health information, someone who cares enough to follow up and check on my dog, and eases my conscience from the worry of what might happen to my animals should I predecease them. I know they would move heaven and earth to be certain my beloved dog was rehomed successfully.

I am so thankful I have a choice in the breeder I select: I don't have that choice with durable medical equipment allowed by my HMO, where the bottom line is in profit making, not meeting the patient's healthcare needs.

Socializing Pets in Public Places

Jane is frustrated in her attempts to find opportunities for stepped-up socialization, since dogs are not allowed in places off-limit to pets, no matter how well trained they may be. She notes that service dogs are the only ones allowed access to non dog places, and asks for ideas on how she can get her dog Kong adequately bombproofed without being allowed to take her dog on buses, etc.

Jane, I understand your frustration, and I too wish things were different in the US. I don't think I would hope for pet access, as is so widespread in Europe, because sadly, our American dogs are not nearly as well-socialized on the whole, and if we had instant access for pets, those of

us using assistance dogs would have to be even more hyper-vigilant for poorly trained, under-socialized dogs who put our working dogs at risk.

Of course, this makes it so frustrating for conscientious, dedicated dog handlers such as yourself, and dogs who DO possess good social skills and would not be problematic. So the great dog owners who have spent time working with their dogs, socializing them, preparing them to exist in stimulus-rich environments, are punished as a default. It's unfair, but considering the plethora of American pets who lack social skills, it would seriously endanger the lives and livelihoods of those using service dogs if all pets were to be given public access rights. If only all dog owners were like you!

One interesting thing to note here in regards to service dogs in training: the right to bring a dog-in-training into places that are not normally open to pets is granted by individual states. There is no federal law regarding dogs still in-training. So I may be an independent service dog trainer and my state may allow me to bring dogs into non-pet allowed places, but if I cross the next state's borders, I may not be allowed any more rights than the pet owner.

The dog has no rights, period. Access is granted only to people with disabilities to be accompanied by their trained service animals - the animals have no rights. They are considered no more than "durable medical equipment," the same as a wheelchair, cane or leg braces might be classified.

Also, many states have statutes that require people training service dogs to belong to a group or organization, and grant no access to individual trainers.

So, there are times even those of us who do have some access allowances, still end up having the same problems Jane has encountered. And here 20 Hot Tips on how to get the job done without breaking laws.

If we can't get ON a bus, we can still go to the bus station, we can practice cueing our dogs and getting crisp responses next to buses

backfiring, next to buses pulling in and pulling out, squealing breaks, next to wheelchair lifts being activated. .

To desensitize a dog to wheelchair lifts, call a friend with a disability who uses a lift-equipped van and practice in that vehicle. No friend with such a van? Call your local Independent Living center and ask if you can post on their bulletin board for a person with a lift-van to assist you in your training task. .

Buses smell and sound different from cars. To help your dog get used to the diesel smell and sound, go to a truck stop and swill coffee with a few truckers, and ask for a trucker to allow you to enter and exit his cab with your dog, while he adjusts the air brakes, etc. Buy the trucker lunch and you may even get a ride around the truckstop grounds in the rig with your dog. .

Since indoor malls are out of the question, **EXCEPT** during times when a local photo merchant may be offering dog pictures (find out when your local mall shops offer this so you can use it for training opportunities!), do your work in the periphery of the mall. There is **SO MUCH** you can do outside, by the seating areas, the parking lot with the delivery trucks, the cars blasting rap music, the snow scrapers, road cleaners. Look for loading docks to department stores, and hunker around capturing training opportunities when trucks are unloading merchandise. .

Ask Mall guards to stop and talk with you, pet your dog, helping your dog get used to uniformed guards. In some states, guards are on bicycles and this is an other great socialization opportunity. .

Stop at the outdoor seating and work on social skills while meeting people of both sexes, all ages, all nationalities. Great opportunities for distraction training, as well! .

Go to police stations, fire stations, and get your dog used to more people in uniforms. If you hit a slow time at a fire station, you may get lucky and get a tour through with your dog, and maybe even someone to start up a truck or turn on a siren or lights. .

Walk down city sidewalks with your dog, getting the dog used to traffic sounds, thousands of feet surging by, and stop in any park area where you might see kids on skateboards or roller-blades. .

Some local stores DO allow access to pets, such as Petco, PetSmart and other pet supply stores. But, you may also well find willing small business owners who will be delighted to help you by giving you access into non-food places, such as hardware stores, plumbing supplies, lumber yards, etc. Smaller businesses are a much safer bet, and larger stores such as Home Depot have strict "no pet" policies. Not so the mom and pop hardware, the local electrical supply, the local real-estate office, etc. Call ahead and ask! .

Grocery stores can be another excellent place to socialize outside: again, provides ample opportunity for distractions, and often there are food distractions added, plus more carts and activity. You'll also have grocery store folks pushing lines of carts around, which is noisy and very distracting. Lots of kids, food smells, opportunities to reinforce wanted responses in your dog. .

Construction sites also can offer a plethora of great opportunities to desensitize to large equipment, new sounds and sights, and unexpected overhead movement and sounds. Construction workers in helmets are great to expose the dog to. .

Parks where dogs are allowed: Look for little league games, ball games of all kinds to help work through distractions and socialize dog with children. .

Country roads: take long walks to reinforce non-reactivity to wild critters, and focus on the handler. .

Most county fairs I have attended allow pets! Take these opportunities to go daily to one of the richest environments for distractions known to humankind. There are the midway lights, sounds, movement of the rides, squealing of the kids. There are animal barns with horses, cows, rabbits, goats, fowl, etc. There are judging rings and activities in

bleachers, and moving under bleachers is another great tip: it can be daunting to a dog to hear all the thundering feet overhead. .

Airport runway approach areas: Often, at major airports, residential areas are useful to desensitizing to low-flying jets. If you have such an area near you, use it to get your dog used to the thunder and hiss of the big planes. .

Garbage Dumps. Yes, garbage dumps. There is usually a nice office, and lots of HUGE trucks going in and out all the time. The smells can be extremely distracting for dogs (ok, and for humans!), but this is another excellent training area often overlooked. .

Festivals of all kinds quite often allow pets. Take advantage of them! Work the periphery until your dog gets used to the hubub. If you can find special events, such as hot-air balloon competitions, all the better. Or loud music of any kind. *TIP: if the music is loud for you, think about your dog's ears which are even more sensitive. Bring earplugs for you AND the dog! .

Farmer's markets: In many towns and cities, weekend mornings offer a terrific opportunity to walk past vendor's tables. Some are posted "no pets," but others are not. Find out if you have one near you that allows people to bring pets. .

Schoolyards: Park yourself and your dog outside a schoolyard during recess, to expose the dog to the squeak of swings, the squeal of children, running, jumping, hollering of kids at play. .

Find small country bridges over roads that make noises as cars roll over them, or even noisy railroad tracks. Railroad yards are also wonderful places, and again, can be very pet friendly. If nothing available, find the timetable for freight and passenger trains and station yourself by a track when you know trains will be going by. Again, earplugs may be in order. <G>

Hope some of these help!

Training Puppies

"How do people train puppies, and when can I start formal training? My friends say I should wait until the pup is 8 to 10 months old before I start teaching her but that seems a long time to wait for her to learn something!"

I think the thing to remember is that puppies are sponges, and they are always learning - even when you think you are not teaching them. Either they are learning from you, or they are learning from their environment. So, in essence, it's never too early to start teaching your puppy, as long as you aren't overwhelming the puppy, pushing the puppy too hard or having too lengthy of training sessions.

Keep in mind also, that the adage of "waiting for 8-10 months before starting 'formal' training" comes from the traditional training methods, which utilize compulsion and lengthy, often very unpleasant training sessions.

Today, we have new options and as we gain knowledge in how animals learn best, we change and grow as trainers. How awful it would be if we were training the very same way we were training a two decades or even a decade ago. We evolve as training evolves, and it's those who are so set in their ways that they can't be open to the science of how animals learn, and the empirical data we now have to support that there indeed IS a better way than the traditional compulsion methods.

We no longer need long, grueling training sessions. We no longer need to punish a dog for making a mistake. We don't even need to use a verbal interrupter if they make a wrong choice. So much has changed in just a single decade that can finally make learning great fun, and unstressful for a dog.

So, with this thought, clicker trainers don't really have to worry about "formal" versus "informal." Learning is just learning, and we teach by tiny increments, so if we need great precision, we can still teach in short, upbeat, happy sessions - and get that precision. We don't use choke chains, prongs, shock collars, leash jerks or aversive consequences, so there is no "...do it RIGHT or else I will hurt you" consequence or even threat. It's simply no longer necessary with the knowledge we have today at our fingertips.

What can we teach young puppies by using free shaping? Sit. Down. Touch. Target with nose. Target with Paw. Target with eyes. Name recognition. Really Reliable Recall. Wait at all outside doorways. Touch with paw and hold. Touch with nose and hold. Lie down on a mat or rug. Sit to earn the food dish. Sit to be petted instead of jumping up on people. "Leave it" or ignore whatever you're doing right now. Trading inappropriate items being chewed for an appropriate item. There's a few to get you started!

These are all very, very simple, basic foundation behaviors that are easy for a young puppy to learn, and totally unstressful. They are fun fun FUN to learn, fun to shape, and it's all one marvelous clicker game for the puppy. It's pain-free, stress-free learning.

Since your puppy will always be learning every minute of the day, you might as well take advantage of that total sponge learning stage and teach the puppy what you **DO** want, so you don't have to worry about changing an unwanted behavior later in the game.

The heart of your question, however, is in asking if there is a usual method or sequence for teaching behaviors - such as manners, socialization, obedience, tasks. Ask any 10 trainers this question and don't be surprised if you get 10 different answers! Here's mine.

I teach basic house manners from day one. Along with this, I teach some stationary obedience behaviors such as sit and down. But I am not looking for long duration in sits, nor lack of reactivity to novel things or novel environments - it's just too much to ask of a puppy not

to react to something totally new it's never experienced before.
"Ooooooh - a leaf dropped, what's that?"

That's why the sessions are kept VERY short - 3 minutes is MORE than enough for a session. And you're always going to be reinforcing good manners even when you are not having a training session, per se - you're still helping the new puppy learn those basic manners of greeting humans appropriately, etc.

The beauty of this type of training is also that we can do so many sessions in a day without ever tiring out the dog. For example, and listmember who have been here a while have heard me talk about this a lot - you can train tons of behaviors in the bathroom, in just short 1-2 minute sessions. Since we all have to go there several times a day, we can use that time to teach something new or refine a behavior we're working on. It's a nice, quiet room with few distractions and it has a built in seat! Whoa, it doesn't get better than that for puppy shaping.

And as for sequences: it's more common sense than sticking to a plan. If the puppy loves doing paw games, I'll keep at it and offer more and more paw games, some of which will become tasks. I think it's really helpful - most helpful - to allow the puppy to tell you what it most enjoys, and your job to find things to shape in that realm of interest.

Of course, it's really all about teaching your puppy how to learn, how to free shape and how to problem solve by offering behaviors. You could wait to teach any real obedience or tasks until the dog has matured - of course, but because with clicker training, the puppy craves learning more and more and more, why stop if the puppy is enjoying the process, enthusiastic and eagerly wanting more?

Remember, we can call it a trick, a behavior, a task, a skill - they are all just names of behaviors that clicker-shaped puppies enjoy learning. You could just as easily consider it almost ALL clicker games to play with your puppy that are fun and helpful.

When it comes to building duration of a behavior - such as sitting still for a while at a time - then, no, that's too much to ask of a young

puppy. Learning the behavior is more than enough. Holding that sit or down or wait is just way over the top. But you can literally teach most anything at a very young age as long as you are not over-stimulating your puppy, over-taxing it, over-exercising it, or asking for focus for long periods of time.

With young puppies, those 30 second to 3 minute sessions are all you need to keep the puppy learning and enjoying the process of learning. There is no need to hold off on simple behaviors with clicker training. Just be careful of longer, chained behaviors. Young puppies can't focus very long, so simple is best for early puppyhood!

Good luck and hope this helps.



SERVICE DOGS

AAT Dog

"I would also mention that an assistance dog does NOT have to be as "out going" as and Animal Assisted Therapy Dog. For an assistance dog, seeking out petting and human

interaction is not necessary. Being able to deal with being touched all over etc. is necessary for an assistance dog."

Jane, I'm glad you brought this up because I think there is a lot of different interpretations about what makes a good AAT dog, and likely many interpretations that conflict with each other as well.

I am of the school that believes that the most effective AAT dog is one who does NOT solicit attention, seek out petting, but waits quietly to be cued to do some type of specific interaction. This is far from an overly-friendly dog with no training, who solicits petting.

I'm talking about a dog who is still focusing on the handler, but is taught to shift focus from the handler to another person, but always under the guidance of the handler. In other words, at every moment the dog is following the cues of the handler, no matter how the cues may ask the dog to interact with the patient.

Example: Let's say that during this AAT visit at a hospital in-patient rehabilitation department, we'll be working with patients who are recovering from strokes. The physical therapist may explain to me that I'll be cueing my dog to move away from me, to sit at 10 feet from the patient, and to wait as the patient tries to toss a soft nerf ball to the dog.

Once the ball has come to a standstill, the dog awaits a cue before leaving the sit position and moving out to retrieve the ball, and must understand the cue for whether to return the ball to the handler or to the patient. If the dog is asked to return the ball to the patient, then the dog likely also is cued to stand and hold the ball firmly until the patient can get a grip on the ball.

My point here is that attention seeking behaviors are not part of the process, and would in fact, greatly hinder the efficacy of the exercise. However, it CAN be part of the exercise, as a reward to the patient for successfully completing the exercise.

Example: Patient is able to grip the ball, take the ball from the dog, and place the ball in his lap. The dog can then be cued to "make friends" with the human, and allow the human to pet the dog. The dog does not go into throes of ecstasy, start licking the person, wiggling around, but remains sitting or standing quietly as the patient pets the dog.

Each behavior the dog has done is under the direct supervision and guidance of the handler. The handler and dog are both under the guidance and direction of the physical therapist. These sessions are charted and become part of the patient's medical records.

There is a great, great need for dogs trained to this skill level, and I'll stand by my original statement that what makes for a great AAT dog is very much the same as what makes for a great service dog: the ability to take direction from the handler, to respond instantly and fluently to cues given, and to not solicit attention. But when asked to interact with the patient, the dog should also not show stress - just as the service dog should not be stressed if petted by someone other than the handler.

"Outgoing" is one of those words open to individual interpretation. To me, it means confidence - a dog who is not stressed, not overwhelmed or overly excited, but exudes confidence during whatever type of interaction it is asked to do. Outgoing to me does not mean overly effusive or attention seeking - to me, those behaviors mean "friendly pet lacking training."

I just wanted to clear up what I meant when I wrote that, and of course, there will be dissenting opinions on this, and that's fine. I just wanted to clarify mine!

Changing SD Partners

After 10 years of being partnered with a 12 pound Papillon service dog, I'm now training with a new successor dog: a 45 pound Border

Collie. Raised and trained from puppyhood by Virginia Broitman, "Finn" is an unusually mellow 4 year old who has been doing commercials and performed on the "How of Bow Wow" video.

Virginia worked with him for a couple of months on public access behaviors, and in learning to control his enthusiasm and joy of children. She taught him to do a "paws-up" on the cashier's counter and deliver a credit card. One thing she found while teaching this, is that some cashiers were uncomfortable receiving a credit card from the dog. So she amended the behavior chain to have the dog place the card on the counter, then push it toward the cashier with its nose. Then the cashier scans the card, and gives it back to the dog, who delivers it back to the handler. She practiced this from both sides of her body, so that the dog would be comfortable presenting the card from both right and left sides.

During our week of team training with Virginia, Finn retrieved potato chips from the restaurant floor and delivered them carefully with his front teeth, without breaking them. Thrilled to see a dog retrieve food, I was anxious to get a picture of it. Virginia quips, "That's not impressive enough. Work up to a steak, and then take the picture."

Two major problems for me in switching over from a toy breed dog to a larger dog, and a dog with different cues than I use, are my own strong default behaviors: I'm used to moving a dog around the floor in smaller spaces, used to focusing on a body closer to the floor, and positioning myself so there is room for a larger dog - things I'm not used to doing. Just these small differences had a major impact on my ability to communicate and handle Finn effectively.

Just remembering cue words took major brain drain, and I fudged lots of cues. Once, in a casino, Finn had just picked up the trash and done a paws up, and dropped the trash into the garbage can. I thought I cued him to fetch his leash, but I used the wrong word. I watch, transfixed, as Finn turns his head to the rear, picks up his right rear leg and holds it in his mouth!

Virginia had taught this behavior long ago while teaching a firm but gentle "hold" and I'd used the cue for this behavior by accident. You should have seen the looks of the gamers playing the slots, watching the dog standing there holding his leg in his mouth and waiting for the cue to release!

We worked through the aisles on loose leash walking, on offering attention and walking closer and closer to the chair on both sides. Finn had some practice moving with a manual wheelchair when Virginia was training him, but had never worked beside a power chair, which really is a whole different ball game. Especially with a driver like me. Finn still keeps a wider berth next to the power chair than he does with someone walking, but he has a good 'Close' cue response, and immediately aligns himself to the chair on either side. In time, I'm certain he will feel more and more comfortable walking closer to the chair.

Because Finn has also done sheep herding, he knows herding cues, which have been most helpful in moving him at a distance away from me while off leash. Here in the middle of the Mojave desert, where the sidewalks and streets are blistering hot during the summer months, it's been a Godsend to be able to send Finn out to a shady spot, or a piece of lawn to down himself there and wait until I have the van opened up. Then I cue him to jump in and move into his crate in the rear of the van.

This has proved to be so handy, that I won't have to use booties on him, as long as he is constantly moving while on the hot asphalt or pavement. It does mean that if I'm on the strip or in the busier parts of the city, I have to gauge the crosswalk lights carefully and keep moving until they change to allow us to cross. Most of the time, we are just moving from one air conditioned vehicle to a building or one Air conditioned building to another.

His recall and down position are so solid that I don't worry about him breaking position, and I'm never out of eyesight, always watching him in my peripheral vision.

What fun it is to play ball and frisbee games with a Border Collie again! My first two service dogs were Border Collies, but that was before the ADA, so I had no rights to take them in public where pets are not allowed. I really enjoy having a ball/frisbee motivated dog again, and find I use these motivators a lot as reinforcers. For example, in the back yard, I will ask him to move "Close" (in a heel position left side of chair, parallel to it without rear end sticking out), then to "touch" my hand before I toss the ball or frisbee. I do the same on the other side of the chair, and also in the front and rear positions. Or I might ask him to do his herding circling left and right, then to down at a distance and then toss the object.

This is great for exercise, and also helps in "tuning up" and keeping behaviors sharp. He's teaching me a lot, this marvelous dog.

He is amazingly good at playing gently with the small Papillons and the cat, and he will play tug in a down position, adjusting his tug strength to the dog he's playing with. Sometimes he gets a bit overly enthusiastic about tugging, so an "easy" cue immediately nets a lighter tug.

When he's playing tug, I stop and cue releases constantly, then cue a tug again. This keeps the release cue strong, and helps the dog not to get so into the game that he forgets to listen to the human.

One cue of Finn's is very similar to a different cue I use with my Papillons. I cue the Paps to "Scoot-Scoot" to move out of my way when I'm flying through the house at warp speed. Finn's cue for moving backwards is "Scooch Scooch", way too close to my "get outta the way" cue. I'm trying to switch over to the "move" cue for the Paps, but old defaults are strong for me, and I screw up unless I'm really concentrating hard!

I also have to remember that larger dogs are moving all the time, that I don't have the option of popping them up on my lap to give them a rest as I can with the Paps. This is a big adjustment for me, too, requiring me to always try to think ahead and watch my dog's body language carefully, and take breaks so he doesn't get exhausted.

I watched him work so smoothly with Virginia during her week here, and hope that Finn and I will soon get to that point where we are "a team" like this. He's just a whole lotta dog who knows so many behaviors that it's going to take a while for me to catch up with him. It's a bit humbling to realize I'm teamed with a dog who likely has a higher I.Q. than me. If the dog doesn't respond correctly, I know it's my fault, not his. Thankfully, he's being very patient with me.

It's a real challenge to work with a new dog, even when the dog is already fluent in a great many service dog and public access behaviors. I am experiencing that time of adjustment and rapid learning that makes me exhausted after just a couple of hours. But it's an experience I think I'm up for, and I'm sure enjoying the heck out of learning to drive this "Ferrari."

Changing Times in Service Dog Training

The Internet Opens the Way

As a service dog trainer, I've observed that most email service dog lists have a broad base, and the mere mention of shaping instead of punishing gets the flames rolling. As difficult as it is now to endure those who would condemn us for approaching training in this manner, I really think we need to stop, take a deep breath, and realize we're all pioneers here.

It was only a few scant years ago when few knew of ways to effectively train without punishment. When I first began discussing service dog training with others on the Internet, the main input was from compulsion-based trainers and programs. Intensive discussions on how to best deliver an ear pinch or a toe hitch were explained in gruesome detail, and suspicion of the efficiency of operant training was high. The most often heard quip was, "Well, 'humane methods of training'

may be fine for pets, but for those in competition and in service work, it simply is not reliable."

Convincing Demos Reduce Opposition

We're now a couple years down the road and it's amazing to me how the entire tide of thinking has shifted. More and more trainers have abandoned punishment-based models of training, jumped on the bandwagon, and are shaping and fashioning programs that are very different from the traditional norm in service dog training.

A Tidal Wave of Change

Incrementally, we forge ahead. But looking back, isn't it absolutely incredible to see the tidal wave of change? I have never seen anything like it in animal training. The proliferation of books and videos now available is unbelievable. I can remember only a few short years ago when Koehler led the popular dog book lists. The tide is changing, and it's due to all of us working together, sharing, exploring creative problem solving.

Though it's tough to be rowing against the tide in our communities, where we may be the only non-command-based trainers, it's also an exciting, wonderful time in history to be working with animals, and working with people who want to better communicate with their animals!

Clicker Trained Dogs on the National Scene

This winter I spent a whirlwind week in Cincinnati, attending the Delta Society Conference for Service and Therapy Animals where my mobility assistant Peek the Papillon was one of the National Service Dog of the Year Award Winners. Another National Therapy Award winner was also a clicker trained dog, owned by Pet Partner clicker trainer/instructor Teotie Pullie. This is simply incredible to me, to see clicker trained dogs earning such well-deserved recognition as well-trained helpmates on a national level.

A few service dogs in attendance were controlled by chokes and prongs. The handlers were forced to give nearly constant corrections to keep their dogs in line. Meanwhile, positive reinforcement trainers were catching their dogs doing something right, and reinforcing those behaviors. I was interested to see that many dogs I'd seen at previous conferences are now working beautifully in public, despite a high stress environment rich with dogs and human crowds, with tons of food and other distractors abounding. Their handlers were using mainly verbal markers whispered to their dogs, sometimes reinforced by a warm hug or a pat, and other times reinforced by a food treat or chance to interact with another dog. These are people who were actively clicking and shaping behaviors at past conferences, who are now reaping the benefits of a well-mannered, well-socialized dog, able to handle the rigors of public access with aplomb.

Peek of Perfection

My assistant, Peek, was among those dogs who were now being reinforced verbally, and with occasional food reinforcements during high-stress times. I was simply AMAZED at how far this dog has come. From a kennel-raised dog, who never had the opportunity to communicate with his own species except through a kennel grate, he now can pass and repass with other dogs without throwing off major displacement behaviors or calming signals. Many times during the conference I just was reduced to hiding to weep at the pure strength of operant training, and the power of that incredible event marker. Could this happy, unstressed little dog possibly be the same manic barker, snarling, snapping, growling dog I once had?

And could this dog who could not even focus his attention on me for more than 30 seconds, possibly be the same dog who quietly lay for hours on the floor next to me snoozing, while dogs and handlers in a crowded atmosphere wandered around him?

Reinforcing "non-behaviors"

One thing really driven home to me was how important it is to reinforce what many think of as "NON-behaviors." For example, dogs lying quietly on the floor, or standing quietly at their owners' sides. I saw so many wonderful handlers reinforcing these behaviors, and it was evident that the dogs understood that this meant to continue what they were doing, it was JUST what was wanted. I saw people watching their dogs from their peripheral vision, and every 30 seconds or so, reinforcing with a verbal "good" and a warm pat just for standing next to them in a crowd. This is SOOOOO fantastic! Yes!!!

Sadly, I saw some compulsion trainers oblivious to their dogs until the dog moved, then having to make a leash correction, which often only served to stress the dog out more. It's so easy for dogs to misinterpret what punishment is for, and to associate the pain they are receiving with the object of their stress. For instance, the person ADDS a punisher when a dog begins to focus anxiously on another dog. The dog is already in an adrenaline rush, and the added aversive often just tells him that the other dog is indeed a reason to become stressed.

But, in this glorious conference, many, many more folks were being pro-active, and working to reinforce their dogs constantly for offering these wonderful, quiet, good behaviors. There can be no doubt that the revolution of humane training, of real communication without pain, has made incredible inroads in the dog training community. I was amazed by how many of those involved in therapy were clicker trainers, and how beautifully their dogs behaved. I returned from the conference infused with enthusiasm for what we are all doing, and for the power of clicker teaching.

Crisis Training for Seizure Response

"You really do ask such great questions and force me to think deeply to come up with responses. And I thank you for this - it's something I need a lot right now, after the holiday

from Hades I had this year. You are nourishing me, and helping me out of a major funk, so first off, I do want to thank you for helping me have an attitudinal adjustment!

My next question is, how do you do that if your issue is something that puts you in a state where you're not really able to reinforce behaviors? Such as a manic state, or a fugue state, or a seizure where you're out of it."

I suspect there are times that no matter how much experience we have with training, and how adept and knowledgeable we may be, that we will require help to do things we simply cannot possibly do on our own. We may need to teach a family member who lives with us on how to reinforce the dog when we are not able to. Or, if that's not an option, we may be able to enlist the help of friends to come and stay with us for a while and help us with that training. And if that's not possible, then perhaps it may be a whole lot easier to go through a program and get a dog who already has the training.

You're so right that when someone is having a grand mal seizure, they are not going to be able to reinforce anything. And in this type of instance - a great contrast to my situation, where I am still in control when my symptoms crop up - I think having someone trained to help reinforce the dog is perhaps the only option.

"What do you do when the only time you can really reinforce a behavior is long after the behavior has occurred. You can't really fake physiological changes. I've had some people tell me that they faked a seizure, and when the dog paws them, or some such reaction, then they praise them, but if you're talking about a dog that can alert to your low blood sugar, I suppose you could purposely let your blood sugar get low with the understanding that you're doing it to reinforce a behavior, but a seizure, which we believe may give off a different chemical smell to a dog, or other things of that nature? I'm not trying to be difficult, but just trying to look at it from all sides."

I know you're not trying to be difficult, only asking tough questions - questions that need to be asked, and again I thank you for this.

"When I'm manic, or extremely depressed, honestly, the last thing I'm thinking about is training a dog. I can't even get up and take care of myself sometimes when I'm like that, how am I going to reinforce a behavior, such as the one I described in my previous post? (SD pinning me to the couch during a manic episode) To be honest with you, she was pretty much irritating me, and reinforcing her behavior at the time was probably not something I was wanting to do. Now, in retrospect, I wish I had, but at the time, right in the moment, I wished she would just leave me alone."

Oh boy, do I understand about how irritating it can be to have a dog pester you this way! That's how it was with Peek at first, and I would get so irritated, lose my patience - all due to the changes happening within me which were beyond my control. I am, again, fortunate that I was able to recognize what the dog was trying to tell me, and watch for subtle changes in the dog's behaviors before his behaviors became really overt. I began to study how dogs show stress, and to look for those oh-so-subtle stress signals the dog would give off. It might be just that the dog begins licking his lips, or getting up and down, or staring at me, or pacing a bit, or just not looking calm and relaxed. The more I studied these "signals" dogs give off when they are stressed, the more I trained MYSELF to look for them, and to be more observant of my dog's everyday signals, so I could be aware when he was changing his behaviors ever so slightly.

This really helped me, because as you note, when you're in the middle of a crisis of any kind, you aren't going to be able to do what you have to do. But by studying dog body language, observing it, you can up the ante enough that you can often spot the subtle changes before you are in full crisis, and while you are still able to respond without anxiety.

"But with things like seizure activity, when it can come on at any time without any warning, it may well be that help in human form is needed to complete the training."

I don't have any really concrete answers to your questions, only ideas that may or may not work! But I do think that if I had a condition that came on quickly, without warning, that I would seek trainer help or get someone I loved and teach them how to reinforce the dog when I was incapable of doing it.

Or, I'd go to a program and hope to be accepted to be paired with a dog who already had that training!

Ethics and Public Access

As others responses have already explained, it's both illegal and unethical to pose as a person with a disability or a service dog trainer, unless the dog is actually in training for service work. The access does not lie with the dog, but only with the disabled person, who has the legal right to use a service dog. The ADA, a federal law, does not address dogs in training or trainers. Each state has their own statutes, which grant some limited access to trainers of service dogs, but most often legal documentation that you are part of a recognized program will be required. And still, you have to ask permission from the business.

The dog itself has no rights. As Melissa explained so well, if she takes someone's service dog out for a walk, even if that dog is still in service dog dress, it's not a service dog. It's only a service dog if it's working for the disabled person. It's only an "in training" service dog if it's truly going to be trained for a person with a disability by a legitimate service dog trainer.

However, I commend your future hopes to one-day do Animal Assisted Activities/Therapy with Spot, and know that this can be a great career for a dog who enjoys interaction with others.

My suggestion is to contact the Delta Society (<http://www.deltasociety.org>) and read all you can about their Pet Partner's program. There is also a list of programs nationally, where you may be able to get into a training class with Spot to learn about what foundation behaviors, socialization, etc. will be required to do the work you are one day hoping to do.

If you are serious about training for AAA/AAT work (and it truly can take years to do, depending on the level of interaction and type of work you may choose to do with Spot), then you can't start early enough. And I know many therapy dog trainers who do take their dogs in some public places, after asking for permission. Normally, they have a therapy dog in training vest on their dog (<http://www.raspberryfield.com>) and when they make these "field trips" they are in serious training mode, not shopping.

Because therapy dogs are not allowed anywhere any other pet is allowed, except when they are on the job, you have to be a bit creative in thinking about where you can train, and still get all the benefits of public exposure and environmental exposure in general.

Some places to consider:

1. Benches outside of malls, where you can work on sitting quietly while being petted, having Spot keep focus on you while being petted, or doing sits, downs, waves, look-watch, loose leash walking, backing up, etc. This will give you a chance to expose Spot to a multitude of people, carts, strollers, car noises, buses, doors opening, kids crying, jumping around, running and people offering fine distractions.
2. Some local stores that do not have food in them - such as a local hardware store or card store, or real estate office, etc. may allow you to bring your dog in if you call and ask, explaining that your dog is in training for therapy work, and that you'd like to practice "good manners" in a short trip through the store.

3. If you have a local rehab center, you may call them and ask if it's possible to bring your therapy dog in training into their facility to expose the dog to rehab equipment.

4. Parks are excellent training grounds for teaching your dog to ignore environmental distractions - other dogs, kids running by, squirrels, cats, etc.

5. Outside grocery stores on benches: An excellent place to get your dog used to seeing shopping carts rolling by noisily, and kids screaming, cars blaring rap music, etc.

6. Outside hospitals on benches: again, lots of wheelchairs, stretchers, perhaps emergency vehicles coming in, and plenty of opportunities to socialize your dog and condition it to new sights and sounds in the environment.

7. Batting cages are great areas to walk around, keeping your dog's attention and practicing behaviors. The WHAP of those balls hitting the cages are quite crisp, and you can incrementally work towards moving closer and closer to the cage until it's ho-hum for Spot.

8. Small art fairs and festivals.

All of these things are important for the seasoned, well trained therapy dog to learn, even if you will eventually work in a vastly different setting. There are distractions, and unexpected sights and sounds no matter where you go, and each one offers a great training opportunity. Both service and therapy dogs have a need for learning strong foundations.

It may also help if you make up a brochure on your computer, explaining what you are training your dog for, with a picture and contact information for people to find out more about what AAA/AAT is all about. You may find some people who just never knew where to start, but perhaps have a very nice pet they would like to do some outreach work with.

Good luck with your quest to one day work in the therapy field with Spot! It's very nourishing.

Fun Activities with My Service Dog

There are many, many service dogs who do things, participate in different sports and activities that have nothing to do with being a service dog. There is no law that says a service dog must **ONLY** do service work, and anyone who states this is absolutely incorrect. We have service dogs who on the side do carting, flyball, agility, obedience, freestyle dance, herding, animal assisted therapy, etc. There is absolutely nothing wrong - and a whole lot right - about allowing a dog other outlets, as long as those activities don't impact negatively on the service dog skills/public manners.

I have always done other activities with my service dogs, and will continue to do so. Let he who thinks he is **GOD** try to stop me, arrest me, or tell me I'm shaming the service dog world by doing so. I will gladly put my dog's service dog behaviors, skills and public access manners up against any test that can be given.

Participating in other venues of interest does not mean I am not disabled and don't need a service dog. My legs aren't going to grow back, my circulation isn't going to get better, and my dog mitigates my many disabilities. But that doesn't stop me from doing fun things we both enjoy when we aren't in service dog mode. At any time, should I need assistance dog help, I can call my dog from the activity he's enjoying and cue him to do a service related task for me.

I defy anyone to try to arrest me for fraud, or to try to suggest my dog is not a service dog! What a joy I would then have in court, demonstrating the multitude of ways he assists me. And for fun, I'd put him through some freestyle dance paces just to show that life isn't all **WORK** for either of us, that we enjoy a multitude of different

activities together. And in the middle of the dance, I'd cue him to stop dancing and assist me in some way. Yep, that's a court case I'd love to be part of.

Hidden Physical Disabilities

In regard to the dog putting paws up on the partner... **"But, my guess is, most people aren't going to see THAT as task trained, that's going to look the same as a "hugger" to many."**

You're absolutely right. There are going to be people who do NOT understand, and who assume there is fraud automatically, just because some of these trained behaviors are so subtle. The only counter we have to this is to take our knowledge and share it when we have the opportunity, with hopes that we can help a person understand some of these subtleties.

There are so many people, who have hidden physical disabilities, requiring them to use handicap parking spots, yet when they walk from their car to the building, they may be stopped by well meaning people who just assume they are fakes, just using that parking spot out of laziness. Because someone doesn't understand, and confronts the person with the invisible physical disability, doesn't mean that the person doesn't have a disability. It just means that the person confronting them may not be aware that all disabilities are not obvious.

Though we all may be able to realize these things, the public is still often largely clueless. Change in public perception and knowledge of service dog issues - especially these subtle ones - just takes time, and the help of those who are able and comfortable in reaching out to help educate those who are confrontational due to not understanding the often-subtle nature of what our animals do for us.

I wish we could wave a magic wand and instantly have the public understand! But unfortunately, misunderstanding often leads to attitudinal barriers that can take so long to change.

I am a double amputee using a power wheelchair. Well-meaning but clueless people have come up to me and read me the riot act for using a wheelchair, pointing out that I **SHOULD** be using artificial legs to walk, and that by using a chair, I am "giving up" and not trying hard enough to walk. But what they don't see - those shades of gray again - is that I also have an invisible disability (a severe vascular insufficiency) that prevents me from using artificial legs anymore.

I have chosen to refuse to let these types of comments affect my positive outlook, and look to these events as opportunities to educate. Not everyone is comfortable doing this, but I am, so I do.

Shoot, I'd give anything just to have the general public just make eye contact with me without having to be coerced into doing it! But they normally don't, so I go ahead and coerce and smile and hopefully help reinforce that people using wheelchairs that may look scary or strange are still just people, and worthy of being acknowledged.

Holiday Grinches and Public Access

"It seems as though the season has more grinches and scrooges than last year. Anyone notice a significant increase in dirty looks and nasty comments in relationship to your SD?"

I live in a very tourist-rich city (Las Vegas) and we have people visiting from all over the world. Yes, I do see people getting a bit pricklier when they are under stress, and this time of the year, with holiday crowds, their patience may be taxed and I might hear a few more grumbly comments than normal. But normal here is to always expect the

unexpected, since people are from all over the world, and may not know anything about service dogs.

The only really ugly thing that happened here so far was last holiday season, in a restaurant. One diner insisted that I was not blind, and therefore, could not have my dog in the restaurant. The waitress, very young and sweet - tried to explain to him that there are "service dogs" for all sorts of disabilities, not just for people who are blind. But the man refused to listen, told her she was dead wrong and began to complain loudly. Finally the manager came over to him, and reiterated what the waitress had already said - that service dogs of ALL kinds were welcome, and that the law protected the disabled person's rights to have their service dog with them. She also told the man that every service dog who had ever been in the restaurant was better mannered than many children she's waited on.

The waitress was almost in tears, as the man had truly upset this sensitive youngster, who was caught in the middle. I told her I'd be glad to go talk to the man, and to give him a couple of brochures that would assure him of the legality of my having a service dog in a public place, and that I would be kind and patient, no matter what the man said. I told her my skin had gotten pretty thick by now, and that I wouldn't let anything he said upset me. But she was afraid it might turn into a "confrontation" and that it would only become a worse scenario.

But you're right, Jane - during holiday times, people can be under great stress, and their ignorance can get combined with their impatience and fuses can be tripped!

When I hear little nasty comments, I try to use it as an opportunity to respond operantly, and try to educate the person in a positive way. Mostly I succeed, but sometimes people are just in nasty moods, or hate dogs or whatever. But usually, if I just turn around, greet them with a smile, and say something like, "You're right! Pets are not allowed in here. But this is a specially trained service dog, whose work is to keep me independent. Here - let me show you how he picks up trash and puts it in the basket, or how he picks up my keys if I drop them." Usually a simple demo like this - which takes 30 seconds or less, does

the trick. So many people think only guide dogs can be in public places, and have never heard of service dogs. I actually enjoy showing them different things, and giving them handouts so they can learn about how many different types of service dogs there are. Usually, we leave shaking hands and smiling. I try not to let the occasional Scrooge get me down!

Order to Train Service Dog Behaviors

“Is there a specific order in which to teach Service Dog behaviors?”

For instance, to me, a retrieve is a very important behavior. I begin this early, and I don't wait until I have a good stay. I don't see how the two relate, and I also don't wait to train one behavior until I have another behavior under stimulus control. I just shape what I am getting from the dog, let the dog tell me what comes next. Others on this list do it more methodically, and shape only one behavior at a time. I don't. I rather like a "crazy salad", but that's me.

As for teaching in a specific order, I truly don't think that's necessary. Again, I let the dog tell me. But I also think that you should do as much preliminary work on shaping the behaviors for pulling and bracing as early as you want, without putting actual weight on the dog. You can teach the behavior without adding any weight at all, and directions for when the dog will be pulling the chair. You can also shape the resistance pulling, by just adding a bit of restraint when you have the dog in harness, and encouraging the dog to move forward. You don't have to stress your dog at all, or put any stress on the bones, muscles, cartilage. Just shape the behaviors the dog will eventually need.

I do this "crazy salad" approach to training because I've never seen two dogs mature at exactly the same rate. For instance, Cappy is very, very immature for his age. It's not unusual in Papillons at all. They live a

long life, often well into their twenties, and many tend to remain puppies until they are two or three, emotionally. Cappy, now at 20 weeks, is still in the puppy socialization class with little 8-10 week old pups, and does fine. He is also in a beginner's class, and does fine there, too. But he does not have the concentration yet to do any long downs or long sits - he's a virtual pogo stick and we have to shape stillness in very tiny steps. So there is no way I will wait until I get a good stay from Cappy to shape other behaviors. We are working on everything we can, just shaping, shaping, shaping.

We shape the retrieve daily with many objects. I use whatever I have in my purse, from pens to hair curlers to emery boards.

ONE CAVEAT! I goofed at one thing. I didn't get Cappy targeting early enough. Instead, I began shaping a retrieve. Now whenever I hold an object out to him, he expects to put his teeth on it, hold it. Went back to targeting last night and guess what? Predictably, he wants to bite the end of the stick instead of target it. This was dumb, dumb, dumb of me. I didn't follow my own advice, instead, got too excited about getting a retrieve. Now I'll have to try to catch that moment between getting close to the target stick and opening his mouth. That will be much trickier, and I could have saved myself a ton of grief if I had kept up the targeting instead of concentrated on the retrieve.

I am also doing lots of tug exercises. Tug clothes from dryer. Tug bedcovers up, tug jacket sleeves off my arm. Tug open the kitchen cabinet door. Sometimes he gets whopped in the face from pulling too hard, and I have to back up, click confidence again. With the tug shaping, I keep reinforcing my "release" cue. I practice this all the time, even in play. I get him all wound up, growly and excited, then I cue him to release. While playing, I don't click and treat, because the chance to tug again is the biggest reinforcer of all. I just verbally mark the moment with a "YES" when he releases, then let him tug again. It's great fun, and we do speed drills now on fast releases. He also has to go back into a sit before I let him tug again. It's almost on automatic pilot now.

Peek

My dear listfriends,

I just came home from the vet and have been given news that has decimated me. It did not come out of the blue. I knew it might be a possibility, but I was not ready, not at all ready to hear the verdict.

Peek, my soul, my heartbeat - has PRA. It's not been officially diagnosed by the ophthalmologist yet, but my vet said he really has little doubt. And then he wrapped me in his arms and let me blubber all over his white coat for a quarter of an hour. He wept with me, as he also loves this dog, and knows the kind of liberation Peek has given me, as an assistance dog. And he knows that thousands of school children in Tucson know him by name, adore him.

Peek. Oh, God. Peek! Peek who has wrapped his warm tongue around the fingers of children on the oncology unit, allowing them to bury their heads in his hair. Peek, who never bit the elder with Alzheimers during a Pet Therapy visit, though she was squeezing the life from him. Instead, when free, he turned to her, licked her hand. Peek, who keeps me from passing out while trying to bend over to pick things up from the floor, or pull laundry from the dryer. Peek, my dearest love is going blind.

I first noticed about 6 months ago, that Peek was having problems picking up objects in the dark, or dusk. In restaurants, he often would go right past the object he was told to fetch. On dark carpets, he could not find his leash until he sniffed it out. Even then, I knew. I just didn't want to think about it. But I knew.

But, I'm thrilled now, positively elated that Peek will be able to strut his stuff, show what a fantastic service dog he is on Animal Planet. I will treasure that tape forever.

SD Brushup Clubs

I'm thinking more and more about brush up clubs, and what types of things service dog users work on during the meetings.

My only experience with this is very limited: the Handi-Dogs group I trained with has brush up classes, open to certified dogs and dogs in advanced certification classes, who are close to certification.

These classes typically run on a Saturday, are about 2 hours long, and encompass working on many different behaviors.

The class is structured, but not rigid. If one thing does not seem to be working, the instructor has a bag full of other ideas to keep the meeting interesting and moving forward.

Typically, the class is attended by about a dozen teams, and is a mixture of hearing and mobility teams. Some teams come to work on refining specific service tasks, others to refine public access behaviors. Normally, for 1/2 of the session the dogs work as a group, doing recalls amidst distractions, or responding to cues at a distance.

I can remember one day when 12 dogs and handlers were positioned in different places around the room, practicing sits and downs while the instructors and volunteers tried to get the dogs attention, making all sorts of noises and waving hats, dropping clipboards, mewling like cats or even barking at the dogs. Emphasis was on having the handlers remain very attentive to their dogs, reinforcing as needed pro-actively.

Also, during the group part of the class, the dogs work on all the basic public obedience positions and behaviors: front, finish, wait at doorways, down at a distance, waiting with another handler while the owner leaves the room, fetching leashes, giving the owner attention, etc.

Sumptuous treats are left on the floor, on low tables and chairs, and each team walks their dogs by, cueing them to "leave it."

Also as a group the instructor may play a few games, like "musical chairs" where the dog who responds the quickest to any given cue when the music stops is the winner. Or the board game "My Dog Can Do That!" Every session the instructor has a different type of exercise or game to try, and this keeps all of us on the ball.

After the first hour, the handlers move into groups, and those working on refining mobility service dog tasks work in like-groups, where the volunteers may set up a type of scenario and send each dog through. For instance, they may set up a simulated store counter, practice with positioning the dog at the cash register, or having the dog handle the money purse, and handle distractions while doing this. Volunteers may push shopping carts close to the dog, limp by on crutches or in wheelchairs, walkers and canes.

Or, they may set up a simulated restaurant, where the dog is cued to do an "under" and "settle" until cued to assist the handler. Food is dropped and the dog is cued to "leave it." Simulated waitors and waitresses try to feed the dog, to pet the dog, to make the dog come to them. Handlers work again to keep their dog's attention, and reinforce that attention.

Other teams may be working on opening and shutting doors, pulling out the laundry, putting trash in a can, etc.

Others may be working outdoors on environmental distractions, such as moving by squirrels, cats, bicycles, skateboards, joggers, heavy traffic.

Meanwhile hearing dogs are busy alerting to known sounds, while ignoring all other sounds - and quite often, there is a real cacaphony!

The dogs again gather as a group and do a bit more distraction training, and this is where it really gets wild. Volunteers are running between the dogs, pushing chairs, pulling toys, bouncing balls,

dropping bedpans - walking over the dogs in down-stays. Every type of distracting toy is brought out, from large gyrating life-sized Santas to wiggling balls hooked to talking raccoon's tails. It's marvelous to see how well the dogs in general do with this high-level of distraction, and how well the gradual exposure to these types of stressors worked to shape confidence when unexpected things happen in the environment.

Is this the type of thing that normally is done at brush up club meetings? I ask because I honestly don't know, and would love to know more about what others are doing in this area. I find these classes to be tremendously helpful, even though I do work daily with my dog to keep his responses sharp. Invariably, we find some area we really need some fine-tuning in, and it helps point out areas where we just need a bit more work.

I have to say that these classes are run by an extraordinary instructor, who is not only a real dog person, but a bright and cheerful people person, who just oozes creative ideas for keeping people interested. I'd love to hear what ideas listmembers come up with for gatherings such as these.

Separation Anxiety in Assistance Dogs

Jane, thank you for that heartfelt sharing. I think it takes tremendous courage to share our fears and areas of weakness, but I also realize it is greeting them in a gentle way. It's acknowledging their presence, as part of our whole selves, but only one part, and a part we can reshape if we choose.

And I think there is much we can learn by acknowledging our fears and looking at them, as Kathleen suggests, as someone else's fears and to imagine finding creative solutions to work with them, and to move past them.

The human animal bond is most intriguing, and I find that I often have the same responses, the same concerns. I too feel discomfort being removed from my animals presence. I cannot even go on a two-week trip if I know my animals are not in my home, being cared for by someone I love and trust.

The thought of putting my animals in a kennel is overwhelming to me. All my fears surface at these times: Will the constant barking reinforce this undesirable behavior in my dogs when they come home? Will they survive okay on kibble instead of BARF?

And the thought of someone else GROOMING my dogs makes me break out in a sweat. I think, "What if they quick the puppy, who now is so relaxed he falls asleep while his nails are being clipped? What if they trigger my soft dog's fear by rougher handling, and he nips at them?"

I have a thousand fears greeting me with each decision to place my dogs in a kennel or take them to a groomer. And I suspect you and I are not the only folks who go through a bit of agony when we are separated from our animals.

Yet, like you, I realize I must give them wings as well as roots, and give them opportunities to be separated from me, and to be with strangers. Laura is constantly asking me to allow Cappy to spend the night, but I worry. I KNOW he needs the experience, but I think, "What if he forgets and potties in their house on the carpet? What if...what if...what if..? "

I think your post has prompted me to action. I need to get the pup used to being with other people more, which I don't think will be at all stressful for him, as he so far displays no separation anxiety, and will literally go to anyone or play with any other animal happily for hours. Yet, in our home, he's velcroed to me all the time. Still, he needs reinforcement in being away from both Tim and I, so I have to address this very soon. He does fine when I am gone for a week at a time, and he's home with Tim.

To bring this into our discussion, what are some ways we can help our dogs to become comfortable when we are not there? What plans have people followed to teach their dogs to accept being without their human partners? Do you do "sleep overs" with friends? Allow neighbors to walk the dog or take them for a few hours while you are away? I'm looking for ideas here!

Great sharing, Jane.

Service DEMON in Training

I'd forgotten. It always happens. The sweet, fluffy, tender lovin' pup hits adolescence with sledgehammer force, turning overnight from angel to demon.

I knew that like giving birth to a human baby, one forgets the pain when the child arrives. And like human moms, the intensity of the birthing experience is forgotten until the next time it comes around.

Harry Potter, the happy, snuggly, friendly service dog hopeful, has morphed into The Demon Spawn. Chew sticks lay on the floor abandoned, while The Demon attacks the wallboard like a gourmand, savoring the spicy flavor of liberal drenching with Bitter Apple spray.

Falling leaves, shadows, doorbell rings on tv, someone across the street 500 feet away - all are triggers for reactivity now, in spite of having spent months out in public daily so he could get used to everything in a constantly changing environment.

The exercise walks/runs on the riverwalks are far more challenging when the pup insists on leading the other dogs by their leashes, tails, ear fringe.

Only Peek, who tolerates none of that obnoxious puppy stuff, can be exercised with The Demon Spawn now - and the pup has learned to respect the grumbly old man's corrections when he oversteps Peek's patience levels.

In stores, going down the same aisles we have been going down daily for months, items that catch his eye are instant monsters. The soft, snuggly stuffed doll. The toaster, the shampoo bottle, all elicit hyper-focus and occasional bouts of rapidfire barking.

The pup who once was happiest cantering at my side in the powerchair, now wants to be the lead sled dog, running out front trying to beat the chair. And though he's only 5 months old, and the chair is the fastest one made, traveling easily at nearly 12 miles per hour, the pup CAN beat the chair, and relishes each attempt.

Grooming sessions have turned from relaxing bonding times to marathons of manic play, as the pup finds the brush, clippers, anti-static spray, etc. as great teething objets and tug games.

Likewise, getting dressed with the Demon in attendance is an exercise in folly: stockings are stretched all the way across the room, pant legs pulled off as soon as they are put on, and t-shirt hems stretched out wide enough to fit a pregnant Sumo Wrestler.

Yes, I know management is paramount at this stage of growth, and that x-pens and crates work wonders for "chill out" time. And I do use them. And I try to be proactive, vigilant, watchful, responsible with dog management. But I slip.

I also let down my guard, when he reverts back to the sweet, sensible puppy I once knew. And of course, as soon as I let my guard down one silly little millimeter, out flies the demon in disguise.

I rolled into the studio this morning to do a very quick headline in calligraphy, and let the pup go in with me. Big mistake. I gave him a stuffed kong, put him in the corner, and tried to watch him from my peripheral vision. It appeared that the demon had gone into hiding,

and the sweet Harry Potter, magical wizard of love, had come back to quietly enjoy bonding time with mom.

But as I forget to be on constant peripheral vision watch, getting more involved with my project, I realize Harry is no longer in his spot on the settle mat. I roll into the living room quickly, and see a garbage dump. Jewelry pieces and unraveled rolls of ribbon litter the floor.

Packing styrofoam peanuts are broken up and strewn from wall to wall. The water bowl from the kitchen has been dragged into the living room, and overturned onto 3 packages of colorful tissue paper, whose colors have now run into the carpeting. A package of jewelry cup tops in a plastic bag lie in the mess, and a couple of t-shirt blanks are sopping up the rug water.

And there's the pup, on top of the cat, humping away to beat the band.

Last night in bed, hubby Tim is holding a chew stick for Harry, as Harry snuggles in the covers between us. Harry manically chews the stick, as if he hasn't eaten in a week, and I hear Tim say, "Oh, Harry Potter. Won't you come back soon?"

This was shortly after Harry took a running leap from the floor, jumped 2 feet over the top of the bed, and came to rest on Tim's most tender parts, using them as a kick off board to pounce on Cappy, who was rudely awakened from a peaceful sleep.

So, here I sit, trying to decide whether I spend the next hour cleaning the living room up, or chuck it all, close the door behind me and take Potter out for a nice long walk, run, sniff and field trip.

I know Harry will survive adolescence, and that he'll move through this hilariously obnoxious, but entertaining phase, but I'm not taking bets on whether his human family will survive it as well.

Service Dog Demos

Think simple. Trust me on this - the simplest behaviors are **VERY** impressive for non-service dog people. If your dog sits and downs when you ask, those simple behaviors are very impressive. If your dog will target, then that's a super demo, though to most of us, too simple to consider flashy enough for a demo. But think about it - most people who are in your audience are lucky if they can get their dog to sit after asking it three times and using a food lure!

You can show how targeting is used to move a dog around from place to place, as if its nose was magnetized to the target - so that you don't have to lure directly with food. You can show how you teach a dog to target in a straight line, to move backwards, to do a circle in each direction, and to move into a sit from a stand. Very simple stuff, but will show the audience how the clicker is used in training, and show how you build some important behaviors for service work.

You can explain that service dogs need to learn to walk behind wheelchairs, and behind people in narrow corridors or in crowds, and you can demo how targeting is used to get this behavior. Simple, easy, but **IMPRESSIVE** to an audience who never would have thought about how you teach dogs to change from one position to another. You can explain that for people using wheelchairs, dogs are taught to use all four sides around the chair, and again, you can just sit in a regular chair and show targeting from each side, the front, and how to move the dog to the rear.

"Leave it" is good, especially if your dog will automatically look at you and ignore **FOOD**. If your dog has a solid "leave it," it's a **GREAT** demo to show how your dog ignores food when you present it with the "leave it" cue, and then to put treats around the floor where the dog is lying, or put them on the dog's legs lined up from the toes all the way up. You can also give the "leave it" cue and then pelt your dog with soft treats, and that will really impress the audience. You then use that demo to explain about service dogs being taught to ignore food on the floor in restaurants, malls, on sidewalks, etc.

If your dog has a really solid hold, you may be able to demo having the dog hold a large piece of food. Hot Dogs are the obvious choice, but can be iffy if you haven't practiced food retrievals/holds very much. An easier and almost equally dramatic food item to demo with is a thin baguette of bread. Let it sit for a couple days so it's really crusty and hard on the outside, and it is a very good item to use. It's not usually a super high-value food item for a dog either, so it would be a lot less tempting than a hotdog.

Basically, you're showing that your dog is trained to hold any item you give him to hold - whether it's a non-edible or edible object. The audience will drool.

The socks, shoes and jacket tug is excellent, and will ge a terrific demo! Having a table set up with a volunteer sitting or standing on the other side of the table would be good for your credit card handling demo.

If your dog will take items from one person to another, that's another great and easy demo.

The light switch would work very well, if you have enough time to just mount it on a board with a tiny little light it can activate. OCAD listmember "Not-so-grumpy-old Fred Cisin" could give you very easy-to-do instructions on making a demo lightswitch board quickly - he's super at that!

OR - even easier, you can find the lightswitches in the room and just cue the dog to go turn the light off and on, so the light in the room is activated. VERY dramatic!

One demo the audience always loves is when a dog can pick up things and put them in a trash basket. If your dog is reliable in this behavior, it's an excellent one to add to a demo.

For retrievals, vary the objects in color, texture and size so the objects are easily visible at a distance. Bring everyday items your dog might have to pick up that people could instantly identify - toothbrush, pill

bottle (put some coins or stones in it so it will make noise!), hair brush, comb, Kleenex, toilet paper roll, fork, spoon, plastic container, plastic baggie with some items in it, a toy cell phone, an old TV remote control, a magazine (tape the open edge in two places so it doesn't fall apart when picked up), a book, a CD case, etc.

Use bright colors for soft objects - such as a red or blue wash cloth, a colorful pot holder, etc.

You can simulate putting clothes into and taking clothes out of a dryer by using an empty cardboard box with a big hole in the side, and taping it to the floor - then giving the dog objects to push into the hole and reach into it and onto the floor and get the items inside it. It would simulate a front-loading washer. You can use a tall trash - if it's well stabilized - to simulate a top-loader.

You can get two students to volunteer to stand on each side of the dog and try to get the dog's attention while you cue the dog to give you attention and ignore the distractions.

If your dog will tug open a door, you could bring a leash or door opener of some type and show how the dog does that.

Definitely use your "under" cue to demo, and if the dog knows to go to a specific mat or rug, be sure to include that as well.

Use every behavior in your dog's repertoire - they don't have to be flashy, only reliable enough that when you give the cue, you get the behavior. What you consider "nothing special" is going to look VERY impressive to your public audience.

Just putting your dog in a "sit" or "down" and walking around him, walking away from him, walking out of sight and coming back while the dog remains in that cued position - is VERRRRRY impressive!

You'll have a blast, and everything you show will be impressive to your audience. You can't lose! Be sure to leave ample time for questions and answers. The most often asked questions I have gotten over the years in

demos are: "What is your dog's name?" "What kind of treats are you using?" "How old is your dog?" You'd think the questions would be much tougher, but those are the questions that consistently come up every single demo - the big three!

The most unusual question I ever got was from a second-grader in a school demo, and he asked me if my dog helped me to go to the bathroom. It may have been the only question I didn't have a quick response for, ever - but you wouldn't believe the images that filtered through my mind upon getting that question. We won't go there. Hahhh!

Just know that the audience **LOVES** to ask questions, so be sure to leave enough time for that, not just 5 minutes. I normally allow for 15 minutes of questions and answers, whether with adults or children. Kids love to line up and come and greet your dog, and you can use this as a lesson in proper greeting of a service dog, showing the child how you prefer the dog to be petted - on the chest, or holding out their hand for a paw, whatever. They all want to do it at once, so if there are a lot of kids in the audience, be sure to lay out the ground rules clearly: single file, one child at a time greeting the dog, not a whole group, and that they may **NOT** ask the dog to do anything unless you tell them specifically what they may ask the dog to do. They all seem to want to do that, and if you're not clear on those rules, they will be commanding your dog to sit, down, etc.

Good luck!! You'll have a blast. They will loooooove you!!!

Sponsorship

Here is a compilation of old posts I've written about sponsorship. There is no "right way" or "one way" to do it. These are just ideas to consider, and one way to approach it.

Obtaining sponsorship really is an area where we can use our individual creativity and resources. How one presents sponsorship opportunities really depends on that person's particular style of communication, and what that person is most comfortable with.

Here's a few general guidelines/ideas that may help:

First, develop a plan. Think of the "Five I's": Identify, Investigate, Inform, Involve, and Invite.

IDENTIFY: find the organizations/individuals you feel may be interested in sponsorship. Those closest to you may be the best place to start: local small businesses you frequent, your church group, family, friends, civic organizations. Don't be concerned at first if they **WILL** sponsor you, only that they are potential sponsors.

INVESTIGATE: Find out all you can about that business or group. What other things in the community do they invest in? Where is their focus? Do they support sports teams, such as Little League or a bowling league? Do they get involved in community events? Keeping a file on each larger prospective sponsor can really help to shape and fashion the contact letter just for them.

INFORM: Inform your prospects about what a service dog does for a person with a disability, and also inform them of how you can use your service dog to give back to the community in some way. Share your passion for giving back to the community, and focus on what you have to offer. Give each donor a strategy. Let your donors know how you intend to use their investment of time/money and the results you are seeking.

INVOLVE: Pay attention to the needs of the prospects to become involved, to be recognized, and to feel as though they are making a difference. Show how they are making an investment in the future well-being of your life, your dog's life, and in the community. Give each donor your passion. Your personal investment and commitment will serve as a strong motivator.

Share anecdotes of ways your service dog has touched other's lives. Perhaps you also do therapy work on the side, sharing your dog with others. Share a little story about someone whose life was touched by your dog's presence.

Perhaps you stopped to chat with an elder or a child in a mall, and they left feeling enriched by that experience. Share that.

Perhaps you did a demo at a school and the children were rapt with attention and enthusiastic about learning about service dogs. Share that too! Share anything that was a meaningful moment to you, where you left that encounter feeling good about it.

Perhaps you met someone who was afraid of dogs, but through your patience and your dog's exemplary behaviors, you were able to help lessen that person's fears of interaction with a dog. Share that! We are all storytellers, with wonderful experiences to share. Once you start jotting down all these wonderful little stories, you'll be surprised at how extensive the list quickly becomes.

When we share our success stories, we allow people to connect with their hearts, their intellect, their desire to become involved and also make a difference in the world. Give each donor a challenge. Approach those first who can be counted on to respond to your appeal for a sponsorship.

Help them to make their own commitments and then use these role models to influence others to jump on board. The initiators will feel the reward of their own gift and seeing their example multiply.

INVITE: Invite the prospective sponsors to invest in the your future and the community's future, by becoming a sponsor.

Follow Up: Give each donor good stewardship. Thank your donors over and over again. Use their money as intended and show that you are protecting and managing the investment they have made in your

organization. Show your donors that they can believe in you and that you deserve their trust.

This can be as simple as follow-up letters, outlining the skills you are learning, the progress your dog is making, and always, if possible, sharing of a story or two that helps the sponsor personally connect. It can be a picture of the team they are sponsoring for their church or business wall, or a simple computer-generated Sponsorship Award they can put up to show their commitment to their community, and especially to people with disabilities who want to participate fully in life. Sources for

Sponsorship: Consider grade schools as possible resources. One elementary school in Texas raised \$1,000 to sponsor a guide dog in training, which they turned into a special community service project with lessons in geography, art, language, and more.

Consider that sponsors can come from anywhere: obvious places: family, friends, co-workers, members of your faith community, neighbors. And from not-so-obvious places: everyone in your address book, your doctors, your hairdresser, your auto mechanic. Parents of your children's friends, your college roommates, the person who does your nails. Strangers who will stop at your car wash, bake sale, garage sale, information table in front of the grocery store. Local businesses and civic groups.

Asking for Sponsorship:

Write a letter, and make it compelling. Tell them who you are, what your goals are, why you are seeking sponsorship, what your dog does or will do for you, what you hope to achieve, and profile yourself as a team, sharing goals, and especially, plans for doing community outreach - sponsors like to know you plan to "give back" to the community in some way.

This then becomes not just a tool for fundraising, but also an educational outreach, helping the potential sponsor learn more about service dogs.

If you trained through a specific organization, you'll want to include a brochure and contact number as well. I

t also won't hurt to include some of the statistics of how much it costs to train and to maintain a service dog. They are available on most every major program's website. Many people have no clue as to how much money it costs to train and maintain a service dog. This will likely be eye opening to them.

Do a separate page with a photo-montage, showing either your service dog in training, or your service dog in action. Compelling action shots include anything with children (one example is showing your dog sitting nicely and greeting a toddler while you facilitate the interaction), and any tasks your dog may do or is working on. For instance, even if your dog doesn't know how to do laundry yet, you can teach him to do a paws up on the dryer door and snap a picture of him there with a load full of clothing.

If your dog already opens the cupboard doors, this is a great picture to get in your kitchen. If your dog can tug off your jacket, gloves or socks, get a picture of it: it's very graphic and action oriented. If your dog flushes the toilet, for sure get that one on film - it impresses the heck out of most everyone, even if it is one of the easiest behaviors to teach. If your dog is just a puppy learning basic obedience, get pictures of him in a sit and down position, with you in the picture offering guidance. If you know your physician well, you can get a shot of the dog greeting the physician with a paw shake, and it's a great shot, especially if your physician wears one of those white coats.

Get pictures of your dog in traffic, in stores, or in restaurants, especially lying quietly on a mat under the table. If your dog can do a retrieval already, get a shot of the dog retrieving something large and colorful, such as a red hat or something that will really show up in the photo vividly. Remember, people want to sponsor you because you give them something they can connect to. You don't have to be a "perfect" team, only a compelling and enthusiastic one. And most of all, a team with a vision to give something back to the community.

Choose the best of all your photos, and then present a page or two with 4-6 photos per 8X11 sheet, which you can run off on your computer. Put short explanations under each photo, such as "Fido activating elevator buttons" or "Fido learning to do laundry" or "Fido makes the bed" or "Fido greets 2nd grade class."

In your letter, which should be limited to two pages, max, you can add on a page of achievements if you and your dog have done outreach programs at schools, libraries, hospitals, etc. Mention any awards, and if you have any newspaper articles about you and your dog, be sure to make copies to include as well. If you have a short video (7-10 minutes max) you can also include this in your presentation package for certain businesses/civic groups who may be exceptionally good fundraising targets. If you have footage of you and your dog working, get someone with a GO video to edit it and make you inexpensive copies. If you don't have footage, get a friend with a video camera to tape you doing as many things as possible with your dog, then have someone with a GO video do the editing and make you the copies.

Get a bunch of folders from the office supply and start stuffing! Be sure to get the one that has slots cut into the pockets so you can add your business card. If you don't have a business card, make them up on your computer and print them out. Send out the packets or the letters alone (with photo sheets!) to prospective sponsors, if you aren't comfortable taking packets in to the business/group in person. But if you do take them in person to potential sponsors, just briefly introduce yourself and your SD or SDIT, and leave the brochure with them.

Even if they say, "No, we're not interested" - leave it anyway. There is always a chance after reading your compelling presentation that they may change their minds and decide to become a sponsor.

Once you have a few sponsors, follow up with delivery of a framed picture of you and your dog, with a certificate you have made up on your computer about the sponsorship. These are inexpensive ways the sponsor can share their support of your team with their clients, patients and customers.

Give monthly updates and progress reports to keep interest high: these need not be fancy. Just a short summary and perhaps a picture of something compelling the dog is now learning to do. Carry a brochure about service dogs with you all the time and hand them out liberally when chatting with people at malls, etc. At the bottom of the flyer or brochure, put information on how **THEY** can help sponsor a service dog team, and put in your contact information.

If the initial outlay for NICE paper, folders, pictures, videos is too costly, start with your address book and send out a flyer to everyone about your project, and give a PayPal address or your home address so people can send donations in to get you started. Just 10 friends sending \$10 can get you most of the supplies you need to do the project professionally and compellingly.

NOTE: if you do not already have a dog, but are seeking funds to **GET** a dog, be sure to instead include brochures from the organization you are working with, and also outline the your needs and how the dog will be trained to help you in everyday life.

Outline the costs involved in traveling to get your dog, for the training time you must be there, for hotel and food, ground transportation, equipment, etc. Plus, also outline costs on maintaining a service dog in top condition.

If you have a psychiatric disability, and are not comfortable disclosing details, tip-toe between the raindrops. You can explain you are training or have a "medical assistance dog" who alerts and responds to medical or neurological conditions. Be creative!

Some businesses/groups may prefer to just make a one-time donation to help sponsor your expenses, or may send you a monthly or quarterly amount, as determined by you and the donor. Yet others may be set up as an 'emergency' financial resource for a disclosed or non-disclosed amount, should you find yourself in a situation that calls for immediate availability of funds.

Sponsorship doesn't need to be limited to businesses, civic groups or religious groups: you can have a special family/friends sponsorship, where instead of birthday and holiday gifts, those who would normally give you gifts could instead put an amount of money into a bank account set aside for SD medical emergencies, for training classes, equipment, etc.

You can even make it easy for those who are online by setting up a PayPal account so they can just transfer funds immediately. (www.paypal.com) Sponsors basically invest in your maintenance and future needs as a service dog team leader, and how you set up the particular sponsorship is really open to creativity. There is no "right" way, only ways that work best for all parties concerned.

Training for Movie Theatres

Congratulations, Jane, on a most successful movie field trip! You sure set your little one up for success. Brava! In contrast, I hope you'll enjoy the story of my uh - less than stellar movie field trip.

Before I washed him out of service dog training, my young Harry Potter went to his first movie at 4 months of age also. I thought I'd set him up for success, because we'd practiced the quiet settle's during TV movies, and I thought it would be duck soup, as it was with my other dogs.

My choice of movie was really poor: I chose to go see "Harry Potter" at a weekday matinee, where I knew there would be few people in attendance.

That was only the first of my mistakes.

We get into the theatre, and settle into the wheelchair seating without a problem. He was quiet, well mannered, and walked on a loose leash,

then settled on his rug next to my chair. I looped the leash over my wheelchair brake, and treated him during the main title, to be sure he would remain quiet and in a down-stay. Then I really got into the movie. I kept watching him the first 15 minutes to make sure he was lying quietly at my side, and he was fast asleep.

Then I forgot about him, assuming that if he got up, I'd "feel" the tug on the leash and see movement from my peripheral vision.

About a half hour into the movie, one of the characters shouts, "It's Harry Potter!" and my Harry Potter wakes, up, gives a tiny woof and looks around to see who's calling his name. I should have read the writing on the wall, and exited at that point, but as I mentioned, I was really into the movie and busy stuffing popcorn in my face.

Each time someone on the screen hollered "Harry!", my Harry would give a tiny, nearly silent woof and look up. Since he didn't get up, I wasn't too worried. Only I could hear the tiny woof - it was almost inaudible, like a whisper.

Finally he stopped reacting to "Harry Potter" being hollered on the screen, and I thought we were through the tough part. I forgot Harry was there, completely, something I normally NEVER do with a dog in training. But I do have my inattentive moments, no matter how vigilant I try to be.

As I finish up my popcorn and coke, the movie comes to the part where the kids are in the dungeon, open the door, and there's "Fluffy," the three headed dog barking and growling. From a distance away, I hear, "Woof!" and wonder if someone else has a dog in the theatre. A few people chuckle, and I chuckle with them, glad to know the little guy at my side is being so silent.

Soon, I hear a louder, "Woof! Woof!" and as the kids scream, "Run, Harry!" I hear a much louder, "WOOF WOOF WOOF! from down front.

There's no mistaking that doggie voice, and horrified, I look down to see the dog and leash are gone. I peer out over the heads of the other moviegoers, and there, down in the front row aisle, is a little black and white Papillon lying in the middle of the aisle next to the front row seats, intently watching the screen, plume tail wiggling over his back, woofing each time his name is called or Fluffy comes on the screen.

Of course, I'm beating myself with mental cat-o-nine-tails, and realizing I've just totally breached all protocols for service dog training. I have to get my dog, but I can't call him and bring even more attention, nor can I roll down the aisle in my powerchair to get him. So I slide out of my chair, crawl down the aisle on my belly, and finally make it to Harry Potter who give me a quick slurp on the cheek and goes back to looking at the screen. I grab the leash and crawl back up the aisle and hope I can exit the theatre before anyone sees me. Yeah, right, as if a legless lady crawling up the aisle with a dog's leash in her teeth, and dog trotting behind her won't attract attention....<G>

And that's the saga of how NOT to do a dog training field trip!

Understanding Zoo Restrictions on Service Dogs

I have been to many zoos with and without my service dog. The times I kept my dog with me all the time were at smaller zoos, set up so that the public viewing area had a visual barrier (such as stone or thick wood) up to waist high to a human.

The real enlightenment about why many zoos can and do enforce the requirement that the A-dog and human be separated during specific exhibits, and why this is realistic, comes from my experience at the San Diego Zoo during a training Expo, where the faculty was invited to go 'behind the scenes' to see how the animals were housed, how they were operantly trained, and how they were handled by all staff members.

I find both ethology and behavior fascinating, and wanted that opportunity to take this wonderful opportunity to see an excellent zoo from the inside. I chose not to take my service dog, though I was told that there would always be an experienced dog handler to hold or secure my dog while I was viewing a particular exhibit, and that we could be reunited as soon as my viewing of that exhibit was done. Service dogs were welcomed in all public walkway areas.

As we were taken back to the living quarters of the large cats, I watched each cat eye and follow me in my wheelchair, never taking their eyes off of me, and moving with me wherever I rolled. Dogs were ignored: each cat had been raised with a dog, and that dog was their "buddy" and life mate. But the wheelchair became an obvious object of great stress to the cats. The handlers explained that this also occurs with strollers, walkers, carts and wagons.

At that Zoo, many of the large cats (and other animals) are taken out daily for walks around the park, both before the public enters and in some cases, during public hours. The handler of the animal was only one part of the exercise team. Another handler went ahead to scout out any possible stress inducers, including visitors in wheelchairs and parents whose children were in strollers. The scout handlers would then explain that one of the large cats would soon be walking by, and the visitors were instructed to stop all movement of the wheelchairs, strollers, walkers and to remain still until the cat was out of sight again.

Having seen the cats "track" me in my chair, I could well understand how wheelchairs, strollers, walkers and carts could trigger a prey-tracking response.

Also interesting, the San Diego Zoo has several very large open bird exhibits. Some of the animals they walk daily are seen as prey seeking animals to the birds (and I'm sure some other animals as well - I just can't remember which ones well enough to mention them), and the birds will go into a flying, sqwalking frenzy when the cats or other prey animals came by their cages.

The cat handlers explained that they take this into account each time an animal is taken for a walk around the zoo premises: they bypass those exhibits where other animals would be unduly stressed by the presence of one of the animals they were exercising.

I find it very hard to fault this practice, since the San Diego Zoo made it clear that their commitment was to the welfare - physical, mental and emotional - of the animals housed there.

I do not see this as discrimination against people with disabilities paired with a service dog. I see it as a compassionate practice, one that puts the health and welfare of some species ahead of anything else. How on earth would I feel if I somehow managed to battle my way successfully into a zoo containing animals who caused fear and stress in the animals that lived there? My ethics and respect for animals would not allow me to participate in demands for equal access in such situations. I totally understand the need for logic and compassion for the animals in the zoo, first and foremost.



PUBLIC ACCESS

OC and Changing Attitudinal Access Barriers: Part 1

I don't know how many times a store manager has come up to me with stories of how people take advantage of the law to bring their pet dogs

in, how they piddle and grab merchandise from the shelves and endanger customers who could get entangled in the long Flexi leashes.

This is something I'm sure most of us have heard from store managers at one time or another. My interest in this conversation is mainly in how we can apply the principles of OC to change attitudinal barriers we may encounter.

When managers stop to tell me stories like this, I consider it part of my operant education to become more observant and savvy at reading the body language in their approach. We have all been learning the necessity, value & insight in reading canine body language - especially stress signals - but most of us have been learning how to interpret the human counterparts since we were young children.

We know that an adult human approaching us with a stiffened posture, furrowed brow, shoulders back and in confrontational stance, arms stiffened and hands loosely balled into fists - means that person is not happy about something, and we're soon to hear about it.

Yes, when I was 10 and rode my horse right across a newly planted cornfield, one look told me what was on Farmer Carpenter's mind when he strode up to our house later that day! I already knew about "consequences" and I knew I'd be fixing all those broken corn shoots, helping feed and muck out the cow and pig buildings for days to come. There are times a "whoopin'" was something I longed to have instead of "consequences" that put me in the place of the person I'd just wronged, where I had no choice but to totally understand what I'd done from that other person's perspective.

Same with store managers approaching me, assuming that I'm trying to sneak in an untrained pet.

Phase One of Operant Responding: The first thing I'd do is accidentally drop my keys, then cue my dog to pick them up, rise up on his back legs, front legs balancing on my knees in the wheelchair, and hold the keys securely while I fumble to take it from his mouth. I see

the manager from my peripheral vision, and I hold up one hand in the international "halt" signal - palm facing the person. I say, "Just a second and I'll be right with you. My service dog has to complete his task of fetching what I just dropped, first."

Then I cue my dog with the slight flip of my left hand to go back into "finish" or "heel" position, which includes a sit. I look up at the manager, say, "I'm sorry to make you wait, but once a service dog has been instructed to do a job, my first responsibility is to allow the dog to finish the task. Thanks for your patience!"

This short episode normally takes away about 1/2 of the stress signals from the manager's body, and while my dog sits quietly at the side of my wheelchair, I give the manager eye contact and my full attention.

Invariably, the manager will just ask, "Is THAT a service dog?" and I'll be able to answer with **Phase Two of operant responding**: "Why, yes, he is. And thank you for asking. I know it must be such a difficult job for you to have to deal with people who try to sneak in pets, so you've made our lives easier by stopping to check to see if this little 12 pound dog is indeed a service dog. I now know that while shopping I'm in your store, I won't have to worry about an untrained pet barking at or snapping at my service dog. Thank you for that peace of mind!"

If I don't see a total reduction of stress signals, then I launch into **Phase Three of operant responding**: I say, "Oh, excuse me a sec...I'm starting to get a bit overheated, and need to get this jacket off. I fan at my face as I cue with my left hand for my dog to tug on the sleeve and begin pulling my jacket off. When finished, and he does another paws-up on my legs with the jacket in his mouth - I again thank the manager for taking the time to check on us. By that time, he's seen my dog in action, he's seen my dog's clean, easily identifiable SD vest, and conflict has been avoided.

Dog and pony show - beneath me!

I've heard this a lot, so I'm no longer aroused emotionally when some folks in the SD-using people accuse me (rightfully!) of doing this. It's true. I don't mind admitting to the truth. If a little dog and pony show helps to educate someone in a way that allows that person to "keep face," then it's done its job. It's allowed me to educate someone painlessly, allowed the manager and other shoppers to see a "real" service dog at work, and hopefully will help the next person with a disability who enters be welcomed.

I now have one less attitudinal barrier in front of me, and at that point I can move into **Phase Four of operant responding** - the recognition, thanking and follow-up educating: "I really do appreciate that you check all animals coming into your store to be certain they are service animals, and to thank you, I have some pamphlets that can make your job easier. Here's a stack of handouts that include the laws about people with disabilities and their service animals, and on the back is a nice Q & A about service dog etiquette. I think this may be something you could hand out to those who do try to sneak in their untrained pets, to help educate them and hopefully keep them from trying the same thing again, yet still keep them as valued shoppers - when they leave their pets at home."

Amazing how well this approach works, and also works to reinforce tolerance on my behalf, something that I always need reinforcing. Tolerance and compassion can be tough to keep to the forefront when we are constantly challenged. So, by trying to use some proactive OC ideas, I'm able to keep my own stress level to a minimum, and find that I leave the situation with a smile on my face, unstressed, and have helped an employee in charge of educating his staff - to give out more accurate information, and to know how to approach and talk with a person suspected of impersonating someone with a disability using a service animal.

The whole encounter may have taken 5 minutes of my day, but multiplied by how many minutes and hours of grief that same manager might spend confronting others with legitimate service dogs - it was 5 minutes well spent, and has a bonus of giving me something I

can "click" or "Tag" myself for. I've learned to add up my "tags", and after collecting 5 tags in a day, I treat myself to an ice cream sundae free from caloric guilt. I earned it!

"For the little dogs that mostly sit in the lap of someone in a wheelchair, as Debi has written so beautifully about, the demonstration may be different?"

Thank you for that nice compliment! Well, I work a bit differently with my toy breed dogs. I still consider them dogs, with 4 legs, and capable of walking and working at my side. The only time they are on my lap is when I have to get somewhere ultra quick, or when they are endangered, or when it's too hot for them to stand on pavement. Otherwise, as the song goes, "They got LEGS...and they know how to use 'em!"

Most of the people I know who use small service dogs and also are in chairs do a similar thing. There are exceptions with higher level disabilities, and I do know of one Chihuahua who rides on the handler's lap always (handler lives with quadriplegia), but jumps down to retrieve items as necessary. Truly cool, because the dog was taught to retrieve the pen or pencil, jump on the handler's lap, and then put the pen into the handler's waist pouch. Anyone watching that task would know that dog had specific advanced training to do the task with such accuracy and respond with zero latency to a cued behavior.

I know of several toy breed hearing dogs who also work on the floor, in heel position, unless doing a specific alert. In the organization I trained with, even the hearing dogs had to have a retrieve, so that if the handler accidentally dropped an item and didn't hear it drop, the dog could signal the handler, then retrieve the item. Very handy for anyone with two arms full of groceries trying to get a key in the door!

As for the pros/cons of certification, ADA, state and local laws, I leave that discussion for the Assistance-Dogs @ yahoogroups list, where it's on-topic and there are always many well-educated respondents. On-topic discussion surrounding these topics on OCAD might include how to shape specific behaviors that are included on public access guidelines

such as through ADI or IAADP. Or, how to use OC to deflect confrontations, and to make it easier for the next team, as I've talked about in this post. Other service-dog related discussions not centered on OC are very welcome on the Assistance-Dogs list.

I encourage those of you who wish to discuss these types of questions to join that wonderful list, which is the oldest service dog list in existence, and allows for a full range of questions and discussions on service dog law, equipment, and other topics related to assistance dog use . Here's a link to the home page where you can join: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/assistance-dogs/>

OC and Changing Attitudinal Access Barriers: Part 2

Nearly everything I can remember learning as a child was taught to me in a very clicker-like approach. Learning to build bridges with words was a game my mom taught me to play as a youngster, and she reinforced it at every possible opportunity.

Some things like that are now simply "default behaviors" for me, but the truth is, if you could talk to my husband, you'd find that while I can play that game fine in public, I fail miserably at home with him. There are way too many times I could find things to reinforce in his behaviors, but it's just too easy - and I'll admit, at times, horribly satisfying - to snap back instead of finding an operant way of responding. I will admit I'm a woefully imperfect being, and that those behaviors I'd hoped would be TRUE defaults, are still not fluent in all environments. <G>

How about growing eyes in the back of your head? We could dub you our very own living Picasso painting <G>. Hey, no one can be THAT observant all the time. There will be hits and misses. But it sure does

make you envy certain spider species with eight eyes, doesn't it? Imagine if we could see things from 8 directions at once! Wowie Zowie!

About the best we can do as humans is learn to scan our environment continuously, and observe behaviors of others coming into close proximity. Even then, there will be hits and misses. You can't fault yourself for not being able to see from every angle all the time. What helped me was simply to practice observing the body language and especially the eyes - bodies normally follow the eyes - of humans around you, and then learning to shift that focus back and forth between the public and your dog.

It really is an exercise - and it can be an exhausting one! - but the more you exercise shifting focus between observing the humans' body language and your dog - the better you become at doing it. It is VERY exhausting, though, and like learning any new skill, you'll burn out quickly if you try to do it for long periods of time without resting. But it is a learnable skill, and I know I'm a lot better at it now, after over a decade of being partnered with service dogs.

I now use a larger service dog, so I do understand that the height difference changes many of the dynamics.

I guess I still speak in the "here and now" too much about toy breed service dogs because that's what I've experienced for the longest stretch of time. I'm still learning to adjust to a larger dog, even after three years of being partnered with him. When I dream, I dream of having my Papillon service dog at my side, not my larger Border Collie. Little dogs have just become my own "default", I guess. So forgive me for talking of little service dogs as if this is all in the present, and not in the past.

Yes, larger dogs are easier for people to reach out and pet, you are so right! But little dogs - especially little fluffy dogs who look like stuffed toys, tend to elicit this "cutie coochie coo" response from women of all ages, and it's plum amazing to me how quickly they can sneak up and pet the little dogs. All it takes is a moment of being non-observant. If

I'm paying a cashier, my focus is shifted at that time, and I often miss the petting muggers swooping down.

And here's one that probably rarely happens with larger dogs - I have actually had a lady shopper rush over, and **PICK UP MY DOG** while he was retrieving an item for me! "He just looks so cuddly, I couldn't resist!" Trust me on this, my inner monster was **NOT** thinking clickerly at that moment. I felt it was as rude as the airline passenger who patted me on the head as I crawled up the aisle of the plane to get to the bathroom. I mean, **REALLY!** Times like this test my patience big time. I still stop short of responding in kind with something rude, but trust me that I'm thinking Freddy Krueger or Dexter. An angel, I ain't!

Because little dogs may appear to look less threatening than a larger dog, young children are drawn to them without fear. A toddler passing by with his mom holding one hand can quickly reach out and grab a little dog by the tail or ear before I could even react.

I really thing whatever type of dog we have, there will be those who are inexplicably drawn to having to touch, fondle and otherwise disturb our dogs who are simply trying to do their jobs. With my Border Collie, I find it much easier to handle these types of encounters than it was with my Papillon fluff ball. But as you noted, the size difference does make sneak attacks easier.

I cheat, too. I have an ace up my sleeve with my very fast spinning power wheelchair. If I see several kids coming our way, and they don't respond to the hand signal to "halt!" - I will spin in a circle so fast they can't get to the dog, and can barely see him through the blur.

Great that you're feeling more comfortable handling the unexpected, and finding what approaches will work for you. I just happen to plan with compliments because that's how I was raised, and I found that it miraculously works to make a service dog supporter out of someone who had a really bad attitude about service dogs. It's the kind of challenge I thrive on, and it's a way to exercise my brain. The older I get, the more difficult it is to respond quickly. Practicing this becomes

my way of keeping myself mentally alert, something I never thought about needing back when I was young and healthy.

I don't expect anyone else to find it necessary to respond in the ways I do - I just share what has worked for me with the hopes that perhaps someday, someone will find it a useful tool in some encounter. And perhaps, it becomes more important to me with each passing year, because I'm physically able to do less and less with each passing year, and I'm determined that no matter what I lose in physical ability, I can still practice the tenets of clicker training/tag teaching with what I have left: a brain that has not quite turned to mush yet!

We all develop communication styles that work for us individually. I have no doubt that with each passing year, you will be able to look back and reflect upon just how **GOOD** you've gotten at handling these types of situations. And when you do, don't forget to click yourself for all that progress!

I do think it's a neat exercise to practice, for those who are interested in learning how clicker training can work in human-human communications. There's an old essay I wrote a gazillion years ago with several stories of different types of access denials or unwanted attention (one child was determined to **KICK** my dog!), and how I was able to use clicker knowledge to change the situation around. It's in the shared files section of the **OCAD** website.

Heck, I may not be good for much of anything anymore, but I still love to tell stories!

Overcoming Public Access Opposition

I certainly agree with those of you who have posted about carrying confidence on your shoulder as helping with access problems. I do remember when I first began using a SD in public, I braced mentally

each time I entered a new place - expecting a problem, and preparing myself mentally for it. I'm sure my body language spoke volumes, as my fear was palpable. But in time, confidence in my rights to use a service dog and my dog's ability to act professionally - wiped out the fears and restored them with confidence.

For a decade, I used a very non-traditional breed (Papillon) as my SD, and I expected to be questioned more often because of this. Strangely enough, with time and confidence - I was rarely challenged, certainly no more than I am now, using a more traditional- appearing service dog.

By "challenge," I don't mean refusal - I just mean being stopped and asked if my dog is a service dog. This no longer makes my palms sweat. Instead, it gives me an opportunity to **THANK** the person who asked. I'll often respond with something like, "Why, yes, he is a service dog, specially trained to help me with my disabilities. I'm so glad you took the time to stop and ask, because the last thing I want to encounter in a store or restaurant is a pet dog who has not been trained to act appropriately in public. Keep up the good work, and thanks again for helping keep us safe from people attempting to pass off untrained pets as service dogs."

Perhaps it's also because I'm living on the West Coast, which is a lot more laid-back than when I lived back east. Life is more casual here, less confrontational in general, less hectic and more relaxed, and we have yet to encounter the kind of rudeness and denial of rights that others have posted about.

The only real confrontations I've ever experienced have been in restaurants in the rural South, and they were diffused by offering the DOJ flyer on service animals and access rights for people with disabilities to be accompanied by a service dog.

Otherwise, I've traveled with my SD to about 25 states across the country (USA) without any real problems, even with my unconventional-looking service dog.

A well-trained, well-mannered dog and a handler with confidence does indeed go a long way to giving a professional appearance all-around.

Please Don't Touch

I like to use the universal "HALT" or "STOP" signal - my palm held up to keep people from coming closer while I say, "WAIT!" That hand signal really stops people in their tracks quickly, and is, in my experience, far faster and more effective than words.

It also allows me to then smile, explain quickly why my dog cannot be petted right now. I may also ask the person who tried to pet my dog if he/she would provide a distraction - try to get my dog's attention while I work to keep my dog's focus on me.

This way, I've allowed them to save face, shown them how difficult it is for a dog to ignore friendly people who mean well, but distract my dog from his work, and get them to be part of the solution.

This whole transaction can take place in 30 seconds, and I'm off, with both of us smiling and no one feeling like a fool for making a mistake.

When I'm really rushed, and don't have time for that 30 seconds of interaction, I still use the "palm up" hand signal, then smile, quickly say, "Sorry, he has to pay attention to me while he's working."

Most of the time, though, I can quickly turn the situation around and get the determined petter to help me in distraction training by having them TRY to coax the dog to come to them, or focus on them. It's all good training for the dog, and it gives the petter some valuable information in a compassionate way.

Plus, it gives me a chance to leave them with a good feeling of having made a mistake into something helpful, and to leave feeling good about the encounter, not embarrassed.

Public Access Issues

I'm partnered now with a 5 year old Border Collie service dog, "Finn." Previous to this dog, with whom I've only been partnered for a year, my partner was a Papillon named "Peek." He's more than a bit old and grey now, probably what I'd look like if I didn't do homage monthly to the image of Lady Clairol. Though retired, Peek still warms my bed at night and at least once a week, accompanies me somewhere in public as a service dog. He just can't handle long days and evening work anymore, as his eyesight is not great, and he's definitely slowing down a bit.

But how strange it is to go from large dog (quit laughing, Cissy, when I call Finn "large!") to a pint sized one, and back again. The smaller dog is a definite advantage in the summer heat here of the Mojave desert, where 110 degree summer days are the norm and the pavement is unbearably hot. Peek can hop up on my lap while get the van opened up, unfold the chair lift. Finn takes much more thought: I have to park somewhere nearby either a small patch of shade or grass and send Finn to do a down-stay in that area until I can get to him.

It saddens me so much to hear of the access problems many of you have in other parts of the country. I wish all of you could take a Vegas vacation to experience how a busy city welcomes service dogs. Only twice in the two years I've lived here have I ever been approached by anyone, and they were by security at major casinos. The guard at each casino came, up, smiled, and asked, "Is that you service dog?" When I responded affirmatively, the guards each smiled and asked if I knew that people using wheelchairs could go to the front of the buffet line.

In the Spring Mountain area, which is all Asian, with some of the most scrumdelicious Asian food of several different countries - the only problems we ever encounter in any restaurant or grocery store is too much attention. Waiters tend to hover, constantly asking me if the dog would like a bowl of broth or water, or a small extra portion of meat for free. It's lovely for the first few times during a meal, but can get old when each conversation started gets interrupted to ask what they can do for the service dog next. I know, tough problem to have, right? <G>

We routinely visit every normal type of business, from video stores to dry cleaners, and have never had any problem whatsoever, outside of normal unsolicited attention - which I'll take any day over a refusal of access. This includes public trans, where all the buses are accessible, and service dogs always welcome and treated respectfully, whether they are large or pint-sized.

This is actually a great town in which to proof solid public access behaviors, with all the lights, sounds of all kinds, and unexpected fountains geysering up or volcanoes erupting. Some of the shows, such as The Blue Man Group, can be extremely challenging. At the Blue Man Group show, huge rolls of crepe paper were rolled down from the top of the stadium seating, and the audience all raises up their hands and pushes it down the rows, while taking a good portion to decorate their own bodies. It's a total hoot, a nonstop plethora of sound, strange lights, pounding rhythms and stuff falling from the sky. Finn and Peek slept through it. The staff offered earplugs for the dogs, so the sound wouldn't be too painful for them.

The one time we were truly uncomfortable in public was in a casino buffet restaurant, when one of the visitors from another state began to complain loudly that "that woman isn't blind!" and "that dog isn't a blind dog!" I could hardly argue with that, since neither Finn nor I are blind. Repeated attempts by the waitstaff and finally the manager, explaining what a service dog was, and the rights of people with all types of disabilities - not just lack of vision - allowed them to bring their service animals with them everywhere in public - were to no avail. The man kept getting hotter and hotter, angrier and angrier that that "dirty fake blind dog" was eating in the restaurant. He was finally asked

to leave, and the waitress and manager both came up to me and apologised profusely for the rude patron and for my patience. People at the tables around us clapped.

That being the worst thing we have ever experienced, I have to say Las Vegas - along with Tucson, Arizona and Marin County, California - are exceptionally service dog friendly places to visit or live.

Public Access Training

"I want to know how everyone did the public access training. Spot is a good boy, but when we're on a platform with other people, he tends to lose his head a bit."

Could it be that Spot is not quite ready for being around that many people yet, while still being able to focus on you? Could you pull back a bit, and perhaps work with him in shorter sessions, perhaps just 5 minutes at a time with other people around? Then, the majority of the time, work with him where it's less hectic, and where he is not over his threshold?

Since you asked listmembers about how they approach public access training, I'll be glad to share how I approach it. First, I know that it's a big world out there, especially for a little dog. My breed of choice is Papillons, so I'm especially tuned-in to not pushing the envelope too quickly, and not pushing a dog over his threshold.

When I do field trips in public, I first start away from people, but in an area where the dog can see people coming and going. I find grocery store parking lots very good for this, as it allows me to pick an area a bit away from all the activity, where I can click and treat my dog for calmness, curiosity, but not overwhelm him with too much stimuli. Grocery stores have doors that open and shut with a whoosh, shopping carts jangling by, people of all ages coming and going, with children

skipping, screeching and cars loading and unloading, often with very loud hip-hop music that tends to shake the ground and rattle the window panes.

I then work very slowly closer to the activity, always watching my dog's body language for signs that he is beginning to stress, or going over his threshold of confidence. I tend to work right on the edge of his comfort zone, but trying not to cross it until he has shown with his body language and ability to shift focus from the activities and offer it back to me again. In other words, I let the dog tell me what he can handle. I get my cues from the dog's response.

Once my dog is showing calm and relaxed body language, I move a bit closer, and see if I can still get his attention back on me without having to coerce him. If I can't, then I know I've crossed the threshold, and I back off just a bit, to a point where I can see he is able to focus once again.

In this way, I can move toward all the distractions in this environment safely. I may only spend 5 or 10 minutes a day doing this. I never take in-training dogs out for shopping sprees or to do errands. Instead, I make my field trips with the dog completely focused on him - so that I don't miss important body language signals, and don't get distracted. My goal is to offer my dog the most non-stressful and rewarding short experience I can give him. It's not about length of time spent out on a field trip, it's about quality of time. Dogs gain confidence from seeing new things, new people in small doses, where it's not "flooding" the dog, but giving the dog a chance to acclimate to all that is happening around him without being overwhelmed.

I may spend a week just in the parking lot every day, before I ever go up closer to the sidewalk. But once the dog has accepted all the noise and activity, and shows curiosity but no stress, then I park my chair on the sidewalk and allow a minimum amount of meet-and-greet with strangers. But only a short amount - after 5 minutes, I take the dog away for a walk in quieter areas, where he can relieve himself (stress and excitement response) and just relax for a little bit.

Over a couple of weeks time, I have gradually exposed my dog to a lot of new sights, sounds and people. Before I ever take the dog inside a store, he has had lots and lots of time on the sidewalk and seating areas outside the store, to get used to all the stimuli. Then, when I finally do take the dog inside the store, I just go into the foyer, circle around, and go back out the door. That's quite enough for a first excursion inside.

Each day I may go a few feet further, until I can walk around the periphery of the store with him in a totally relaxed manner. I'm totally focused on the dog, watching to see how he handles carts coming close to him, or people darting out from aisles, or dropping cans, or kids hollering. If people come close to my dog, I use the universal palm up hand signal for STOP!, and then explain quickly that my dog is in training - or in school, in the case of interactions with children, so they will not continue to move forward and touch my dog without my being able to monitor the interaction carefully.

Of course, I do want people to interact properly with my dog, but I make it clear that I direct the interactions. No one gets to pet my dog until my dog has been given them "sit" cue, and can offer me eye contact. I will then give the dog the signal to "make friends". I have already instructed children and adults that he can only be petted when he is sitting. If he gets up, then they should ignore the dog, turn away. In this way, I pull people INTO the training experience, and when they have finished, I thank them for helping me in training my dog.

I really think that working purposefully and carefully in small sessions is going to give a dog more confidence than anything else we can possibly do. I have rarely found that long excursions help more than hinder, especially if they are to high-activity environments. This is a LOT of stimuli for a dog to take in, and it takes so much concentration - and it's exhausting! Even short field trips are tiring. It's mental and psychological energy they are expending, and it's our job as trainer and guardians, to be able to watch our dog's body language and adjust our plans to accommodate the dog's needs.

I have seen too many people with in-training dogs take their dogs on errands, while they shop and interact with staff and cashiers. I watch

the dogs, and most often see dogs who are either overwhelmed by what may be happening, or the dogs are sniffing and greeting people inappropriately while the owner doesn't even see what's happening, because the owner is busy talking with a staff person. This really doesn't help the dog at all, and in fact, it's more like "un-training."

For a field trip to be really effective, and for maximum learning potential, I think it's essential that we keep our focus on the dog, and know where the dog's focus is every single moment. We can't do that if we're searching for things we want to buy, or asking for help from a sales assistant, or going through a checkout and getting our wallets out and handling money and credit cards.

The "green" dog is just not ready for this, and in those unsupervised minutes, the dog can be learning things we do not want him to learn - how to sniff people's legs, or flirt with kids, or sniff at things on the floor, or scarf down a dropped french fry. The dog is always learning, even when we think we are not teaching him anything.

Basically, when I go out with my in-training dog, I have nothing else on my plate other than training my dog, and making that experience as rewarding and positive as possible. If I need to shop, I take the dog home and go back out to shop later. I need ALL my faculties to work with a green dog, and I can't be distracted by having another agenda.

I don't know if this will help you with your field trips with Spot, but since you asked us to share how we approach public access training, it's my offering!

Public Manners

Dear Jane,

I can only imagine your horror over the behaviors of the dog and handler in the restaurant!

Does this woman normally have difficulties with what is and isn't appropriate in public places?

I'm just wondering if there isn't some operant way you could set her up for success and help her learn to be a responsible and well mannered team player.

I'm wondering about the possibility of doing a "public manners" session with the club members participating, and simulating proper and improper responses and reinforcements, in a way that would allow her to save face and not feel it was all about her and her dog. This might allow her to actually see what she's doing - she may well not be aware it's not something she should do in public. She may not even have thought about what she was doing, and was just doing the same things she'd normally do at home.

I'm reminded of a group I was with once, where the handler wasn't paying attention to the dog while walking through a restaurant, and the dog reached up and licked another diner's plate on the fly. The handler never saw it happen.

Perhaps such a training session could bring out many different types of things we may choose to do at home that are not appropriate in public places, and in a way that everyone could participate and help this woman to see what she obviously doesn't see is not right.

Especially if she's otherwise a valued member of the group, and someone who will be out in public with her dog a lot. Some people are just clueless, and need to learn different manners for different environments. If there was a way you and the others in the group could set her up in a learning environment, so she could learn these lessons and practice more appropriate behaviors - with everyone else doing them too, then she could learn this valuable lesson without having to live through the agony of condemnation.

I'm the sort of person who often makes mistakes, and some of them have been major social gaffes, things I just never realized when I was doing them. I certainly never meant to make a social gaffe, but I did, nonetheless. How grateful I would have been to have someone help me learn the appropriate responses in a way that wasn't hurtful and punitive in nature.

I grew up in a very blue-collar, working class world, and I had a lot to learn about appropriate responses in public. I didn't know, for example, that everyone didn't rub their bread around in the gravy on the plate. Lots of little things like this I had to learn once I got out in the bigger world, but some of those lessons were very painful. I was ignorant, and needed guidance, that's all. When I realized this, I began to question people who did go to nice places, and ask everything I could think about proper behaviors. I took out books from the library.

But still, I remember sitting at a table as a young teen, with a friend's family at a very fancy restaurant the likes of which I'd never been to before - and having the mother turn to me, and say, "That's obnoxious, and if you continue to do that, you'll go sit out in the car until the rest of us who have civilized behaviors are finished dining." 45 years later, it still stings, thinking of how I had to learn that particular lesson.

Is there any way to reach out to this woman in kindness, and help her to learn new responses? Also, to help her with ideas on how to handle inappropriate responses of her dog, and how to respond and anticipate problems before they happen?

Rock Solid Public Access

I had mentioned that:

"Balls and Frisbees can be another difficult area, and if I were testing, a test would include observing the dog ignoring balls thrown and rolled by them, as well as frisbees."

And Jane responded with:

"...but it makes me wonder, then, how they later get the animal to retrieve and pick up things.. or to fetch say the phone?? if the puppy was not allowed to pick up and bring.. ??"

I wasn't advocating not playing ball and frisbee with dogs! What I meant is that when we are preparing for public access, we are also teaching our dogs to ignore things they love while they are in service dog mode, things that may well trip their triggers and elicit an unwanted response.

My dogs all play ball, frisbee, shake and kill toys, and Finn, the new boy in training - adores children. There are always some things with which our dogs will enjoy doing but have to refrain from doing in public, when they are in service dog mode.

I wouldn't think of keeping them from the interactive co-operative games and greetings they enjoy. Some people may pass by a well endowed woman and wonder - quietly, in their own mind, if she is filled with silicone or naturally endowed, but they have learned that walking up to that person and squeezing what protrudes to find their answer - is not acceptable in public.

My dogs love sniffing other dogs' butts, and they would love to sniff the crotches of every human who visits with them. But it's a human world they live in, and they do learn what we find appropriate manners for the human world, even if it's totally accepted in the dog world, don't they?

In the back yard, the house or in a park, when cued "free" from service dog duties, my dogs are like any other dog, enjoying a wide variety of things that have little to do with being a service dog. They may be wild

for balls or frisbees in the appropriate environment when released from duty. But they have come to understand that playing these games isn't something that's going to happen when they are in service dog mode, no matter how much they might desire to go "off duty" and play at that moment.

Your question is really a thoughtful one, because it appears to be asking, "Doesn't a dog need to play retrieve and fetch balls in puppyhood in order to have a solid working retrieve later in life?"

This is such a great question, because many trainers strongly believe a good play retrieve is a necessity in getting a solid working retrieve down the road; other trainers believe that retrieving can be taught to animals who have never retrieved, from many different species. There are strong supporting data for the latter belief, and copious video footage showing non-retrieving animals learning how to retrieve an object through operant backchaining, and learn the behavior through to fluency.

We now know we don't require early play chase/retrieve experience to teach a reliable working retrieve, given the operant methodology we have at our fingertips today to utilize.

Peek, my 11 year old retiring SD, had no play retrieve as a puppy, and I taught him a solid retrieve with backchaining. It's a strong behavior for him, and very reliably on cue. He still has little use for playing ball or frisbee, but I've taught him through the years to play interactive games. But he doesn't enjoy it as much as he does working - picking up items I call by name or point to.

For many years, I felt having a natural play retrieve was a real asset in training for service work. But I've shifted my opinion on this through the years, as I've seen how well backchaining works to build a solid, fluent retrieve, regardless of the dog's natural inclination to retrieve.

On the other hand, if I used a different methodology in teaching the retrieve, then I would likely be singing a different song. I just got incredibly lucky and ended up re-educating myself through a great

operant training program, and found that much of what I thought were "absolutes" when I was classically training, actually were not absolutes after all once I began operant training.

It's our job as trainers and handlers to continue refining our dogs' public behaviors, and teach them when it is and isn't appropriate to offer certain behaviors. A big part of my training regimen requires me to incrementally teach my dogs to focus on me as I increase the distractions incrementally. I train in a lot of 'trigger' areas - such as next to batting cages, out in the park when people are playing frisbee golf, next to schools where kids are running and screeching.

A well trained service dog may well be manic for balls and other play items when off duty, but learns, through careful repetition and reinforcement, that when in service dog mode, a different set of rules apply.

I go back to my "mantra" that teaching the tasks for service work is truly the easiest part. But teaching rock solid public access responses is what takes all the time and energy. I expect to put in two years of public access work until I can expect the dog to be reliable and fluent in wanted responses when confronted with genetic or behavioral trigger trippers.

I wish I were better with math (and if I had been good at math, I'd be a dentist right now, not a dog trainer!) so that I could figure out the cost of my time in teaching public access and taking a dog through to reliable fluency in a host of stimulating environments.

Let's see, just off the cuff, I spend about 5 hours a day with an in-training dog out in public and a couple more hours at home meeting his other needs for problem solving games, learning new behaviors, exercise, grooming and being handled. 7 hours a day 7 days a week for 2 years. I charge \$50 an hour for calligraphic work and dog training lessons.

Using half that amount - \$25 an hour, and I have still amassed about \$56,000 of billable time on training a dog. If I were to charge myself

my normal rate per hour, I'd be at \$112,000. I could buy a house for that amount of money!

Service Dog Clean Up

I'm not visually impaired nor blind, but I do have blind friends with whom I've been out enjoying the town. When they cue their dogs to "PARK," they touch the dog's back, and can feel when the dog has emptied out and is beginning to straighten up again. The dog remains in position until the handler's hand follows the outline of the spine, then the handler can reach down and easily find the pile to be picked up.

There are days I cannot bend down enough from my wheelchair to pick up my own dog's feces, but I carry a shortened version of a pincer-grip reacher pole (the kind they sell for people who need to reach things up high) and can fit a doggy bag over the pincers, pick up the fecal matter, then hold the pole upright as I bring it toward me, then close it up and dispose of the bag.

I try to always cue my dog to eliminate in appropriate areas, but occasionally they will hit a patch of nicely landscaped grass. I also carry lots of water with me, and if the dog urinates/defecates on the grass, after cleaning up the solids, I then use my water bottle to flood the area where the dog urinated, so that it doesn't kill the grass.

If we're out somewhere and it's 110 degrees, standing on the pavement or even sand is just too painfully hot for the dog, so if they move off the asphalt/cement onto a bit of grass, that's when I would need that particular back-up plan.

I've never had to have ask anyone pick up my dog's feces for me, though a couple of people have rushed up and asked to do it for me, and I gave them the back and thanked them for their kindness,

explaining it would sure save me time from having to get my reacher pole to do it.

Socializing Pets in Public Places

Jane is frustrated in her attempts to find opportunities for stepped-up socialization, since dogs are not allowed in places off-limit to pets, no matter how well trained they may be. She notes that service dogs are the only ones allowed access to non dog places, and asks for ideas on how she can get her dog Kong adequately bombproofed without being allowed to take her dog on buses, etc.

Jane, I understand your frustration, and I too wish things were different in the US. I don't think I would hope for pet access, as is so widespread in Europe, because sadly, our American dogs are not nearly as well-socialized on the whole, and if we had instant access for pets, those of us using assistance dogs would have to be even more hyper-vigilant for poorly trained, under-socialized dogs who put our working dogs at risk.

Of course, this makes it so frustrating for conscientious, dedicated dog handlers such as yourself, and dogs who DO possess good social skills and would not be problematic. So the great dog owners who have spent time working with their dogs, socializing them, preparing them to exist in stimulus-rich environments, are punished as a default. It's unfair, but considering the plethora of American pets who lack social skills, it would seriously endanger the lives and livelihoods of those using service dogs if all pets were to be given public access rights. If only all dog owners were like you!

One interesting thing to note here in regards to service dogs in training: the right to bring a dog-in-training into places that are not normally open to pets is granted by individual states. There is no federal law regarding dogs still in-training. So I may be an independent service dog trainer and my state may allow me to bring dogs into non-

pet allowed places, but if I cross the next state's borders, I may not be allowed any more rights than the pet owner.

The dog has no rights, period. Access is granted only to people with disabilities to be accompanied by their trained service animals - the animals have no rights. They are considered no more than "durable medical equipment," the same as a wheelchair, cane or leg braces might be classified.

Also, many states have statutes that require people training service dogs to belong to a group or organization, and grant no access to individual trainers.

So, there are times even those of us who do have some access allowances, still end up having the same problems Jane has encountered. And here 20 Hot Tips on how to get the job done without breaking laws.

If we can't get ON a bus, we can still go to the bus station, we can practice cueing our dogs and getting crisp responses next to buses backfiring, next to buses pulling in and pulling out, squealing breaks, next to wheelchair lifts being activated. .

To desensitize a dog to wheelchair lifts, call a friend with a disability who uses a lift-equipped van and practice in that vehicle. No friend with such a van? Call your local Independent Living center and ask if you can post on their bulletin board for a person with a lift-van to assist you in your training task. .

Buses smell and sound different from cars. To help your dog get used to the diesel smell and sound, go to a truck stop and swill coffee with a few truckers, and ask for a trucker to allow you to enter and exit his cab with your dog, while he adjusts the air brakes, etc. Buy the trucker lunch and you may even get a ride around the truckstop grounds in the rig with your dog. .

Since indoor malls are out of the question, EXCEPT during times when a local photo merchant may be offering dog pictures (find out

when your local mall shops offer this so you can use it for training opportunities!), do your work in the periphery of the mall. There is SO MUCH you can do outside, by the seating areas, the parking lot with the delivery trucks, the cars blasting rap music, the snow scrapers, road cleaners. Look for loading docks to department stores, and hunker around capturing training opportunities when trucks are unloading merchandise. .

Ask Mall guards to stop and talk with you, pet your dog, helping your dog get used to uniformed guards. In some states, guards are on bicycles and this is an other great socialization opportunity. .

Stop at the outdoor seating and work on social skills while meeting people of both sexes, all ages, all nationalities. Great opportunities for distraction training, as well! .

Go to police stations, fire stations, and get your dog used to more people in uniforms. If you hit a slow time at a fire station, you may get lucky and get a tour through with your dog, and maybe even someone to start up a truck or turn on a siren or lights. .

Walk down city sidewalks with your dog, getting the dog used to traffic sounds, thousands of feet surging by, and stop in any park area where you might see kids on skateboards or roller-blades.

Some local stores DO allow access to pets, such as Petco, PetSmart and other pet supply stores. But, you may also well find willing small business owners who will be delighted to help you by giving you access into non-food places, such as hardware stores, plumbing supplies, lumber yards, etc. Smaller businesses are a much safer bet, and larger stores such as Home Depot have strict "no pet" policies. Not so the mom and pop hardware, the local electrical supply, the local real-estate office, etc. Call ahead and ask! .

Grocery stores can be another excellent place to socialize outside: again, provides ample opportunity for distractions, and often there are food distractions added, plus more carts and activity. You'll also have grocery store folks pushing lines of carts around, which is noisy and

very distracting. Lots of kids, food smells, opportunities to reinforce wanted responses in your dog .

Construction sites also can offer a plethora of great opportunities to desensitize to large equipment, new sounds and sights, and unexpected overhead movement and sounds. Construction workers in helmets are great to expose the dog to. .

Parks where dogs are allowed: Look for little league games, ball games of all kinds to help work through distractions and socialize dog with children. .

Country roads: take long walks to reinforce non-reactivity to wild critters, and focus on the handler. .

Most county fairs I have attended allow pets! Take these opportunities to go daily to one of the richest environments for distractions known to humankind. There are the midway lights, sounds, movement of the rides, squealing of the kids. There are animal barns with horses, cows, rabbits, goats, fowl, etc. There are judging rings and activities in bleachers, and moving under bleachers is another great tip: it can be daunting to a dog to hear all the thundering feet overhead. .

Airport runway approach areas: Often, at major airports, residential areas are useful to desensitizing to low-flying jets. If you have such an area near you, use it to get your dog used to the thunder and hiss of the big planes. .

Garbage Dumps. Yes, garbage dumps. There is usually a nice office, and lots of HUGE trucks going in and out all the time. The smells can be extremely distracting for dogs (ok, and for humans!), but this is another excellent training area often overlooked. .

Festivals of all kinds quite often allow pets. Take advantage of them! Work the periphery until your dog gets used to the hubub. If you can find special events, such as hot-air balloon competitions, all the better. Or loud music of any kind. *TIP: if the music is loud for you, think

about your dog's ears which are even more sensitive. Bring earplugs for you AND the dog! .

Farmer's markets: In many towns and cities, weekend mornings offer a terrific opportunity to walk past vendor's tables. Some are posted "no pets," but others are not. Find out if you have one near you that allows people to bring pets. .

Schoolyards: Park yourself and your dog outside a schoolyard during recess, to expose the dog to the squeak of swings, the squeal of children, running, jumping, hollering of kids at play. .

Find small country bridges over roads that make noises as cars roll over them, or even noisy railroad tracks. Railroad yards are also wonderful places, and again, can be very pet friendly. If nothing available, find the timetable for freight and passenger trains and station yourself by a track when you know trains will be going by. Again, earplugs may be in order. <G>

Hope some of these help!

Testing for Public Access and Reality

I personally used the Public Access test and task test from Pets and People, and photographed each activity being done. It would be better to do that test with a video recorder, but we don't own one. Here is a link to their public access test, and its purposes and requirements <http://www.petsandpeople.org/publicaccess.pdf>

The P&P test is a pretty good starting point, but those who use this test (and, for the most part, most other similar tests I have seen) might consider "souping it up" to add what is missing. There is nothing in this test that will give the examiner any idea of how the dog responds around some heavy trigger issues: other dogs, cats, prey. I've met many

dogs who can bypass food but in no way can bypass another dog without lunging/snarking at them. And when a cat runs by? Rabbit? Squirrel? Off leash dog? These are heavy trigger trippers for a good many dogs, and things a service dog will likely encounter during the partnership.

The CGC, TDI, Delta tests do address the candidate's behavior when a friendly dog on leash is walked by, however, none of them address the true trigger-trippers - fast moving cats, squirrels, rabbits, little dogs or off leash dogs. To me, this is an important and under-tested issue for service dogs. If I were testing, I would put on the top of my list to examine how the dog reacts to these types of triggers in the context they will normally be encountered: moving fast.

The quiet, well mannered dog on leash is just not an indicator of how a candidate can handle the situation once the fast movement triggers are tripped, and many dogs within the categories of herding breeds, sighthounds, even scenthounds - this can be a very big issue. Imagine the team being out in the park, and the dog is doing brace/balance work for the human partner. A squirrel or rabbit sprints by . The dog loses focus, swings its body around to focus on the squirrel or rabbit, and the human partner falls. OOPS! That wasn't supposed to happen, but still, there lies the human with a shattered hip. OUCH!

If I were giving the exam, I'd also like to see the dog's response around screeching children, children having a temper tantrum in the mall, and also how the dog handles being hugged by humans. Hugging can elicit a lip lift or low growl in many dogs, as it's not a natural behavior for dogs - it's a human behavior. So if the dog is not taught to accept hugging, and to tolerate it, it could easily trigger an unwanted response.

Granted, we try to not put our dogs in that position, but sooner or later, some kid will break away from their parents and rush to the dog and throw their arms around the dog during an unguarded moment in time - perhaps when we're paying for something we just bought, or reaching for merchandise. In my opinion, dogs need to be able to accept hugging if they are going to work in public. They don't have to

like it, but they should at least be able to tolerate it when it happens, for a short period of time.

Crying children can also be a trigger tripper for some dogs. They may be able to totally ignore children in other contexts, but if a child starts really wailing, for some dogs, this is very hard to ignore.

I have an in-training dog now, and this is one of his trigger trippers. We are working daily on desensitization and playing attention/focus on the handler games in malls and stores where we routinely encounter crying and screeching overly-tired and frustrated children. It should be a bonanza training opportunity time soon, as the holiday crowds start coming into the stores.

Balls and Frisbees can be another difficult area, and if I were testing, a test would include observing the dog ignoring balls thrown and rolled by them, as well as frisbees. Again, this can be a major trigger tripper for some breeds in general, and dogs of most any breed on an individual basis. Not all dogs will react, of course, but there are enough who will that I feel it warrants testing.

Training in Grocery Stores

"I am training my Spot who is 14 months of age, I am training him as an Assist for myself and my mother as we both have Multiple Sclerosis."

Will you be teaching him to work in public for both of you, independently?

"He does quite well in the stores except when we are near the meat sections, dairy, etc...any place in the store that has a cooler where the temp changes. When we go near those

areas he either stops dead in his tracks or lays down in the middle of the isle like a speed bump."

Are you sure it's the temperature change or could it be something else, such as some sound the cooling/refrigerant unit gives off, perhaps at a pitch you cannot hear but your dog can? I don't think it really matters what he's reacting to, only that something is clearly making him uncomfortable in that specific area and your job is to help him get past whatever he finds disturbing.

"I started using Puparoni in small pieces and then call him over. When he comes I click and give him a treat. I ask if this is the right thing to do, or is there another way to do this? Once I click and treat he stays for about half a minute in the lie down position, but gets back up after that;....<snip>.....does this take more time to learn?"

Okay, so you know that he is at least WILLING to come to that area when you call him over. You also know he has only a 30 second down stay in that area.

First, what is his down-stay duration time in other environments when you are moving around, doing things? Will he remain in that stay position longer than 30 seconds in your house? How about in your yard, with distractions from neighbors, animals, traffic, children? How about in department stores where people are pushing carts by him? On the sidewalk close to a street with traffic going by (while you have him on a long leash for safety, of course)? Will he lie down and remain down next to your refrigerator or dishwasher?

The first thing I would advise is to NOT take him when you have to go grocery shopping for now. Take him, instead, when you can go to that store and do full-time attentive teaching. Make time for short daily trips to your grocery store and walking down those aisles.

This is also where your clicker (and you may want to consider a quiet clicker, such as an i-click or Clicker Plus) will do you the most good - you'll be able to focus on the dog totally, and do continuous

reinforcement (click/treat, click/treat, click/treat, click/treat) for walking past those spots where he balks or wants to lie down. He needs to learn to walk next to you and offer you some attention, and also that when he is cued to lie down, that he remains in that position until you cue him to do another behavior.

Yes, this ALL takes time, and I think it's counterproductive to take a dog who is having problems maintaining focus and staying in position with you when you must do your shopping. However, I think it's highly productive to make short, upbeat trips to the grocery store just to work him in those problem areas, so he can get used to whatever it is that is bothering him there, and to learn to rely on YOU to keep him safe and give him the cues he needs to remain safe.

I agree heartily with those who have advised purchasing "The How of Bow Wow" video (can order from <http://www.dogwise.com> or <http://www.takeabowwow.com> and many other online sources) to learn exactly how to teach the strong foundational behaviors you'll need for service work in public, and to get reliability with all cued behaviors. This particular video was made with the service dog in mind, to provide a visual guide for how to get the kind of reliability consistently that you want in a dog doing public access work.

Also, I agree with those who have advised joining Sue Ailsby's Training Levels group, and to work on the excellent information she has graciously shared for free on her website at <http://www.sue-ch.ca>. These two excellent resources will offer you the nuts and bolts of how to teach the most important behaviors expected in a public access setting. Both resources will help you become a better teacher, and streamline your effort in teaching your dog the behaviors he has to learn.

Good luck and good training!



SERVICE DOGS AND THERAPY WORK

Animal Assisted Therapy

The article about service cats included some vague/inaccurate information (as do so many articles written by journalists who take the interviewee's words as accurate without research).

While the article was mainly about service cats, it did contain information on other species, mentioning that those using guide horses have the same access rights. It would have been nice if the journalist had actually checked the facts of this statement, especially with airline regulations.

A miniature horse may be taught to guide extremely well, may be trained to eliminate on cue, to lie down as unobtrusively as possible, and to be every bit as bombproof as a well-trained service dog. But travel by car/van seems to be the only option at this point in time, possibly in no small part due to the absolute fiasco of the pot bellied pig that wreaked havoc on a plane a few years back.

The article also stated that: "Service animals are an entirely different breed than therapy animals: The former do a prescribed job for a disabled individual; the latter provide companionship or emotional support, which, while therapeutic, is not a specific task."

While I agree with the spirit of the statement - that therapy dogs are NOT service dogs, not all therapy dogs are there to simply provide companionship or therapeutic emotional support. There are a good many therapy dogs who are not doing only visitation, but are

participants in animal facilitated therapy, where their work is directed by a physician, a physical therapist, or other healthcare specialist.

These animals have been taught specific tasks that are used as part of the patient's actual treatment plan, and the work and time spent with each patient is carefully charted and becomes part of the patient's permanent medical records.

I used to do animal assisted therapy with my now deceased service dog through a local hospital's rehabilitation department. Some of the tasks my dog might be asked to do are:

- retrieve rubber rings tossed to a pegboard to help the patient regain muscle control and take the object to whomever the therapist requires: back to the patient, or to the object bucket, or to put it in a pile on the floor.
- push large rubber therapy balls back and forth to the patient, which requires accuracy to keep the ball going straight with nose or paws, and then to move on cue backwards until the necessary distance is chosen, and the patient tries to push the ball back to the dog.
- Hold a Nerf ball quietly in the dog's mouth while the patient attempts to practice grasping the ball and improving fine motor control. If the ball is dropped during this effort, the dog waits until cued to pick it up and begin the exercise again.
- The patient learning to balance on unstable objects may be asked to balance on a large therapy ball, and reach out to touch a dog standing at arms length away - with the dog not moving an iota, even when touched.
- The patient may need to learn more fine motor skills by holding the dog's leash in one hand, while pushing the wheelchair with the other. This requires the dog to be able to maintain the same pace as the patient (who may be recovering from a stroke, hip replacement, etc. and has a very unsteady gait), and to be able to do this behavior on each side of the wheelchair or walker.

- The patient may be working towards moving hands in circles, and use that as a visual cue for the dog to take a position wherever asked - several feet in front of the patient, or to each side, or even in back of the patient. When positioned by walls of mirrors, the patient is able to see the dog respond to the circular hand cue even when he/she cannot actually see the dog, except through a mirror.

- The patient may need to be learning how to bend over in a wheelchair and pick up or put something down on the floor. Quite often this would be the dog's water dish, filled with water, some of which invariably splashes out. The dog is then cued to move to the bowl and take a drink. It may be only one lap of the tongue, but it does the behavior on cue just the same, thirsty or not.

A good many of these behaviors are advanced skills also utilized in some way during service work. The extra training required for utilizing them for therapy work requires a dog who will, when directed by the owner, take its cues from a different handler - such as the therapist or the patient. The dog's owner remains in close proximity, so that the dog can continue to "check in" with the owner, in order to be able to keep the dog's own person as the primary focus.

I consider this a dual career dog. While working with patients, the dog is a therapy animal. But as soon as I take over and the dog shifts into meeting my needs and doing tasks for me, his disabled owner, he is a service dog again. The dog can switch career modes several times during one session at rehab: he may be working with a patient and therapist, but something happens where I need him to help me immediately. A cue word is established between the human therapy staff so that the exercise can be truncated, and the dog returns to me to do a specific task, then go back to work with the patient and therapist.

Was my dog a service dog? Yes. Was he also a therapy dog? Yes. Was his training for therapy work even more advanced than his training for service work? Absolutely. Would I expect to have access to places other pets are not allowed when he is wearing his therapy dog vest? NO. He is only a service dog when he is working directly for me, mitigating my

particular disabilities. He may be performing many service dog tasks while acting as a therapy dog, but it is only when he is working for me in the capacity of a service dog, can be considered a service dog.

I bring this up only because I often read that people consider a dog doing "therapy work" as a dog who only is there for being petted and making people feel good, but has no task-related skills other than good manners. I'm guessing here, and have no data to back this up, but I suspect the majority of "therapy dogs" are those doing visitations and not animal assisted therapy, where advanced task training is required and often quite critical.

I bring this topic back to Jane's excellent post of what she feels a well-trained service dog must be capable of doing. Once those behaviors are fluent amidst distractions, changing environments, at distances, and in adverse situations, it just might interest some pwds to explore animal facilitated therapy and the challenge and fun of shaping behaviors that require the dog to shift focus, work for others, but still maintain "check in" and focus on their own disabled handler. Dogs who have been trained to work at this level are in extreme demand, and for many people with disabilities, it's a way to do some outreach that will truly make a difference in someone else's life.

I'm no longer in a position where this is an option for me, due to my own physical/energy limitations. But my memories are filled with joy and delight to know that in some small way, my service dog helped someone healing from a major physical crisis.

SDs Doing Therapy Work

I don't think it's confusing for the well-trained service dog to shift into therapy dog mode. I think it's very confusing, however, for many handlers. Service dogs doing therapy work need to be dogs who have solid foundation behaviors, looking to the handler for a cue of when to

interact and how to interact. Likewise, the handler must understand and have the skills to pay attention to the dog, and to be certain to cue the dog before allowing the dog to interact.

Doing therapy work with a service dog is something many of us do successfully, but normally don't try to do until we have a very solid partnership, and our dogs have extremely fluent behaviors.

There are also different types of therapy work. Visitation is very different from, for example, working in animal assisted therapy in a physical therapy setting. In physical therapy settings, the handler is asked to cue the dog to perform specific behaviors with patients that will help the patient in regaining strength, muscle tone, memory, balance, etc. The dog still must take all initial cues from the handler, but is taught to interact on cue with a patient or physical therapist. However, all initial interaction is directed by the handler.

This eliminates confusion for the dog, because you - the handler - are directing the dog to interact on cue, or to retrieve an item on cue, take that item to another person, or to remain in a specific position while the patient stretches an arm or leg toward the dog, etc. You, the handler, may cue the dog to respond to a cue from the patient or therapist, such as a patient saying, "sit," or "Paw". But normally, all cues come from the handler.

The well trained service dog has been taught to focus on the handler, to avoid distractions while working. However, we normally have some type of cue that we give the dog to tell them they MAY interact with someone else, and we also normally have specific ways we will allow interaction. In our homes, our dogs may be allowed to greet visitors with tail wagging, but not jump on them. In a different setting, for instance a store, we will likely not allow our dogs to freely greet people who come up to the dog, but have taught them to ignore those who are trying to get the dog's attention.

When we move into doing therapy work with our animals, we are responsible for teaching the dog to look for specific signals from us as to when it's appropriate to interact, and what type of interaction will be

allowed. As long as we cue the behavior, then it's not going to confuse the dog.

During a visitation, for example, our dog may only be allowed to sit quietly on the floor with one patient, but with another, may be asked to do a "paws up" on the bed or chair. Our dog looks to us before doing any behavior, so there is only confusion when there are no rules, and no guidelines for the dog to follow.

The well trained service dog can be so incredibly valuable in therapy work. Since few dogs are trained to the skill level of a well-trained service dog, the variety of skills a SD can offer can be of immense value.

Therapy Dog for Grieving Children

Jane, big cheers for you for volunteering with Spot to be one of the therapy dog teams on staff at the camp for grieving kids. Sounds like a wonderful opportunity.

I am assuming you have been doing visitation with children already with Spot?

If so, I'd expect you also have come to "read" her stress signals when she needs to have a break.

Sounds like you have a great plan in progress to set both of you up for success.

One thing I'd consider is that flexibility may be the most important factor for both of you. If you see Spot getting overloaded, it may take more than a half hour rest for her to go back to it. It may take lots more time. If you are flexible with this, and don't commit her to

sessions back to back, but allow Spot to tell you when she can handle it and when she needs to be away from it - then all should go well.

Shorter sessions are less demanding on the dog, in my experience, and allow the dog to handle more time doing therapy work. Longer sessions seem to deplete them emotionally and physically. I could always do more short sessions with Peek, then take a break, come back for another short session - much better than I could do a three hour session in a row. That would wear Peek out totally, and he'd be totally out of it asleep on the way home, and wanted to rest more once he got home.

Short and intense worked well for us, and multiple short intense sessions worked splendidly. In between sessions I'd allow him to go for a relaxing walk and sniff, and then just rest in his crate or on the grass under a tree while I read or napped myself.

I pretty much let Peek's behaviors guide me and let me know when he was on overload and needed to get totally away from it and rest.

Good luck to you! What a neat thing to do.



SERVICE DOG DOCUMENTATION

ID

Here's what I put on my ID's:

FRONT:

Picture of Dog or Dog and handler, about 1 inch square. Then SERVICE DOG or SERVICE DOG IN TRAINING next to the picture, and under that owner/trainer's name, address, phone number and one emergency phone number. Then I add the name of dog, breed, sex.

BACK:

I put a brief synopsis plus the numbers of the Federal statutes, the air carrier access act, plus the individual state statutes in brief with necessary numbers.

There is no "right" or "wrong" way to make up an ID. But if you do it on your computer, when finished, I'd advise getting it laminated. It usually costs about 50 cents. Really helps it from looking beat up.

I like to put a few tiny holes in one end, layer on a little blob of industrial strength glue, then when it hardens, attach it to the back of the vest at the neck with a binder's clasp. The glue "bump" keeps the laminated card from slipping off the clasp. I squeeze and remove the metal arms from the clasp, and the whole outfit then looks really snappy and professional.

Good luck!

"In Training" Papers

"Where do I get papers that say that I am training a service dog? Mama and I went to Wal-mart to get some stuff. Mama took her IG and I took Murphy. They won't let me in because Murphy was too big. They asked to see my papers? I stayed in the entrance way to wait for Mama to get back. They let

her in after some discussion and she had to promise not to let the dog down or go where there was food."

First, there are no "papers" required, nor can anyone legally ask for "papers" of any kind, or deny access because of the lack thereof. There is no national certification, and dogs are also not required to be "dressed" nor are handlers and dogs required to have ID in the USA.

However, that said, it can be much easier if you DO have some sort of identification, and that the dog "looks" official. Some on this list will disagree with me here, and perhaps say, "NO STINKIN' BADGES!". So be it. They are well within their rights, legally, to operate as a team without such identification.

Still, I'm a non-confrontational person, and I do whatever I can to minimize problems, to make it easier for myself, my dog, and for the next team who enters that door. This is why I use OC so much when I see problems coming. If I can educate and diffuse a potential confrontation at the same time, then I have made it easier for the next team. If I am confrontational, demand access because it is my "right", then I may well win the confrontation - but I have left a bad taste in the mouth of the confronting person, and chances are the next team or the next time I come in that place of business, I will not be greeted warmly and welcomed.

Where do you get ID? You make it! It's perfectly legal! Make it up on your computer, with a picture of the dog, with the important info on the front, the ADA and your state laws on the back. It looks VERY official, and one glance at such a laminated ID clipped to the back of an official looking vest can waylay problems. Especially if one uses a non-traditional dog, like a Papillon! <G>

Hope this helps!

The PROCESS of Certification Training

For me, the process of becoming "certified" through a program was one of the best experiences of my life. Not the certification itself - of course I realize this is not mandatory, - but the *process* of getting to that point was what was so invaluable.

I trained through Handi-Dogs here in Tucson, set up to teach people how to train their own service dogs. The feedback during that two years of training was invaluable, and I had tangible, incremental goals to constantly work towards. Plus, I had the other students in my class to help prop me up when I felt overwhelmed, to help be my "eyes" and catch things I simply could not on my own.

For me, that process of bonding, growing, learning with my dog, and reaching incremental goals was worth far more than the certification itself. That was only frosting on the cake. As the training director told me, "By the time you're ready to take the test, it will simply be no big deal, because you'll just be there to show with pride what your dog can do, and what it does every day."

I also recall that no matter how hard I tried, I was still nervous about that testing day. And I also remember one of the certification team members putting her hand on my arm, and saying, "you've both worked hard. Now just relax and trust your dog."

And that's exactly what I did. I let go of my fears, and just plain treated that test as if it were just another demo, just another day I could show someone how wonderfully responsive my dog had become. The test became a joy - I had the BEST time, and once I relaxed, my dog was able to relax and just do what he had been well taught to do.

I found the entire process of working toward really tangible goals to be so invaluable for me, because it relieved me of having to try to look at the whole overwhelming picture, and just concentrate on one tiny piece of that whole at a time. If I looked only at the whole, I would have been totally overwhelmed, thinking, "I'll never get there, never!"

But at Handi-Dogs, each incremental goal reached was cause for celebration and much reinforcement: not only by the training instructors, but by classmates and office staff. There was a camaraderie that charged me up with motivation and enthusiasm, helped me push through the really difficult challenges.

I'm thinking of those who don't live in areas where this type of reinforcement is available, and how valuable the internet can be to help reap those incremental reinforcements, so necessary for us to keep on keepin' on. In an ideal world, we'd all have supportive instructors and an environment of positive reinforcement like I had. I can't imagine how difficult it must be to "go it alone", and I have great respect for those who are working on their own, and not giving up.

I have tremendous admiration for those who have started clicker clubs, brush up clubs, and offer opportunities for people to sharpen skills in a supportive environment. I love to hear of people videotaping their practice sessions, and watching them carefully to see how they might improve their timing, improve their cueing and sharpen the dog's responses. I think we have many more excellent opportunities today for assessing our growing skills, even if we DON'T have a program we can work with, to help us in this area.

This is one of the big reasons Christy started this forum originally: to be a source of ideas for those who did not have support on a local level to help them develop skills.

I'm especially delighted to see Paul from Leashes for Living and Annette from DFI share how their programs work, as we truly all CAN learn from each other, and information shared can be so very helpful. I also thank Suz for her very thoughtful response in support of Head Halters for those with high levels of disability. This was very eye opening for me, and I feel these types of sharings DO lead to more understanding.

Whether we are pro or con on the issue of certification has little to do with how we can make use of the tools/testing materials available to us

to help us develop as a team. Again, I think it's the process that is so valuable, not the certification in itself.



SERVICE DOG EQUIPMENT

Power Chair Info

The wheelchair junkie site is a bit confusing to navigate, so I wanted to offer the direct URL to the most relevant information to help you assess the type of chair you may need:

<http://www.wheelchairjunkie.com/page2.html>

What may work well for one person could be horrific for another. There is no one "best" chair for all. Each chair and type of chair has advantages and disadvantages. The trick is listing all your priorities before making the choice.

Do you intend to use the chair in the house?

Do you intend to use the chair outside, mainly for exercising your dog?

What type of terrain will you be on 80% of the time? Flat pavement, grassy ground, hills?

I have two powerchairs, both very different and used for different purposes. My "super" chair is a 21st Century Bounder, the fastest chair

made, and very, very heavy duty. My need for this chair is for comfort, reliability and enough speed and power to adequately run my dogs and build up muscle and endurance. It's a fabulous chair for outdoors, for the type of terrain I'm on, but it's a horror indoors, since it's so powerful and can wipe out a wall in no time flat if you accidentally touch the joystick by accident, or a dog happens to trigger it.

But outdoors, it's beyond superb for me, and has a motorcycle halogen headlamp and taillights for night driving, something I need very much living in the desert, where it's way too hot in the daytime to exercise the dogs. At night, it's bright enough and fast enough that I can travel in the bike lanes on the road, and really get from one point to another quickly.

For indoors, I have a small Invacare Ranger Storm, which is more compact, less powerful, but much easier to handle in tight areas of the house, such as hallways and bathrooms. I found it on eBay 3 years ago for \$700, used, and it's been a real workhorse for me. This is also the chair I travel with, as I'm very wary of anything happening to my Bouncer chair, with all the electronics on it.

Barbara Handelman has a new Invacare mid-wheel drive, which is now made much more stable than the older ones, that would rock forward when it stopped. I don't care for mid-wheel drives at all, prefer rear wheel drives, but Barbara loves her new chair and it has a very tight turning radius. It's also very spiffy looking!

You might want to try out several types of chairs to see what "feels" the best for you - mid wheel drives, rear wheel drives, rear wheel direct drives.

Also, you might enjoy hopping over to <http://www.wheelchairjunkie.com> and reading about the different types of powerchairs, and about batteries, turning radii, maintenance, etc.

Good luck and I think it's a **GREAT** decision to consider a powerchair. They have much more versatility than carts, and certainly have much more power and speed.

You just have to find the particular type that meets YOUR needs, and assess each component carefully.

Service Dog Vests, IDs

I have toy breed service dogs, and while there are now several companies who make vests in my dogs' sizes, at one time there wasn't, and I had to make my own. If you have a sewing machine, I will gladly share information with you on how to make a vest.

My favorite vest site is Raspberry Field. The one thing this company offers that others don't is a coated packcloth fabric that sheds hair. It's fabulous - the same tough cordura-type material other companies use, but it's a tighter weave, a bit slicker, so hair just doesn't stick to it. The URL for the company is: <http://www.raspberryfield.com> . They also have several types of service dog patches available.

The reason I mentioned making your own (and from the same materials as the ones the companies offer) is that it can be a cost savings since your dog will grow out of the vest within months. Until your dog has attained full growth, making your own vests can constitute a considerable savings. You can still purchase the service dog patches to sew on your home-crafted vest, or you can simply take it to a local embroidery shop and have it embroidered.

I have found a vest/id setup that works well for me personally. I don't care for dangling cards, but I like to have my dog's ID up close and on my dog's back. This is just a personal choice, and not a recommendation, as many people choose to not use ID cards, and some choose not to use service dog dress at all. It's strictly my personal preference, in large part based on my choice of breed - a small, foofy-looking dog whom way too many people want to pick up and cuddle.

Having a "business looking" demeanor with vest and ID helps people to bypass that tendency to reach out and pet or pick up the "oooooh-cutie-pootie-puppy." Honestly, I live for the day the first person stops and says, "My, what a well trained service dog" instead of, "Oh, what a cute puppy" (usually in a babytalk voice.). But my service dog is now 10, and it ain't happened yet, so I'm not holding my breath. <G>

The vest set up I like is to have a velcro "T" shape sewn on the top back of the vest. Then I make up a picture ID card on my computer, laminate it, and put sticky velcro on the back, also in a "T" shape. This allows me to keep the ID in place, and to quickly remove it if I need it - normally only at airports.



SERVICE DOG SELECTION

Choosing an Appropriate SDIT Candidate

Hi Jane,

Thanks so much for your good wishes on my next SDIT. I'm sure hoping this boy has what it takes to become a service dog working in public. But, if not, then he'll join our happy family just the same. There's always canine freestyle!

As for what a Papillon service does for me (I was partnered with my previous Papillon SD Peek for a decade), it has nothing to do with seizure or any other type of alert. I work from a powerchair, and with a vascular insufficiency and no legs now, I get very dizzy when I bend

over. So I basically need a dog who can do low-level tasks for me to save me from having to bend over. Because I also have less strength and sometimes very little facility with my hands, I also have times when I count on my dog to do things I would normally do with my hands.

Peek fetched items I dropped, including very tiny items such as pierced earring backs, straight pins, knitting markers, etc. I shaped him to pick these types of small items up in his front teeth only, and hold them firmly until I cued a release into my hand or basket.

He also opened and shut kitchen cupboard doors and drawers, and pulled pans out of the lower cupboards for me. He open and shut the doors of the house, which are not heavy, and helped with laundry. We have front loading washers and dryers, and a little step ladder he pulled to the machine, put the clothes in from the basket and shut the door with his paw. He could also transfer wet clothing (not heavy things like jeans, though) from the washer to the dryer, and when dry, open the dryer, tug the clothes into the basket.

He was very adept at making the bed, something little dogs can do much easier, I think, than big dogs because they can do it from on top of the bed, grasping the covers and moving backwards towards the head of the bed. He'd also pull the pillow into place, and then all I'd have to do it fluff stuff up and square things a bit.

When my hands and arms were weak, he'd tug off my gloves, jacket, clothing.

He'd pick up his own settle mat in restaurants after lying on it. From my lap in the wheelchair, he'd activate power door openers and elevator buttons.

Pretty much most of the things a larger dog can do, but of course, somewhat limited by size. For instance, he could pick up an empty pop can, but not a full one, because he could not get his teeth around it without squashing it a bit.

My Papillons are all oversized, and I choose them this way on purpose - about 13-15 inches tall, and about the same in pounds. This gives them a bit more bone and more leg length, so that they can easier keep up on the ground with the speed of my wheelchair. They are also not quite so delicate, and I hate to admit it, but there have been times when I've accidentally nipped their toes with the chair, but thankfully never broken a toe. Knock on wood.

As to your question as to whether a dog can be trained to alert to seizures: to my knowledge, that's still something many people are experimenting with, and there are two camps on this topic: one that claim the alerting can be taught, and one camp that claims only the response can be taught. I have never done either, since I only need mobility assistance. However, curiously enough, Peek began alerting on his own about 7 years into our partnership to my low blood sugar, so i shaped a response I could use - paws up, touch and hold his paw on my arm and look at me nonstop until I stopped whatever I was doing, and ate food.

He also was a therapy dog on the side, working with me in a physical rehabilitation section of a hospital, where he would help patients recovering from strokes, brain injuries, hip replacements, etc. by using his service dog tasks such as retrieving items patients would toss to build up arm muscles, or pushing a large therapy ball twice his size back and forth to the patient learning to reuse atrophied muscles.

He was just beginning to learn canine freestyle when he began to go downhill, get tired quickly, and was later diagnosed as having congestive heart failure. I've always wanted another Papillon service dog, but the next three I was able to obtain were not suited for working in public, though they were great little home helpers and still are very helpful around the house.

In all honestly, I did not originally set out to get a Papillon as a service dog. I had the Papillon as my pet, and then my health status plummeted, and I needed help. Since that's the only dog I had, that's the dog I trained. It was just a fluke that he had the right temperament,

confidence and personality it took to become a service dog. Hey, one outta four....<G>

If you go to the shared PHOTOS section of the OCAD website, you'll see a bunch of pictures of my Papillons doing service tasks. I know it sounds a bit strange, but honestly, little dogs can do so very much!

Fit for Service?

I totally agree with those who have posted about the dangers of using a dog who has issues with other dogs out in public. It's simply not fair to other service dogs, to other teams working in public.

Of course we can work on desensitizing a dog with reactivity. We can even expect to make some great headway. But with a dog that's already mature, aging, and set in his reactivity for years, it's not likely that a dog like this will be able to function in a very stressful public environment without getting overly stressed when other animals are present. Not even with copious training.

With desensitization and behavior modification, and given a couple of solid years of working in these modes, yes, there is a lot of help you can give a dog, given the dog's triggers are not sufficiently tripped. The dog may well learn to handle friendly other dogs, dogs who happen to be obsequious or have great social skills with their own species - when in a known surrounding, such as a park the dog frequents, or on a walk around a known neighborhood.

But, add novel environments where the unexpected happens routinely, and it's a whole new ballgame. There are always - ALWAYS - dogs off leash that have lacking social skills, dogs who will attempt to mount your dog, dogs who will stare your dog down, or agress toward your service dog. This is life. It would be great if all pet owners were responsible, and we never had to worry about off-leash dogs who get in

our dogs' faces, or on-leash dogs who respond inappropriately. And way too often, these dogs - if on leash - are on lnnnnnnng flexible leads with the owner clueless 10 feet away.

So, you take a dog who already has issues with other dogs, and put that dog into constant new situations, and you have to expect that the dog WILL experience major stress. Coupled with a history of aggressing behaviors with other dogs, it may just take the right set of triggers for the dog to react in the way it has reacted for years and years.

It's quite often we see small dogs with zero social skills, and often these dogs are being walked or handled by children or adults who treat them like they are little children, capable of reasoning and understanding the nuances of our language. If little fluffy gets away from the kids, rushes up to your dog, barks maniacally and nips at your dog's shin, what is likely to happen?

There are just some situations that just call - no, BEG - for being conservative in estimation of a dog's ability to handle unexpected stress. Even if in every other way, the dog meets and exceeds your hopes and dreams. Working in public is a tremendous responsibility, and one not to take lightly - which I know you are not doing. I appreciate your concern, your thoughtful questions, and that you are reading all the posts pro and con and trying very hard to act in a responsible way.

But perhaps there is another way this otherwise stellar, lovely and lovable dog can be of service to humankind, besides working in public? Could it possibly be an at-home helper dog, aiding a Senior by helping around the house? There's SO MUCH dogs can do to help elders and people with disabilities without having to work in stressful environments that set off behavioral triggers.

You've noted that this dog is whip-smart, learns so quickly and loves learning. Think of what a great help this dog could be to a senior with Rheumatoid Arthritis, etc., by pulling off articles of clothing, picking up things dropped on the floor, putting items in trash cans, tugging laundry from the dryer, opening and shutting cupboard doors, drawers,

and tugging baskets full of laundry from room to room for the owner to put away. Or by bringing the ringing phone, or pressing the 911 button in case of emergency, picking up its food dish when finished, etc.

I have no doubt this is a magnificent dog, and a dog who is capable of becoming an excellent companion dog at home, a lifemate supreme, and learn to do many, many helpful tasks. There are people with disabilities who don't necessarily want a dog to accompany them in public, but would like a little help at home. And that might be a perfect placement for this Dobe.

SD Breed Choices

"It seems that some choose a SD that is a breed that is not universally accepted when compared to other breeds. Why od why do some not choose in the direction of minimizing problems rather than choose to allow situations that might otherwise have been avoided?"

Dick, that's a really good question, deserving of thoughtful discussion. Why indeed do people choose breeds they know will likely increase the number of challenges they face, during their partnership?The answers will likely be extremely varied.

Some just love a specific breed, others need a specific size of dog to mitigate their disabilities or environments. Others choose the smallest dog possible to mitigate their disabilities due to apartment size, ability to exercise the dog, etc. Yet others may choose a non-traditional breed because there are certain things about that breed that are helpful with the type of service the dog is performing for that PWD. Some choose dogs by how much they shed, how much grooming is required, or how well that breed may do with other animals or children in the family. Some people prefer a quieter, laid back dog and some prefer a very

active dog, with whom they can also do dog sports, such as agility or canine musical freestyle.

Sometimes, the dog is already there as a pet, and has the right set of attributes to become a service dog with additional training. This is how I ended up using a 10 pound Papillon as my service dog for a decade. I didn't choose him for service work, but he was my pet at a time when my physical abilities began to deteriorate rapidly. I needed help, and I didn't feel I could meet the needs of a larger dog at that time.

I opted to experiment - see how much the little guy could actually do for me. I was amazed to find the dog able and willing to do as many things as I could think up - such as making a bed, tugging off clothing, opening and closing cupboard doors and drawers, retrieving very small items like pierced earring backing plates, tugging clothes from the dryer, fetching objects I dropped, etc.

When I began using him in public, then YES, I certainly admit that his size made his credibility questioned at times. But it also just made me try harder to insure that his public manners/skills were excellent, so that in spite of the diminutive size, we could be professionally appearing representatives of the service dog community.

It wasn't that I wanted to face more challenges with a pint-sized partner, but that this was the partner I had, and the one who helped me live my life independently. In the ten years we were partnered, our challenges were truly minimum, however. I find that a well-trained dog and a good attitude goes a long way in reducing the amount of challenges we may face . It may not solve every problem, and granted, I'm very, very fortunate that my access challenges have been easily solvable - but it does go a long way in minimizing frustration, stress and confrontation.

For the most part, I had 10 wonderfully positive years with the wee Papillon partner, and I hope that I was part of helping open up minds and hearts to a size of service dog that was not the "mainstream." I enjoyed being one of the pioneers, but then, I am of a very outgoing nature, and enjoyed showing people what litte dogs could do. I tried to

make every confrontation into a positive encounter, so that the person challenging me left feeling better about small dogs who were legitimately doing vital service work. Not everyone wants nor would they be comfortable with this role, but it suited my particular personality.

The biggest problem I encountered on a daily basis in public was the cuteness factor triggering mushy behaviors in people. The worst thing I can remember ever happening was when a woman shopper, watching my dog fetch a dropped item, swooped down while my dog was working and picked him up to cuddle him as if he were a puppy or a stuffed toy.

For the most part, people made lots of cutesy noises, but they seemed to respect that the little dog was paying attention, was focused and in work mode, and let him be. I was diligent in teaching my dog to avoid flirting with humans, to ignore the noisy distractions as people gushed at him. His demeanor over the years became very, very professional and I was proud to be partnered with him. I'd still be partnered with him if he could see better!

Anyhow, that's my long winded answer for why I chose a non-traditional toy breed for service work, and why it was worth the challenges in public for me.

Great question, Dick, and I know we'll have some good discussions because you asked it! Whether traditional SD breeds or non-traditional, the humans who love their SD's can be quite passionate about their choice.

SD Candidate Selection

"Your Chocolate labs apparent dislike for small dogs does not bode well for a future as an SD . If it was just your at

home dog one could say they are jockeying for position but the attacks outside the home are not promising. I wouldn't get attached to this dog."

Jeanne Hampl is one of the most experienced trainers and selectors of service dogs in the service dog world, with a lifetime of experience to back up her advice. She has worked with tons of shelter dogs, breeder donated dogs, rescue dogs, and knows well what she is talking about.

I realize this is a most difficult dollop of advice to consider, especially when otherwise, you have found this dog to be such a willing learner, and quite delightful. But I really hope you will dig deeper and talk to other very experienced service dog trainers about this problem, because it's not a minor one, and could lead to major tragedy.

In public you will encounter toy breed dogs working as service dogs, also service cats as well as outdoor cats that will come out of nowhere to run across your dog's path. You will encounter squirrels and chipmunks in the park, and lots of off-leash dogs - many who will be small, yappy and obnoxious. Some of these could be a potential lawsuit should your dog break away and injure another smaller animal.

Finding an appropriate SD candidate is one of the most difficult tasks to attempt, and even very experienced trainers find that dogs they really thought would work out, end up washing out for some type of behavioral reason like this. When it comes to reliability, and ability to focus and work in public, there is just no room for error.

In many states, there are stringent laws to guarantee the safety of service dogs. If your dog attacks and injures a service dog, you could be in deep legal doo-doo. Your dog comes equipped with a built-in lethal weapon, and without his having control of his impulses, and having also now had a bite history of attacking other dogs, it's just an "accident" waiting to happen.

Please consider that there are service dogs of all sizes working in public, who are highly trained and lifelines for their human partner's independence. If, in one unguarded moment, your dog injures or kills

one of these animals, no matter how horrified or sorry you are, it's not going to bring that lifeline back for that human who relies upon his/her service animal. Even if minimal physical damage was done, it's not unusual at all for dogs who have been attacked to no longer be able to work in public.

Please don't let your heart overrule logic when it comes to selecting an appropriate SD candidate. It's very hard to "wash out" a dog that otherwise shows such terrific potential, but it is the responsible and professional thing to do for the safety of all.

Small Breed Ad: Pros and Cons

I find small dogs have other built-in advantages: their tiny mouths can pick up very small objects much easier, such as straight pins and pierced earring backing plates. Of course, clicker training gives us the precision to train these tasks in a very "safe" way. For instance, for tiny silk pins, we shape picking them up by the front teeth with lips parted, and holding the object very quietly while bringing it to wherever it is to be placed.

Other advantages of small dogs can sure be found in our hot climate here in Tucson: when the big dogs are hopping around on hot pavement, waiting for lights to change, they either have to keep dancing in place, or wear booties. Little dogs can be picked up, or can jump up onto laps in wheelchairs, while we dig through our purses to find car keys, or stop to talk to someone, or wait for a light to change at crosswalks.

I travel quite a bit, plus am out every single day with at least one service dog, or pup in training. I have had so few access challenges I could count them on one hand. I know I'm lucky, but I also think that we can use the principles of clicker training to help diffuse possible access problems and confrontations of all kinds.

To reduce problems, I **DO** dress my dog as professionally as possible, and I think it helps. Dress combined with good focus and instant response from the dog makes a heady combination, and I do think people can **SEE** it's not a pet, but a working dog, no matter what size it is.

I also think carrying brochures or flyers explaining how small dogs can help people with disabilities - can be an enormous help. Most of the time, when I'm talking with people and going over all the things my dogs do for me, they instantly break out into a smile, thinking I'm joking. People really have no **CLUE** that little dogs are simply big dogs in small packages, very capable of precision behaviors, of good manners and doing a multitude of helpful tasks.

This is where the brochure really comes in handy, and helps maintain the professionalism we wish to affirm. Yes, little dogs are perpetual puppies to the public at large, and yes, I would absolutely die and go to heaven if someone ever, ever, ever walked up to me and instead of saying, "Ooooooh what a cute puppy!" would say, "My, what a well trained dog you have." But it never happens. Amy is so right: small dogs are always seen as "puppies" by the general public.

I have even had people stop and try to **PICK UP** my service dog! They want to lift him into their arms and cuddle him, without stopping to even ask if they can **PET** the dog, let alone pick him up, something I would never allow.

The caveats are also good ones - small dogs **ARE** seen as squeaky toys, and often as prey to many larger dogs who have not been properly socialized around small animals. In a hotflash, a small dog can be picked up by the neck, shaken and killed. Small service dogs **ARE** at risk, and the handler must be very vigilant and proactive to protect the smaller dog.

Small dogs can also be at risk from shopping carts rolling over toes, and from shoppers stepping on them with heels. This can shatter foot bones instantly. For this reason, I always seek service dogs in my breed

(Papillons) who are expected to soar over the standard, and will hopefully have enough weight and size to help protect them in public gatherings.

Some Pitfalls of Owner-Training

I've never had a chance to do much temperament testing, since my chosen breed has small litters, with singleton pups not being a real rarity, and a litter of 3 is a nice, normal size. In addition, there is no plethora of quality breeders, and those who are consistently quality breeders of champion dogs often have long waiting lists for pups. If one is fortunate enough to even find a healthy puppy whose sire, dam and ancestors have been consistently tested for genetic problems, chances are pretty slim that anyone wanting a service dog candidate is going to get a chance at the top dogs - they will be reserved for conformation and breeding.

I have 3 Papillons who ended up all being wash-outs as potential service dogs, and I have to admit that had I a chance to temp test any of them, I would have found their unsuitability early on, even with my admitted lack of knowledge on temp testing. I didn't have that choice, so I took the best of what was offered, knowing it was a definite crapshoot. I should have stuck to the penny slot machines - I have a much better "win" average!

The personalities/temperaments and responses to different sights, sounds, substrates, unexpected noise and movement were all red-flags early on, even before fear stages set in. In spite of my commitment to not flooding any of these dogs, or taking them to public places where I could not control what they may be exposed to, the basic personality of each dog remained the same, even as they gained confidence in other areas and learned new, helpful skills and good manners.

These traits still show up, and no amount of desensitization, counter conditioning, etc. has or likely will change those innate responses. Basically, what they were as puppies they now are as adults.

One dog is extremely outgoing and sweet, a super fast learner, always willing to do any task asked of him, and yet, he's supremely ill-suited to handle the unknown in public. He's a dog who is most comfortable within the parameters of his learned patterns. He picks up superstitious behaviors in a hot flash. If, for example, he comes to one side of the wheelchair, raises up on his back legs to receive a treat or give me a retrieved item - and happens to step on a picker at the same time, then it's going to take no less than 6 months to a year to get him to trust that that side of the wheelchair is not going to cause him pain. 3 years ago we put in a fairly slick floor, and in spite of endless hours of slowly teaching him how to walk without slipping, on his own, he will scramble from rug to rug, still afraid to try to walk normally on that floor.

Still, he's a grand little dog in many ways, great fun as a companion and pet, enjoys other animals, children, adults, cats, turtles. He's very helpful around the house with service tasks that make my life easier. But a service dog? Never! An adorable pet? Absolutely.

Another hopeful Papillon is a very high-strung, energetic, talkative dog who has never had the patience to learn at a slow, normal rate. He has two speeds: sleep and fast. He's overly responsive, and screeches over every tiny little discomfort, such as stubbing his toe. Also a nice little dog, friendly, happy, and a delight as a pet and companion. But a service dog candidate? NEVER!

The last attempt at finding a successor dog was based on the breeder's insistence that she had a dog supremely suited for service and therapy work. The pup arrived overly cautious from the get-go, and extremely quick to become aroused, slow to settle back down. If I had to label him, I'd call him a fearful bully who is always quick to become overly aroused. But, he's also a sweetheart of a pet, who is the first to volunteer to retrieve items I need, and who knows dozens of everyday items by name and can find them no matter where they are hidden.

But out in public he cannot relax, and simply does not possess the necessary traits to allow him to be a well-adjusted service dog, in spite of his intelligence and ability to learn very quickly.

Surprisingly enough, the only truly suitable SD candidate of this breed I've ever owned was the one who was more commercially bred, undersocialized, and had way too many bad habits firmly established. Yet, he was a quiet dog, a confident dog, and though for a couple of years, he was overly reactive around other dogs, he eventually moved through this to become the very best SD partner I ever could have hoped for - reliable and unflappable. He just happened to have the right combination of genetic components for being non-stressed in ever-changing environments. This, in spite of the fact that I made every possible training mistake on him, being my first "crossover" dog.

It was simply a fluke, and I never could find another candidate of his breed as well suited for working in public. I've seen a few very good ones, but most often, I find very poorly suited dogs of this breed who should not be working in public.

For the owner-trainer, it's easy to become dog-heavy with dogs who just don't have what it takes to be a service dog, but are still now firmly entrenched in our hearts and lives. While I'm not at all sorry I have three SD washouts, I have to admit my life would be so much easier if I'd chosen a different breed, where my chances of assessing larger litters with the help of experienced temp testers would have upped the odds of success greatly.

The more I learn, the more I realize I would never, ever attempt to choose a potential SD puppy without assistance from those far more experienced and knowledgeable in making this type of assessment. My strong suit is in shaping behavior, in behavior modification, not in temp testing. I'm not embarrassed to admit that there's way too much I don't know to be able to make such an important decision as selecting a successor dog on my own.

Though I would choose a program carefully, and one that was clicker-based, I will admit that if I live long enough to need another service

dog, I will choose to go through a specific small but immensely successful program, where tough decisions are those I will not have to make.

The heartbreak and growing cache of "pets" are one of the inevitable pitfalls of owner training. I love my multitude of "pets," but as my health deteriorates, I find it increasingly harder to meet the needs of so many dogs. Having just ONE dog would be so much easier, and so much less exhausting.

Just my experience, but one I wanted to share, as I know others have found themselves in the same position I'm in: too many lovely SD washouts now beloved as pets, and too little time, energy and good health to do them all justice, meeting their needs physically, mentally and emotionally.



TRAINING MECHANICS

ADJECTIVES: Can Clicker Savvy Dogs Find Them Confusing?

I'm not convinced that it's easy for dogs to understand the concept of adjectives. I don't know of any data supporting this pro or con, but my own experimentation has indicated it can be confusing to dogs.

For example, when I tried teaching "kiss" and "no kiss," the dog kissed on the "kiss" cue, stopped on the "no" word, then kissed again on the kiss word. The dog interpreted it as "kiss-no-kiss" rather than "kiss" "No kiss."

I found it successful to just use a cue word for "stop whatever you're actively doing," which can be anything. Finn's "stop the active behavior" cue phrase is "thank you."

I tried the same experiment with "tug" and "no tug," "pull" and "no pull" and got the same results. Again, I changed to "tug" and "thank you" or "tug" and "hold," etc, and "Pull" and "thank you" or "Pull" and "hold."

What was really funny was watching the super clicker savvy dogs try to figure out what I meant with the adjective "no." They instantly did each individual cue word they understood as fast as they could.

The same thing happened when I used "good" as a praise adjective - such as "good sit," "good down." If the dog was already sitting when I offered the praise phrase of "good down," it would get up quickly, then sit back down again!

Or if already lying down, the dog would quickly stand or move into a sit, and immediately flop back down again. I found that the dogs were confused by adjectives, and that when they were really listening to cues, they would try other behaviors to see what "good" meant, what I would reinforce during "good." I got some very interesting behaviors trying this. Finn threw out a bunch of tricks - when he was in a down position, and I said, "Good Down," he tried putting his paw over his nose, then resuming the down position without the paw on the nose. He also crossed his paws, turned his head left and right. He seemed certain that he'd eventually figure out what I wanted with the word "good," if he just tried enough behaviors.

It was these experiences with clicker savvy dogs that gave me the information that adjectives were often confusing for them, and that choosing a different word for the behavior of "not" doing something was far easier for them to comprehend.

Emperical data to support this? I have none. It's just a theory, based on personal observation and experimentation. I suspect it may be more pronounced in clicker savvy dogs who are listening closely and offering different behaviors to sounds they do not understand given before, or between sounds they do understand.

Again, fascinating stuff, and I find I learn so much more from my dogs than I ever thought I would. Their responses have "trained me" to become clearer in my communication, and less anthropomorphic in assuming the dog's mind translates things the way the human mind translates things.

Dance Moves

Look at the Musical Dog Sports Association website. There you'll find a list of the moves, and explanations of each move. You'll see, while reading the list, how many of them are useful to have for service dogs. I was amazed that I found that the majority of moves listed could also have a practical use in service work.

Also, there are online clicker class/workshops that goes into detail on training - and many of the instructors are clicker trainers, and those that aren't, are still teaching with positives. There is also an email list where many clicker trainers will jump in and answer questions regarding the shaping of specific moves.

Here's the URL: <http://www.musicaldogsport.org/> Here is the direct link to the list and explanations of moves: http://www.musicaldogsport.org/MDSA_Library/MovesList.pdf

They are also hoping for more input/participation by service dog users. One of the founders, Carolyn Scott, is living with post polio sequelae and still dances with her 13 year old Golden Retriever, Rookie. Many people online have seen their video performance on the web of them dancing to "You're the One that I Want" from "Grease."

There are several very fine groups online where you can learn more about canine freestyle, as other listmembers have already shared. I share this one with the list. This particular group is special to me because of its commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities into the sport, and because several wheelchair users are on the MDSA discussion list, and ready to offer neat ideas for adapting movements for those teaching from wheelchairs and other durable medical equipment.

Ringin Door Bells

I have Papillons, too, and know that teaching them to ring the doorbell to go outside is a very easy behavior for most Papillons to learn. The sooner you start, the sooner you can allow the barking, whining and scratching at the door to go into extinction. A caveat here - if your dog is already doing these behaviors - especially the scratching, then be extra-extra careful NOT to respond to that scratching and open the door. The scratching is such a strong behavior, and once it's become the default, it can be extremely challenging to extinguish.

TYPE OF BELL:

For Papillons, I find a thong (leather like laces, not like panties!) with bells hung on the thong at intervals, then affixed to the DOOR FRAME (not the door!) works well. It also has the advantage of being

"low tech" and if it breaks, you only need to replace the leather lace. Also a benefit - you can hang a second thong of bells OUTSIDE the door, so the dog can again learn to signal you to come back in.

As Dick also posted, you can also teach the dog to press the Pet Chime doorbell. These are wireless and work at least half the time. I haven't had one that worked a long time, and they do tend to get "sticky" and require harder and harder pressing as the edges wear, and the pad gets stuck on the side of the unit. But when they work, they are great. I just don't know that they are greater than the old 'analog' method of stringing a few bells on a leather thong. And, they are also of little use outdoors where the unit can get rained or snowed on.

But - I love these units for teaching a dog to press and hold firm enough to get a sound, and find they are great for stationary target training.

TEACHING THE DOG TO RING THE BELL:

The biggest problem with teaching a dog to ring a bell to go outside is not that it's difficult to teach, or that it's difficult for the dog to learn - neither are difficult. But a real problem to be avoided is to just open the door and let the dog out once it learns to ring the bell. Why? Dogs can (and most, in my experience, will...) end up ringing the bells endlessly to go outside to check out a sound, see what's happening, etc. or to get your attention. It can be a real monster in disguise, so it may be very handy to heed the advice to **ONLY** pair the doorbell with going outside to eliminate, not just to play or catch your attention.

First, teach your dog to target the bells. If you are not familiar with target training, check the shared files section of the website for instructions, or hop over to clickersolutions.com for instructions.

At first, you're just teaching the dog to touch a nose or paw to the bells. Nose is better, IMHO, because then you don't have to worry about dog nails raking the door frame while activating the bells. With the nose-touch, just have to clean up the snot marks once in a while. <G>

So, teach your dog to target the bells, then hold off for just a few seconds before clicking and treating until the dog really pushes the bells a bit harder with its nose or paw, to get them to ring brightly.

Note: It's not necessary to put this behavior on cue - you won't need a cue, because the dog is going to learn that when it needs to go outside to eliminate, it's his/her responsibility to ring the bell, and wait until you come to let the dog out. You won't be cueing the dog from other rooms, etc., to go outside!

Once the dog is ringing the bells brightly, hold off on the treat just a moment while you open the door, and let the dog go through, then click and deliver the treat outside the door.

Then, and here's the reallllllly important part - from that point on, be sure to go outside with the dog and don't click and treat until the dog eliminates. If you don't follow this part of the training, you may set yourself up for the "ringing for attention or to go out and play" scenario, which I guess, is fine if you don't mind getting up and going to the door a couple dozen times a day!

So, to recap:

1. Teach dog to target bells
2. When ringing strongly, open door and deliver click and treat OUTSIDE the door, then bring dog back in and repeat.
3. When ringing is second nature to the dog (just a couple sessions is all it should take), then go outside and ignore your dog until it eliminates. When nearly finished eliminating, CLICK and TREAT! Why do I say "nearly" finished? If you wait until the dog is completely finished, you risk clicking the dog for putting its leg down, or turning around and sniffing where it's gone, or for turning its head, etc. If you click just before the dog is completely emptied out - when you KNOW he's nearly finished, then you have marked that moment that the dog IS eliminating and that's what the dog will remember - a clear signal that eliminating is what's earning him the click and treat.

4. Until your dog is really, really fluent (solid, never makes a mistake) about ringing the bells **ONLY** to go out to eliminate, don't let your dog out without going outside with it, to be sure the dog is going to eliminate.

5. You can help this along by timing your teaching sessions, and knowing when your dog is likely to need to go outside.

Good luck!

Field Trippin'

I've had some health bobbles that have kept me from normal life lately, but finally am coming back to life again. I have been neglecting my SDIT, Harry Potter, for so long. During the fixing up of the old house before we moved, we were so busy that Harry's field trips were few and far between. After we moved here, we were equally busy and again, poor Harry got shortchanged. I've had a lot of guilt about this, but with fluctuating health, there is not much I could but wallow in my guilt.

However, the last 4 days, I've felt absolutely terrific, and am even able to eat food again, so life all of a sudden looks much brighter. Yet, what makes me smile the most is finding the time and energy to work with my boy again. We have never completely stopped training, as every interaction between us is teaching the dog something. Harry is a young, effervescent Papillon, however, and needed much more than I had been able to give him.

So for the past 4 days, we've been doing 2-4 hour field trips in our community. We roll a mile to the local strip mall, but on the way, we stop in the park so Harry can run and jump and chase around like a jackrabbit and get all the "ya-ya's" out of him. Then we roll the rest of

the way to the park, practicing loose leash walking on the way, and the ignoring of environmental distractions - the most challenging being cats and barking dogs behind fences.

We found one block where there must be 3-4 dogs behind every house, and we keep working closer and closer to those homes in large circles, until Harry is able to maintain focus on me, even when it's total barking cacophony from every direction.

We do a lot of sidewalk work, just simple behaviors such as "behind" and "Close" so he can practice changing positions, do "forwards" through doors after nice "waits." We stop at every street crossing, and it's becoming automatic for Harry to do this now, even when I forget and don't give the "wait" cue.

He does very well in the stores, keeping pace with my powerchair, leash never tightening, and is daily getting more able to offer me focus rather than explore the sights and sounds around him. We still have problems with fear of children who reach out at him, but we're working on it, having kids offer him treats.

I work outside the grocery store quite a bit - probably more than I work inside, as it's even more distracting. One thing we've been working on this week is desensitization to the horse machines for kids outside the store. Harry was not keen about being too close to them. I just put in a bunch of dimes and let the thing rock and roll, then worked Harry in circles, gradually getting closer and closer to the noisy monster.

Yesterday, we were at the point where he would accept treats just one foot from the thing. He still won't touch it while it's moving, but we're working toward this. First, he has to get comfortable enough to take treats just a few inches from it, and then we'll have him put a paw on it while it's moving.

It's a challenging environment for a young dog, because the store lot is very busy, and there is so much going on. Lots of people, squeaky carts, bicycles, skateboards, kids, cars, etc.

What amazes me is that for the past 6 months, I have done so little with this boy, and I thought for sure he'd be much more distracted and full of himself. But there is so much he has not forgotten, it just amazes me. He picked it all back up so quickly, so I guess I can let go of a bit of the guilt and know that it was worth bypassing the "flash" and concentrating on those foundation behaviors from the get go.

I will embarrassingly admit that I STILL have not taught this dog a working retrieve yet. And his in-home behaviors are not the greatest. He's been spoiled to death, and it shows. But put on a vest, take him out in public, and he morphs into a different dog. This is as it should be, considering I let things slide in the house. Out in public, am consistent in asking for certain responses, and reinforcing them heavily.

With the holidays upon us now, I'm trying to gear up for the increased crowds, the gridlock traffic, and using them all as training opportunities. I just look at all those poor able-bodied folks with their aching bunions and corns and think how incredibly lucky I am to be a wheeler, and to be able to take my seat with me everywhere I go.

Go Settle - Go to Mat

I use a "Go Settle" cue, which means, find your settle mat and go lie on it until I cue you to do something else. Settle mats don't get confused with carpeting or rug runners for any of my dogs, and I don't use a specific name for a mat. The "settle mat" I use out in public is different from the ones I use in the house. Perhaps if I had a lot of different small rugs in the house, it would get confusing, and I'd have to worry more about context changes and train for this. But as a wheeler, I don't keep any rugs in my house that aren't glued down, or they would be twisted in my wheels constantly.

I use different settle mats in the house, depending on what is clean at the time. It's sort of like musical chairs - whoever gets to the mat they

prefer first, gets to settle on that mat in that particular place. The cue "go settle" means go find one of the settle mats and hang out on it until otherwise directed.

If I'm in the bedroom and cue "go settle," then the dogs will have to run to the living room to find the settle mats and plop down on them. If I move the mats to the bedroom and they are in the kitchen, then they'll have to run into the bedroom to find them and lie on them.

If I'm out in public, it's normally just with one dog. But there are times Tim and I will have all five dogs with us and perhaps go to an outdoor patio restaurant, where we'll put down 5 rugs. We can then just give a general cue of "go settle" and all the dogs will scamper to find a rug and lie on one. But most often, I'd want specific dogs in specific places, so I'd just cue one dog at a time to a specific mat by pointing at it.

We'll do the same thing at parks if we stop for a picnic lunch. We just plop down 5 rugs and give the general cue, and the dogs will find a rug and lie on it. They are not all the same type, the same texture, but that doesn't matter. The dogs have generalized the cue "go settle" well enough that they will find the nearest mat available.

If I had settle mats in every room, then I'd expect to have to use a modifier cue, such as **BEDROOM** settle, or **KITCHEN** settle, etc. But I don't and likely never will. When I don't have any mats down, I don't use the settle cue. I then just use the "down" cue which means settle wherever you hear that cue, and stay there until you hear from me again.

The dogs are much better about downs on a settle mat when it comes to duration, because that's where they have been most reinforced correctly. If they break a normal "down" cue when they are not on a mat, it's always my fault because I have not taught each dog through to fluency on that behavior except on a mat. We get what we reinforce. I'll get fluent duration in normal downs with all my dogs if and when I ever take the time to take that behavior through to fluency with all the dogs. I likely won't, because I just am not that motivated enough.

If I'm out in public with one of them as a service dog, then of course, I will expect them to have duration in that context, because they have been reinforced for the behavior always when on leash in service dog mode. But at home? I'm a sloppy trainer, a sloppy handler, a lackadaisical dog owner. I won't have fluency in my home setting until I train for it.

Maybe next lifetime. <G>

Right now I'm the world's worst service dog owner, having totally ignored all my dogs completely while obsessing over learning Powerpoint for my upcoming Clicker Expo presentations next week. The dogs are being so very well-mannered, and are just all so anxious to do any task - retrieve an item, open or shut a door - just to have something to do! I have not done any learning sessions with them, taken them on walks to the park, and yes, I feel very guilty. I try to do something with each dog a couple times a day, even if it's just a few behaviors while I'm in the bathroom, or feeding the turtles, or ironing clothes.

Oh, I do hate it when I let my dogs down and don't make enough time to give them the attention they deserve. But I also have ignored my husband totally, all my friends, and not returned any emails. Knitting is my passion, my calming activity, and I have not even been able to pick up a knitting needle in the past three weeks. I am so focused on learning this stuff so I don't fall flat on my face at the Expo, that the whole world is shut out except for fonts floating in front of my face.

But I digress: this post is supposed to be about settling on a mat in a specific place. To bring it back to that, I'll say that on the way to Tucson, during each stop, I'll take out a settle mat, place it somewhere outside the van, then cue Finn to "go settle" so he'll have to run around the van and find the mat in order to lie down on it.

I think teaching a dog to settle on a mat is really a fun exercise, and one of the best behaviors to teach to see exactly how best to work the 4 D's of fluency: distractions, duration, distance and diversity. It's easy to keep notes, even for those who are not linear thinkers, because the

image of a dog lying on a mat is very distinct in the mind, and for many, word pictures are how we remember and how we can best take notes on each training session. I have to see a visual image before I can remember it and write it down. That's just how my particular brain process information the most efficiently.

But for anyone who wants to see what it's like to keep training notes, teaching a dog to settle on a mat is a great and simple exercise because it's so specific, and it's easy to raise and lower your criteria as needed when you add any of the 4 D's, because you can read the dog's body language so easily, and it's a lot simpler to be proactive and read precursors that the dog has reached its threshold on any of the D's, and to catch and reinforce them before they go over the threshold and break position.

At Handi-Dogs a decade ago, when I first began teaching this behavior, it was always one of the favorite behaviors any of the new students enjoyed teaching. It was right up there with targeting, because you got instant results, it was clear for the dog, it allowed for novices to have success without having to have exquisite timing, and the benefits of having the rugs and the "go settle" behaviors were so handy in group settings.

Dogs who could not go as long lying on a bare floor duration-wise could lie much longer on the mats, because they had come to generalize that when they were on the mat, they were in their "safe place" and that the mat was like something they were supposed to be glued to until cued otherwise. When we started working with the dogs in down-stays on adding heavier distractions, diversity and longer duration, we had them on their settle mats to help set them up for success. They had already come to generalize that the mat was there "safe place" and nothing bad ever happened there and something good always happened.

Time to get back to Powerpoint. This old bird finds it hard to learn new tech stuff, and it takes so much energy, time and concentration. Talking about dog training is so much fun, and such a nice break. I'm using posting as my reinforcement for working long hours on learning

this technical stuff, which is just so difficult for me. So each time you see a post from me, it's really because I am giving myself a reward away from heavy concentration to flap my fingers like I'd flap my mouth if anyone were around!

Greeting

Think about taking the behavior back as far as you can. When people come to visit you in your home, what do you do with your dog? Well, I'm guessing you will first want to teach your dog to give YOU attention, not jump on the visitors, or bark at them, right?

So, the first step might be shaping all four paws on the floor when a visitor arrives. Then, shaping a "sit" while the visitor arrives, and keeping focus on you. Then, having the person move a few feet away while you keep your dog's attention. Then, having the visitor hold treats and reach out with a hand to offer them to the dog while you keep the dog's attention on you. Then, giving a "let's go" cue to move toward the visitor, and as you're moving, add the cue "Make Friends" and let the dog get his treat from the visitor. Then, to fade the "let's go" cue and just have the dog remain seated, giving you attention until you cue "Make Friends" and allow the dog to move to the person, sit, and get his pat or treat.

They seem to pick up "make friends" very quickly, because if they are curious dogs, friendly dogs, they WANT to greet the new person, so they are motivated.

But first, getting the "sit" and "focus" on you fairly solid first will help. Also, be sure you instruct all your visitors to give the dog NO attention: no eye contact, no petting, but to TURN AWAY if the dog starts to jump up on them with an enthusiastic greeting.

Hmmmm, this sounds a clear as mud. <G>

Longe Line for Exercise

As a way to exercise your service dog, longeing may work when opportunities for free-runs are not available. The term "longeing" comes from the horse world, where it means to condition and communicate with a horse who is moving around you in a circle at different paces.

Having a safe, easy way to exercise a service dog on trips, or in small areas, is a great option for service dog handlers.

There are several ways to approach teaching a dog to longe, or to walk, trot, canter and stop at the end of a long leash. The way you choose should reflect your dog's individual learning style.

You can use the targeting method, starting by getting the dog to target a ball attached to the end of a long stick (you can use a horse's longe whip with the whip part removed, and a ball target added - it's nylon, lightweight, easy on the arms).

Once dog is targeting the ball, moving out to touch the ball when you hold the 6 foot whip out away from you, and coming back each time to get his treat, you can start moving the whip and having the dog follow the target.

Start out slow, and c/t for just a step or two, then up the criteria by a few steps. Once the dog is following the target as you move it slowly, you can stand or sit in one spot and turn around, while holding the target stick, letting the dog follow the stick in a circle. Gradually step up the pace and length of targeting.

Some dogs, especially those who are used to working close to the handler in a "heel" position, may drift inwards, at first not feeling comfy being so far away.

If it happens, lower your criteria and build up distance incrementally. Start by shaping the target closer to your body, then gradually moving it out a few inches at a time, until it's at it's extended position.

Change directions and repeat. Get dog walking, trotting and cantering. Fade stick by pulling in while dog is briskly trotting, getting in some rapid reinforcements as the dog continues to run in the circle, while the stick is being incrementally withdrawn.

Add cue when dog is doing desired gaiting (walking, trotting or cantering) just before you click. Once dog is used to moving in a circle, from using the target stick, he will be more apt to move out away from you once you begin moving your body. Don't expect the dog to generalize starting from you in a standing position in a new direction. To get it jump started, move **WITH** the dog a step or two to get him in motion.

When dog is moving out on its own in a circle, at the end of a long leash or Flexi, add the cue to the appropriate gait just before clicking.

WITHOUT TARGET STICK

I don't use a target stick much because a wheelchair doesn't often leave enough hands to hold clicker, longe whip and long line, and still have a hand to use on the controls. I still feel it's the best option whenever possible, though, as it bypasses the need for food to be present as a lure.

Without the target stick, you can use forward momentum to get the dog moving, gaiting beside you. Then circle **AWAY** from the dog, loosening the long line so that the dog can go further and further from you, while still moving in a circle.

Begin tightening up the circle, making it incrementally smaller, until you are just turning in one spot, with the dog at the end of the long

line. ,The dog's circle incrementally widens as the handler's incrementally narrows.

Click and Treat every turn at first, then every other turn, and so forth, lengthening the time allowed for the dog to perform the behavior between reinforcements.

Add the cue as above with the target stick, at the point when the dog is offering the circling behavior consistently, and then just before the click. I use the standard verbal horse cues of "Walk" "trot" and "canter". I also let my voice aid in the cueing, with "walk" drawn out in a quiet, slow manner....:"walllllllllllllk." And "Trot" said in an upbeat, crisp manner, "Trotttt!" .

This may or may not be a good thing, so I'm adding a caveat here. **THINK** before you do this. By doing this, you may get a dog who may only respond to this cue when it's given in this manner, not delivered in a neutral or monotone.

I have consistently found that my dogs respond to the emotion in my voice faster than the words I am saying. So when my husband or other handlers try to cue my dog with different word-emphasis, like a crisp "walk!", the dog often confuses this with "trot!" because of the emotion in the voice.

If you're astute, you can use this crutch to get the behavior faster, but don't miss the solidifying the responses to this word delivered in many different ways. I'm finding I am now retraining the dog's vocabulary because I need to know others can cue him if I'm not around.

This is a real natural human tendency, because we **DO** put so much emotion into our words. And it can aid in helping the dog understand. But it also becomes part of the cue, so I felt the caution necessary.

You can test your dog's ability to understand the cues given in other ways by giving your cue in a new way and observing the dog's response. Move behind your dog so he can't read your body language.

Give the verbal cue for "sit" in the same tone of voice and inflection as you give the cue for "down".

Does the dog attempt to sit or down? Does the dog show any confusion or hesitancy before offering the behavior? ? Move behind your dog. Cue him again to perform a different behavior normally offered in another tone of voice.

If you are seeing confusion, or the performance of a different behavior than the one cued, then you may be double cueing your dog and also want to consider working on delivering cues in a more neutral tone.

FOOD LURE:

You can also lure your dog instead of target train him to longe. Luring works fine, but again, you have the added baggage of reinforcing following a food scent, and this can work against you in teaching the dog appropriate public behaviors, as it's reinforcing sniffing, an inappropriate service dog behavior. It can work if you fade that food quickly.

You can begin it close up, using the opposing circle method, or you can use it far out, using the longe whip with a spritz of squeeze cheese or liverwurst stuck to the tip. Again, it's luring, not shaping, but it can get the job done as long as it's not too reinforcing for a behavior you dog may already have a problem with: sniffing and scent following.

Know your dog, choose your method appropriately. Or come up with your own ideas. This is one of those things you can try a lot of different approaches, and many may work just fine.

Longeing is such a useful thing for a dog to know. When time is short, when energy is low, your dog can still get sufficient exercise. When traveling, longeing works great at highway rest stops, or at hotels in busy cities.

You can use each longing session as a training session, honing your dog's attention and responses along with toning his body, oxygenating his blood, strengthening muscles and promoting balanced gaiting.

It can be a great help in aiding the dog to remain alert and ready to respond to your needs during long meetings, classes, workdays, when the dog has little to do but pick up an occasional pencil or help you brace when you get up from a chair. Giving the dog a few Longe breaks can improve attention and responses.

My husband, who is bipedal, longes two of our dogs daily. I don't longe my service dog, only because I have a power chair and can run him next to it. Also, his default is heel position, and I haven't felt the need to take the time to reshape this to working out a ways from me, since I do have the power chair and can give him adequate exercise. But I have found this to be a very beneficial way to exercise a dog in the past, and a terrific way to get the ya-ya's out of puppies in training!

Nail Trimming for Sensitive Dogs

In an ideal world, we would only have well-socialized and well-handled puppies to shape for this behavior. But in the real world, we encounter dogs who have not had these obvious advantages, and often carry baggage with them. So we need to begin a desensitization program to set these dogs up for success.

If the dog is very fearful of the clippers, first begin by sitting in a known environment with the clippers in your hand. The Sofa. Your favorite lounge chair. Let your body language reflect peace, calm, mellowness. Hold the clippers in your hand and have a bag of treats and the clicker ready to go.

Let dog come to check out what you have in your hand, and if he reaches out, sniffs at the clippers, click and treat. Move clippers around

on your lap, hold them out in your hand, click and treat for any interaction.

Squeeze clippers, activating them, and click and treat for the dog not balking. If dog balks when clippers are activated, just ignore the dog. When dog, from your peripheral vision, is no longer throwing calming signals, squeeze clippers again and quickly click and TOSS treat to dog. Continue squeezing clippers and rapidly click and toss treats.

Do this for however long it takes the dog to realize you are holding something that he need not fear. The open bar/closed bar is good here, as Jean Donaldson explains. When the clippers are in hand, the bar is open and treats flow fast. When the clickers are put away, treats stop. If the dog mainly stresses on a grooming table, when his feet are picked up, toes manipulated, now is the time to start desensitizing him to this. Take a day or two to practice just putting the dog in the grooming noose, if necessary, and clicking him for allowing you to spread his toes. Don't attempt to clip a nail until the dog is no longer showing stress over having his legs lifted, his toes spread and manipulated.

If you don't use a grooming table for nail clipping, and use your lap instead with the dog lying on its back or side, work on getting the dog comfortably in that position while you click and treat for calmness. Then pick up the clippers and hold them in the palm of your hand, and slowly touch the dog's body with the clippers. C/T for all quiet behaviors. Then activate clippers while still rapidly reinforcing calm and quiet.

Don't attempt to clip nails until the dog is not stressing around the presence of the clippers. Some dogs only begin stressing once the clippers are activated. Practice desensitizing to the sound of that sliding metal which probably indicates to a dog that something stressful is coming, or something painful.

Know your dog anatomy well, and be sure you are prepared before you do an actual cut on the nail. If you cut too high, quick the dog, you'll have a much harder time gaining his confidence and are back to square one. For the desensitization program, you truly need to make certain

each experience in the presence of the clickers is non-stressful, non-painful.

Work on getting the dog, in whichever position - upright, back or side - to allow you to flex and manipulate the leg freely. Hold the leg with a bit of firmness, but still maintain the relaxed, flexibility of the leg. If dog balks at this, work on c/t for just letting you flex legs, then for letting you manipulate toes, press on nails.

When the dog is relaxed and not fighting your touch and hold, can handle having the clippers rubbed on his body, on his legs, touching his feet, then you can begin to actually nip off a bit of nail.

If you can get a helper, it will really make it easier. Or if you can grow another arm. The helper can click and treat as you direct, while you use both hands to clip and manipulate the leg and foot.

I often use a bit of light t-touch & massage to get the dog even more relaxed in between manipulating toes and readying myself for that first clip.

When the dog is really relaxed, pick up the foot and clip just a tiny bit off the nail. C/T. Release foot, do a bit of touching, hands on massage for a few seconds, then quietly slide hand down dog's leg and lift foot again. Whistle a happy tune, and clip another nail. If dog begins to stress, back off and ask for a few behaviors the dog likes to offer, c/t for them. Then go back to work again, IF the dog is not stressing.

If there is any hesitation, don't attempt to do all the nails the first day! What's important is that each time he is to have his nails clipped, that it be a very **GOOD** experience for him. You're reprogramming him here, and it may take a while. Let the dog's observable behaviors guide how much you can do at any one time. Set the dog up for success and build in as small of increments as necessary.

Usually, I've noticed that if I up the criteria too fast, the both the dog and I lose. So I'm very careful to strongly reinforce the behaviors I want before I actually tackle the clipping task. The little extra time it

takes can go a long ways to shaping JUST the behaviors you do want for foot clipping.

Patterning and Cueing

Sounds like the service dog is used to a specific pattern: eliminate, and then whoopie! Time to play. Time to mix him up a bit, so you don't have to try to capture his attention when he anticipates it's play time. Instead, you can teach him to "check in" with you and your partner, and offer you focus to see what the next cue will be.

Jane's idea of teaching an attention cue is a good one: the eye contact games are so helpful when we need to redirect a dog, and they are great fun for the dog to learn. Do you have the "How of Bow Wow" video tape? It takes you through how to teach this step by step, and you see the dog learning to quickly move its body to "find your eyes." They learn this VERY fast. If you don't have the "How of Bow Wow" tape yet, it's a fabulous foundation tape, and shows you several great ideas and how to teach them that would work in this situation.

Besides eye contact games to teach the dog to focus on the handler, instead of anticipating a different behavior, you can also teach targeting. The dog can quickly learn to target your hand as you move it around in different positions.

You can also ask for rapid responses of well-known behaviors such as sit/down, while reinforcing the dog with food treats.

Teaching the dog that the presence of another dog means, "Look at the handler for what to do next" is a good thing to do, as well.

For emergency situations, before the new cues are understood and generalized amidst strong distractions, have an ace in the hole and carry something that may be more value than romping and playing, if

the dog has something he likes more than that behavior. For some dogs, it might be a squeaky toy, ball or tug rope. Though this will be somewhat reinforcing "play time" it can also work to get you out of a jam if there is another dog approaching, etc. and you have to get from point A to point B without the dog getting too focused on whatever the distraction may be. You don't have to use it, just keep it held where the dog can see it, and use it as a focus item until you are past the distracting area.

Be really careful about using your voice cues as punishers: you can quickly teach a dog to ignore you until the really loud and strong cue is given. Instead, teach your dog to listen carefully for quieter and quieter cues, finally ones that can be delivered in a whisper.

In essence, it's like the new show "Nanny 911." Have you ever seen this show? One of the biggest problems the Nanny's encounter in a home situation where the children are out of control is that the parents continue to raise their voices louder and louder, so it becomes a contest of wills - who can shout the loudest. It's an easy pattern to fall into.

Funny little story that kind of goes with this scenario. Years ago, a guide dog user on one of the listserves told me a story about his dog working on a street in a busy city. The dog was at a stoplight, and when the light changed, the dog was busy sniffing the light post and wasn't listening for the "forward" cue. The handler gives the cue again, this time a bit louder. Still, the dog continues sniffing. Finally, the handler SHOUTS to the dog, "FORWARD" and the dog finally responds.

The funny part is that two elderly ladies were standing near him as this happened, and one turned to the other, said, "Oh, isn't that the saddest thing you ever saw - a blind man with a deaf dog!"

We can teach our dogs to wait for louder and more commanding cues very inadvertently. So being aware of not raising your voice, not hollering out the cues - is a very helpful tip. You want to work to give softer and quieter cues all the time, and this means the dog has to learn to focus his attention - checking in with the handler - often.

All the attention and targeting games are very helpful, as is mixing up the play time after elimination. General training advice with puppies often includes that of not bringing the puppy inside right after it eliminates, because it can teach the dog that the fun and sniffing and outside time can be extended by putting off eliminating. Instead, the advice is to get the job done, then play with the dog for a few minutes, so it learns that play only happens after the elimination is finished.

Just as we sometimes wait too long to fade food or toy prompts, we can do the same with the play behavior. Once the dog knows to go outside and eliminate where and when

asked, then start mixing up the play time by walking the dog to another area before playing, or taking the dog inside and then playing a couple attention or problem solving games.

It's such a natural thing that dogs will come to anticipate patterns. Cats are good at this too. My husband, for example, has our Maine Coon cat well trained to be the most obnoxious cat in the universe after a human showers. Every day, for the past 8 years or so, my husband gets up at 5 am, takes his shower, and right after his shower, he heads to the kitchen and feeds the cat. So of course, the cat now expects his food right after the shower is turned off, and howls nonstop until the food is presented to him.

By not mixing things up, by keeping to a very regular schedule, the cat now assumes and expects that certain cues mean certain things are going to happen. And if it doesn't, better have your earplugs on.

I purposely never feed the dogs at the same time each day. I vary the feeding time, and the things I do in preparation for feeding so that I don't have to put up with the stuff my husband does with the cat.

When I take my SDIT outside, it might be for a run before going on a task, or it might be going right into the van to get on the road, or it might be just to go outside to eliminate. I keep him guessing, and looking to me for the cue, rather than assuming that each time we exit

that specific door in service dog dress, he thinks he's to run to the van and jump in.

Jane explained this pattern-oriented behavior very well in her response to you (thank you, Jane!), and I just wanted to elaborate a bit because it gives me a chance to tell stories, something I love to do!

One more thing - it may help to shift thinking of the word "command." Even the sound of the word is "commanding" and "Demanding". In contrast, if we think of it as a "cue," then we can think of giving that cue in a very neutral voice - politely, as if asking someone at the table to "pass the butter, please." The more we teach the dog to look to us for the next cue, rather than have to coerce the dog's attention - the easier our job is, and the more harmonious the partnership.

Good luck to you,

Teaching Recalls

As a wheelchair user for 25 years, I have not found teaching recalls much different from when I had legs.

Run or roll backwards to first induce the behavior? Sure. Same. Then clicking when the dog is in motion toward you, and feeding when the dog gets there - usually on a second or two later.

With puppies I love the "round robin" games, with family members sitting on the floor, each with treats. Each person makes a sound to entice puppy to come to them (not saying the cue yet - just tapping the floor, or clapping hands or slapping hands on thighs). Then as the puppy is in motion coming to them, they add the cue word and immediately click, feeding when the puppy arrives in front of them.

In general, I like to teach attention games first, so the dog knows to "look to the handler" when it hears its name, or in other words, to stop and look, rather than to come running at the sound of its name. "The Find my Eyes" games are great fun, and oh-so-helpful.

Then, with teaching recalls, I get the behavior first (again, round robins or people sitting in different areas of the yard, room, etc.) then start adding the cue word while the dog is in motion, just before the click - which also happens while the dog is still in motion.

I do use backing up as well, as you suggested - and I think it's great, because it can build a nice "front" position getting the dog to come straight in toward you. Again, I do it the same way in a chair I would teach it on legs. I think I tend to do this more once the dog is already familiar with the cue word to some extent.

I like a different cue of "front" instead of the recall word for this behavior, though. So I think I tend to wait longer to do the backing up, turning a quarter turn, etc. because by that point I'm already thinking about the new cue word/behavior I am teaching. "Front" to me is actually a compound behavior - it's not just a simple recall, but to move toward me, maintain a 12 inch distance from my chair (no nosing my crotch, thank you!), and if I stop, the dog stops and sits. When I turn the chair a quarter turn left or right, it's the same as someone who is bipedal turning a quarter turn with feet. The dog still has to find the front position of my body/wheelchair.

As I mentioned, I do prefer to teach the attention games of "find my eyes" first, so the dog automatically already knows to find that position where your eyes are focused, and that is such a nice "lead in" to teaching a "front" position.

When I teach a dog to do a "front" position when the dog only knows a recall cue, I often get a dog who will move in too close or stop too far away. So unless I give an initial compound cue, the "front" position becomes the "default" positioning part of the recall.

For example, if the dog is off sniffing in the yard, I'll use the recall word to get him moving toward me, and then as he is in motion, I'll add the cue word for what position I want him to take when he gets to me - front, side (right side of my chair) or close (left side of my chair, heel position). Once this is fluent, I can, if I choose, work on actual compound cues - those cues given initially together at the same time - the recall cue and the position cue - before the dog is in motion.

I might cue the dog to "come" ... "front" or to "come".... "close" or to "come".... "side" - the compound cues are given together, but each cue word is given clearly with a slight pause (less than a second!) between the recall cue and the positioning cue.

When teaching the added behavior, I'll put emphasis on teaching the cue word for the the newest behavior. Since I establish the recall cue first, I'd say, "come.....FRONT" or "come.....SIDE"

As a side note, I have to add that I'm not a real fan of the cue word "come" as much as words that can come out less harsh during a stressful times - like the word, "Here." But, since my dogs already have been trained to use that word, I use it but constantly practice reinforcing myself for saying it in a NON-commanding way. It becomes almost a two-syllable word, from a tonal standpoint. My voice raises in the beginning, then falls at the end about 3 notes. This is for ME, not the dog. It's to help ME remember that this is not a command, but a cue. By reinforcing myself each time, I then set myself up to have a default tone of voice when I'm under stress, so I don't end up shouting "COME!" in a dictator-ly way!

I like using the clicker for recall teaching - using it while the dog is in motion, coming toward you, and you can be 90% sure he will get there quickly. I also use high-value treats when I start adding distractions.

The recall isn't fluent and "on cue" until a dog can bypass distractions - the bouncing ball, another person calling the dog, food on the ground, squirrels/cats/ little critters, children jumping around and dancing or offering the dog a slurp of ice cream cone, - and still come running toward you each time. That's the real world for service dogs.

But wait - it slices, it dices, it Julienne's - it's the Recall-0-Matic! I also teach the dog to do behaviors before it gets to me, once the positioning behaviors are already in place. I may want cue the dog to recall, then halfway to me, cue the dog to "down" or "sit." Then cue the dog a few seconds later, after that behavior is happening instantly when I give the cue - to come the rest of the way to me and take a position.

The sequence may then be "Come".....(halfway mark)....."Down".....(few seconds later)....."Leash" (fetch leash on the ground before coming into position)....."Close" (find the "heel" position at my left side.)

Ideally, we can work toward being able to give compound cues (cuing multiple behaviors with the initial recall cue, such as "leash, side, COME"). I'm working on this now, but not quite all the way there yet. I'm still working on a compound cue of only three behaviors given initially, such as "Finn" (first cue - name means give handler attention - look and wait)...."Side"....."COME." Once he's got that, I want to work on "Finn" "Leash" "Side" "Come."

I give the recall word last, when teaching the compound behaviors, so the dog doesn't start flying toward me the moment the recall word itself is out of my mouth. The "come" or "here" word is the last of the cued words to be given.

So my teaching plan for a recall might look a bit like this:

1. Entice the behavior (clap, squeal, run backwards, etc.)
2. Click while dog in motion toward you
3. Deliver treat when dog gets to you
4. Start adding cue word just before click
5. Changing positions slightly (giving while you're facing a quarter-turn to another direction)
6. Adding distractions
7. Adding more distractions
8. Teaching in more distracting environments
9. Adding a positioning cue while dog is in motion (positioning upon arrival)
10. Teaching positioning cue with distractions
11. Teaching positioning cue with more distractions
12. Teaching positioning cue in more distracting environments
13. Adding "wait" or "down" or "Sit" or "leash (fetch leash), etc. while the dog is in

motion 14. Teaching added behaviors as in #13 with distractions 15. Teaching added behaviors with more distractions 16. Teaching added behaviors in more distracting environments. 17. Teaching compound cues (name-leash-side-COME - or, "look at me, fetch the leash, take it to the left side of my chair, and now COME to me!" 18. Adding distractions 19. adding more distractions 20. Teaching in more distracting environments

The real experts on the compound cues are Sherri Lippman and Virginia Broitman, who do presentations on compound cues and also adduction at their workshops and at the Clicker Expos. I'm still in the learning phase myself on teaching the compound cues.

But learning about compound cues has really made me think of the recall differently - as the "Foundation" behavior for a whole lot of other possible compounded behaviors. There is no end to how much we can use it and what we can teach the dog to do. Fascinating stuff, and really does "take it to a new level." So much is possible with clicker training! I am still learning to see the possibilities, and it totally boggles my mind.

Tossing Treats: Pros and Cons

Wonderful discussion on treat tossing and treat-finding games!

I began to do a "180" on this topic after watching Sue Ailsby toss treats to her service dogs during training sessions.

Eye contact and focus? This trainer can move dogs around at a distance by just shifting the position of her eyes. Do her service dogs lose focus and sniff the floor, start hovering for crumbs due to the tossing of treats? Nope.

Watching Sue toss treats has given me new insight in how treat tossing can be done very effectively, without compromising desired service dog

behaviors. Does Sue Ailsby's "Scuba" stop to eat tidbits of food the floor while out in public? I've never seen it happen.

I did get the rare opportunity to spend a week with Sue, watching Scuba work in one of the most challenging environments - the Las Vegas casinos and shows. After thousands and thousands of treats having been tossed during training sessions, Scuba was a model service dog in every way.

Though Scuba lives on a farm in Saskatchewan, normally working and living in a far different environment, she was "at home" in the lights, bells, crush of crowds. Scuba had endless opportunities to scarf up treats on the ground and casino, restaurant floors. She didn't.

Scuba's focus and attention is dedicated to Sue and her fluency in public access behaviors are superb. Scuba showed no stress in the demanding new environments, was relaxed and attentive, and slept through a very noise-filled Las Vegas show - Cirque du Soleil's "O." Sue has trained Scuba by tossing thousands and thousands of treats.

I have seen trainers who do treat tossing non-effectively. It may not be an option for those with certain types of disabilities. But I have seen that in the hands of a skilled clicker trainer with superb timing, a trainer who spends copious time teaching eye contact games, free shaping, and engaging the dog's attention and participation fully - it's like watching poetry in motion. They "know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em."

Does that mean I necessarily advocate tossing treats for everyone? No.

I look at tossing treats during training sessions like teaching a really reliable recall. If the dog isn't fluent yet in responding to the recall cue - don't use it. If you choose to toss treats, you do it when you know the dog is engaged in the game and that getting the treat is just the precursor to the next part of the game.

I've seen dogs become so focused on playing the game that if they don't catch the treat, they just ignore it and choose to continue on with the

game, knowing another treat will soon come. The next step in the game becomes even more reinforcing than the treat itself.

I don't always toss treats. I'm not nearly as skillful or dedicated a trainer as Sue Ailsby, or Virginia Broitman and Sherri Lippman - also treat tossers and excellent service dog trainers. I let the dog tell me when it's not a good time to toss a treat, and when hand delivery may be a better option. In teaching close up behaviors with rapid reinforcement, hand-treating is the better option, of course.

When I know the dog is very engaged in playing the game, I'll toss treats. If I suspect I've lost his interest, or the environment is too stimulating, then I don't toss treats. I realize I'm not engaging the dog sufficiently to keep his interest, which gives me some good information: perhaps my timing is off, perhaps my energy level is too low to be fully engaged in the game myself, perhaps the environment is too distracting for the dog's ability to remain attentive - it always comes down to some kind of trainer error or misjudgment. That again is information to me. It tells me what to do next, when to shift gears.

If the dog is more focused on finding the fallen treat, then I'm going to be hand delivering those treats until I have the dog's attention fully once again. Or I'm going to change environments, to set the dog up for success. Or I'm going to take a break and eat chocolates or take a nap, and start again when I feel I can be fast and accurate enough, observant enough to keep the game going rapidly.

I expect a service dog who is nearing fluency in public access skills to be able to retrieve an object amidst a mine field of treats - it's one of the training exercises I do in public places. I'll scatter treats all over the floor, toss an object amidst the treats, cue the dog to retrieve the object while bypassing eating the treats. I don't expect to have to add a "leave it" or "off" cue to this exercise - the game is retrieve the object, not find the treats.

If the dog requires a "leave it" during the game, then I know it's my error - I've raised the bar too quickly for the dog to respond to the cue to retrieve. Or perhaps I've misjudged, missed an obvious

antecedent, chosen an environment in which to work where there are still too many distractions for the dog to concentrate on the game of retrieving.

By the time I think the dog as being "fluent" in a retrieve, I will expect him to be able to bypass a floor filled with treats and pick up the object, bring it to me, hold it quietly until I cue him to release it in my hands, or in the basket, or wherever.

Do I still use a "leave it" or "off" cue? Yes! There are times the environment will serve up unexpected challenges. That piece of Kentucky Fried Chicken wing on the sidewalk to a hungry dog may look pretty enticing.

If I notice the dog twitch a muscle toward that chicken bone, I'll give a whispered, neutral "leave it" or "off" cue. It may never be an issue in some environments, but in others, it may be very challenging for the dog to ignore. I use a cue when I feel I need it. If my dog is off duty, off leash and on a walk with me, I'd expect to give the cue.

There may be many reasons why people will choose to teach their dog to never take anything off the ground, and I respect that view as well. It just doesn't work for me. I realize it's a natural dog behavior, and I want my dog to know that there are times when it's okay to do it, and other times when it's not okay.

Certain rituals become prompts for a different set of behaviors, such as when a dog is in service dog dress. When my dog is walking with me in a public place, I don't expect him to drop his head and suck up a treat. If he does, then it's a reflection of my not having taught that desired set of behaviors in public yet to fluency.

What I don't see is that a skilled clicker trainer need think tossing treats during training or playing "find the treat" games during a play session is automatically going to reinforce floor sniffing while the dog is "on duty."

Floor sniffing is a normal dog behavior, and to try to stop a dog completely from doing it is likely to be an exercise in futility: it's against the genetic grain. But teaching the dog when it's appropriate is what brings the service dog into fluency in "on duty" behaviors.

In Jane's excellent post, she mentioned that sniffing can also be a stress response, and I totally agree with that. It's also great information. When I see my SDIT Finn sniff in public, then I know it's a stress response, as he's already fluent in ignoring food on the floor while "on duty." I look around at that point to see what I have missed - what in the environment at that moment in time is causing him to offer a stress behavior? I can usually identify it quickly.

It may be a child beckoning the dog to play from behind a rack of clothing in a store. It might be a mother who has just swatted a child on the rear and caused the child to cry out. It might be another dog approaching. It might be that I've inadvertently clipped my dog's toe with my wheelchair tire. It might be a kid on a skateboard moving quickly past my dog in close quarters. It might be a new combination of distractions the dog hasn't yet encountered. Knowing that his first stress response is often to drop his head to the floor to sniff, and this is information to me.

I then take that information to work through those particular distractions or set of distractions or environmental antecedents that caused the dog to sniff. What I don't want to do is use "leave it" as a harsh command and blame the dog for "doing something wrong." If he sniffs, there is a reason, and my job as trainer is to identify and examine that reason, and teach him incrementally to handle the situation that prompted the stress reaction.

Fascinating discussion, and it's fun and illuminating to read all the different responses. For me, tossing treats and playing treat-seeking games - have not been problematic. That's simply my experience. In sharing my experiences, I am in no way condemning other's opinions or experiences. What works for me may well not work for someone else.

Training Under (and Pointing!)

On training "under": there are no right or wrong ways. You can be a purist and shape, you can use a target, you can use a food lure. Quite frankly, I have seen no differences between ways of approaching this. If your dog responds better to luring, then lure, if the dog is a whiz at targeting, target. Likewise, if you want to "catch" the dog offering the behavior, free shape.

Personally, I tend to lure or finger-target. I have a hard time targeting in general with a stick, as I just don't have enough hands with having to push my chair, in which to effectively use a target stick. So I have my dog target my finger. I point a lot. Too much, yes. But since it works for me, gets the behaviors, ask me if I care if I'm not being a purist!

Of course, this works against me, too. I just saw myself on videotape and I looked like a gyrating fool. It was most humbling. I am notorious at over cueing, and will now have to work very hard to quiet down my overly-dramatic body language. You cannot IMAGINE my horror at seeing how much luring and finger targeting I was doing. I thought I had it pretty much under control, had learned to quiet down my body motions. Not so! But I digress.

I lure this behavior by having dog target my finger to move under table. I don't try for the down at the same time - that would be upping the criteria too fast. The "under" is a chained behavior, because the dog is first moving to the place, then going under the object, then going into a down position.

So first I lure with finger, click the moment the dog has stepped into the "aura" of the table. Incrementally I shape the dog to go completely under, then to go completely under and lie down. Then I add distance by moving a foot at a time away from the table, and sending the dog under from further and further distances.

Then I move the training to different rooms, then different environments. I don't usually add a cue until the dog is reliably offering to "go under" each time I point, but again, there's no right or wrong ways to approach this. (well, there are wrong ways - yes, you sure wouldn't drag a dog by a choke or prong under the table, of course!)

Some people just toss a treat under a table. When the dog goes for the treat, they click and treat.

Zipper or Thoughts from the Throne

The biggest problem with paw targeting is the natural "raking" thing that can so quickly and easily happen. My greatest concern is that my dog doesn't get an opportunity to do this, to save my thinner skin and to keep him from getting in variable reinforcement. Extending the duration of that touch and HOLD of the paw is to me as important as that HOLD step in the retrieve chain - if it's a weak link, the rest of it falls apart like dominos.

In the paw touch, the dog gets excited and starts raking the paw - there goes the wall next to the light switch, or the nicely finished wood cupboard doors and drawers. There goes my pricey black tights when a nail catches on them and rips them. There goes a nice little welted scratch that may take a couple weeks to heal up with a vascular insufficiency.

It's such an important link to get really fluent that I tend to harp on it, I think! I've already taught it the wrong way - NOT concentrating on that particular link, when I was a novice clicker trainer. And I lived with lots of scratched up wood, walls, legs, arms, and ruined pantyhose.

Just as I finally realized I'd never have a good retrieve until I went back and got that one weak link - the HOLD - really fluent, I realized I'd

never have good paw behaviors until I could control the pressure and the duration of that paw press, and how the dog removed his paw - again, without raking, but by lifting.

For those of you who have dogs help take off clothing, if you have to get it over the head, does the dog help the clothing get over the head?

I do have my dogs help with this when my arms are feeling weak. I just bend my head, tucking my chin in enough that the dog can pull on the sleeve and eventually the whole jacket/top will come off, so the dog can then retrieve it for me. If I lived with paralysis to the point where I could not bend my neck at all, I'd likely have to re-design this approach - cueing the dog to work from a higher level such as a bed or chair, so the dog could pull upwards as well as backwards at the same time.

Or, if you have the dog pull a zipper (with zipper pull), how does the dog get the part at the end where the little piece wants to stay in the zipper once you get it in there? Is there a technique for this?

YES! You can shape the beginning of the zipper pull into a chin lift, so the dog will disengage the zipper stopper. For some wheelchair users, we have jackets with double ended zippers - that open up from the bottom as well as from the top, so that when we are sitting, the coat doesn't ride up on us. This requires teaching the dog which zipper to activate first, and which direction you want the dog to pull in. In other words, top zipper: lift and pull up, or lift and pull down? Bottom zipper: same thing.



ATTENTION

Eye Contact and Attention

"Debi, I'm making an observation here and wonder how or if it ties together: Dog body language of one dog looking another dog directly in the eye is a challenge, so if a dog doesn't or hasn't learned that before we start training that is a good default to teach (not staring at another dog or person). But here you say it is good that Spot focuses so well on Jane right down to her eye movements. Isn't this conflicting? "

I'm not sure I understand what you are asking here. We teach a dog to seek our eyes, to change positions to find our faces and eyes, during training. We then teach the dog to not maintain steady eye contact, but to "check in" constantly and glance at our eyes.

This has nothing to do with other dogs, other than we are also teaching the dog to check in with us, seek eye contact with the human before interacting with another dog. Obviously we aren't going to encourage our dogs to "stare down" another dog. We are teaching the dogs to look to the human for leadership and the cue of how to respond next. We may give an 'ignore' cue, that the dog has been taught means to turn head away from other dog and ignore it. Or we may give a cue to "make friends" and greet the other dog.

Yes, I totally agree that it's important for dogs to learn that staring another dog in the eye is not something all dogs are going to appreciate, but with a dog learning to automatically "check in" with the handler upon the approach of another dog, this is not something that's going to be problematic while working in public as a service dog. Dog-dog socialization issues is another topic.

I see no conflict in teaching a dog to seek out the handler's eye contact. It has nothing to do with other dogs, and everything to do with

learning to offer the handler attention and focus, to be ready for whatever cue may next be given.

The advanced attention exercises I mentioned some of us were working towards, with eyeball targeting, - are not something all handlers will want to do, or need to do. But they are good to know about, because it opens up a whole new realm of possibility for those with very high level disabilities, so that the handler can shape behaviors at a distance, in a totally hands-off way, moving the dog around the floor simply by moving their eyeballs right, left, up and down. The beginning "find my eyes" exercises are much simpler, and teach the dog to offer focus to the handler consistently. For those who choose to take it to a higher level, teaching the dog to actually move as the eyeballs move, that's great. But not everyone will have a need for this, or a desire to teach to this level of skill. Still, the basic "find my eyes" and focus/attention exercises are the foundation for all other basic behaviors. Until you have your dog's attention, you don't have much to work with.

"I need to understand this better I think."

I think we were just talking about two different, but somewhat related things, and that may have been the confusion. I really don't think we have any disagreement here!

"When is it good for a dog to being looking at another dog/person's eyes and when isn't it and how does the dog learn to differentiate?"

Good question! And I expect each handler may have a somewhat different answer. For me, I want my dog to first "check in" with me, and seek MY eye contact to know what behavior I will ask for in that situation. Do I want him to go greet the other dog or person, or do I want him to stay by me in a certain position, or move to the other side of me, or what?

The attention exercises are focused on the handler - offering the handler eye contact, not any other human nor any other dog. Peek, for

instance, my SD, rarely makes eye contact with other humans unless they are training him, in trainer mode. Even when doing therapy work, he does not seek eye contact with humans other than me. I'm the leader, the handler, the person he looks to for direction. He has never been taught to seek eye contact with other dogs, only to defer eye contact and instead offer it to me.

"I think this sort of ties in with what Karen (Bear/Thor) was talking about with you regarding Bear trying to stare her down. That might be the source of my confusion on this particular topic."

I don't understand how it ties in. I don't think Bear was staring her down, but most likely looking to her for leadership in a situation where he was unsure and too stressed to respond. Karen shared that when Thor is not there next to Bear during training sessions, that Bear doesn't shut down.

"Jane was answering Karen about negative reinforcement and avoidance of negative stimulus: An example Dogs learn not to pull on a prong collar so learn loose leash walking by avoiding the discomfort of the prongs. This time I AM confused. wouldn't a dog avoid 'the discomfort of the prongs' by heeling - being as close to the handler as possible so as not to take a chance of the collar being use? LLW seems a bit risky to me for avoidance of discomfort! If I were uncomfortable with a prong collar on, I wouldn't be one centimeter farther away from my handler than absolutely necessary."

Exactly. And you just reiterated what Jane said: It's avoidance of discomfort that teaches the dog in a prong to avoid re-activating that particular aversive stimulus. The dog learns to stay close to the handler so as not to take a chance of the collar tightening and causing discomfort. But the dog first has to experience the pain of the tightening of the prong to know it's something to be avoided. It hurts when he pulls, it stops hurting when he is walking next to the handler on a loose leash. Negative reinforcement.

"This is both an observation and a question: of course in order to train anything the dog must be able to focus on the trainer. BUT as time passes and the dog learns, how much do each of us want our SDs to wait for us to give direction, and how much do we want them to have learned to 'problem solve' and anticipate what we might need? Spot too often does something before I ask him to. And they are not always things I've trained."

Good question! We teach focus and attention, but we are not seeking the kind of wrap around never take your eyes off mine kind of attention used in competition obedience. We may use this during the learning process, but our goal is to teach the dog to do an automatic "check in" with the handler, whether out in public on a short leash, in a park on a Flexi, or off-leash cavorting with other dogs. The dog who has learned that it's very rewarding to 'check in' with its owner, will continue this behavior if taught in all contexts and environments. For example, my dog checks in with me about every 15 seconds. When he's out on a Flexi, he may check in every 30 seconds, but he has learned that keeping an eye on me is rewarding and good things happen when he does. When he's off leash, the same behavior is offered. I smile, as a cue to continue whatever he was doing, or may decide to offer a cue to do a different behavior, such as drop into a down, or come to me.

This has nothing to do with teaching the dog to anticipate your needs, which it will likely do anyway as our behaviors become patterns for the dogs. But I don't want my dog, for example, to pick up objects I have not cued him to pick up, with one exception: keys. There might be a razor blade, knife or dangerous pill on the floor. The last thing I want him to do is anticipate I'm going to ask him to fetch all items I drop.

Now, a dog who has a solid repertoire of behaviors can still anticipate and offer "intelligent disobedience" . For example, Sherri Lippman's shepherd was taught to find objects by scent that Sherri has touched. Once, her purse fell open late at night in a dark environment, and the contents spilled on the ground by the car. Sherri could not see all the objects, but cued her dog to "find MINE" meaning find and fetch any

object that smelled like Sherri. After what Sherri thought was the last object to be fetched, she cued her dog to get into the car. The dog refused, and offered her only eye contact. Realizing something was amiss, she decided to offer the "find MINE" cue again. Sure enough, the dog went belly down, crawled far under the car and retrieved a pen that had rolled and lodged against the back tire. Once that object was retrieved, the dog responded to the "get in the car" cue.

Now, I may appreciate that my dog anticipates that when I'm gathering the leash and moving towards the door, that it's likely time to go out with me, and that he's showing readiness by remaining close and in a sit position. But I don't want him to automatically raise his front paws onto my lap in the wheelchair, just because we always do this to put his vest and leash on. I may be just going out for the paper, and not have anything to protect my legs from his nails. So the anticipation of offered focus to me is good: the assumption that he should do the next behavior in the pattern - doing a paws up on my leg - is not good. So I don't reinforce any unasked for behaviors other than focus and eye contact, until I have cued them to be offered.

"I don't see anticipation and problem solving as synonymous. Dogs learn to press on through a bit of frustration through exercises in problem solving. That is not the same as anticipating what is going to be needed from him, and doing it without being cued to do it. There may be many behaviors we do appreciate the dog anticipating and doing without being asked, and we reinforce this by always accepting that behavior when it is offered. Some of these may be walking nicely on a loose leash or off leash beside us, or sitting before getting the food bowl, or alerting us to environmental sounds or sights. But there are likely far more behaviors we don't really want to be offered without some type of cue from us, for safety sake."

Again, I don't think any of us are really in disagreement here. I just think it's apples and oranges, and we're each going to have our own individual behaviors that our dogs are encouraged to anticipate and

offer without being cued to do so, and others we prefer our dogs not to do until we cue them to do so.

"..and again on 2/10 Jane mentioned about luring with food in her left hand at her side/knee for teaching heel. That made me remember on trainer I went to who said to teach 'heel' he always first moves with the dog instead of trying to make the dog (in any way - lure, collar correct, etc) follow him until it becomes second nature to the dog to be in the right place when walking with his person. Seemed strange to me then because he didn't talk in current OC terms but he was teaching the dog to heel with no aversives, wasn't he?"

Yes, indeed, he was! Jane's sharing of her chosen method is a very well accepted way to teach a dog that the position next to the handler is VERY rewarding. She lured the dog initially, then delivers the treat in place. We can do the same with a target stick, or with a finger target, or with a positional verbal cue, with or without event markers such as clickers, verbal markers, whistles, etc. We don't have to talk in OC terminology to explain what is being operantly learned.

Teaching Attention and Focus

My current dog is a SDIT, not a fully trained service dog. He did herding and TV work before he was offered to me as a service dog. He has some very solid foundation behaviors, plus a plethora of other behaviors that were transferable to service work. But stage work, even with all its distractions - is quite different from service work, and we have to allow adequate time for the dog to not only transfer to a new handler, but also to generalize attentive behaviors in so many new environments. Though he is doing very well, he is nowhere near "finished" and is still very much a SDIT.

I am working through the attention issues as well. It's a slow process, but immensely rewarding to see the tiny steps of progress with each outing. You asked if I use "watch" or another cue to ask for attention from Finn. Sometimes I will, but most often I will simply cue another behavior, such as touching my hand, to re-engage the dog with me if his attention is wandering. Or, if we are moving, I'll simply stop, and this elicits eye contact, and then I can cue a "close" (move into position at my left side).

I guess I try to use the dog's body language to tell me what approach will work best at that particular time, and with that particular distraction. This particular dog has a strong, strong "down" as a default, and when the distraction is really difficult to ignore, and I suspect he may not hear me give any other cue because he's tuned out, then I'll cue the "down" position. His former owner/trainer taught me this, and it has been an ace in the hole for us.

There are times when standing at my side is just not working - especially when kids are determined to pet him. He adores kids totally, and is still learning to 'check in' with me first before greeting them. But even when he's able to remember to offer me attention, there's no doubt that kids are approaching. His tail betrays him every time. This is GOOD, because he'll spot a kid 100 yards away and I have plenty of time to keep his focus before the child gets close.

Sue Alexander shared an excellent idea of how to teach a dog to associate someone touching the dog as a cue for the dog to offer instant attention to the handler. There is nothing I have to offer that is better advice than this. I think it's a very good exercise to teach and practice routinely, and can build a strong default of associating touch with checking in with the handler.

Teaching "look" and "watch" is also really terrific, and can be a marvelous attention-keeper. Sue Ailsby's SD Scuba is very fluent in these cues, and it's very impressive to see Scuba do these two behaviors in rapid succession.

Also, in a an archived post Sue Ailsby shared how Scuba touches her leg at intervals as a "check in." Since I had this post in my personal archives, I'm reposting the two paragraphs that explains the behavior:

"Scuba knows how to touch my hand with her nose, and she also knows how to lay her head in my hand BUT what she taught herself was for when we're walking. When she's in Service Dog Mode, and we're walking somewhere, particularly when there are high distractions and she's concentrating very hard on her job (at that moment that means staying by my side, watching for dropped things, walking v-e-r-y slowly when she'd much rather be doing weave poles around people)."

"Many years ago she started gently touching my left knee with her nose. This is a fleeting thing, doesn't impede my motion at all, but it tells me that she's right with me, On The Job, no need for me to think about what she's doing in this crowded situation, or keep the leash tight enough to know where she is, or keep twisting to see her. She does it in cadence with my footsteps, 2, 3, 4, Touch, 2, 3, 4, Touch. So maybe you could teach a nose-to-knee brush instead of Watch Me."

Using Circles to Regain Lost Attention

Jane has a 3.5 yr old lab who had extensive early socialization, but who has been frightened by rough play with other dogs, and now exhibits stress behaviors with some dogs. Jane notes that she has "space issues" when on leash, and begins to react once the other dogs comes into her "safety zone." Jane has been trying to ignore the aggressive behaviors and reward the positive interactions, but the situation is only getting worse. In part, Jane states, this could be due to the neighbor's off leash dogs who run up to them when Jane and her dog go for walks. She asks for suggestions.

Jane, I think the key will be to become even more pro-active. You are doing a great job, and I think you have to click and treat yourself for

your commitment to this lovely dog, and how hard you are working to bring her through this and out the other side. So my first suggestion is to pat yourself on the back and take a well deserved bow.

Second, you can see a very visible shift in her behaviors when the advancing dog gets close to her "space", or comfort zone. So, back up a few yards, and begin shaping what you DO want many feet from the edge of her comfort zone. This is what I mean by becoming "pro-active." You begin your program of systematic desensitization at a point before you begin to see the stress reactions, not after they have begun. If they have begun, then you have no choice but to react. So to set yourself up for success, become very pro-active in your approach.

For instance, if the oncoming dogs trigger calming signals in your dog at 40 feet, begin your program of shaping what you do want at 25 feet, at a point where the dog is not already throwing off calming signals.

One trick I use constantly with this is circling and arcing. I don't make the dog face his fears head on - usually, this only leads to intense focus on the oncoming dog and less attention on me.

Instead, I note that a dog is coming, and I begin continuous heavy reinforcement, getting the dog focused completely on me, and asking for well-known behaviors, such as sit, down, shake, - whatever.

Then, I begin arcing or circling INTO the dog. Why? When you move INTO your dog (and I don't mean a tight circle, or stepping on him), you force him to focus on YOU so he won't get stepped on. And each step he moves away from you, with his attention riveted on you, you can do heavy, rapid reinforcements.

Moving in that arcing circle, you incrementally get the dog closer and closer to the object he fears, but still totally attentive to YOU, because he doesn't have TIME to focus on the other oncoming dog. If he begins to focus on the dog, you move into him again, causing him to give you full attention so he won't get stepped on. This again gives you the opportunity to reinforce heavily, and re-capture his full attention.

I realize this is a bit of a stray from allowing the dog to always move of his own volition, by moving into the dog. He really doesn't have a choice but to move away from you. However, with dogs who are exhibiting fear aggression, throwing off calming signals like mad, I find this particular technique extremely effective, and well worth straying from total volition for the results it gives.

I have now done this with at least a dozen dogs who have had fear aggression issues, and I have never had it fail me. My service dog Peek was the worst of the lot. A kennel raised dog, he never learned to communicate with his own species except to do major territorial guarding while in his kennel.

At first, I tried punishers (this was pre clicker), and brother - did the problem escalate. With each tightening of the leash, with each correction - he got more and more anxious, stressed - it just exasperated the problem and I had to abandon trying to socialize him. At that time I thought it truly was hopeless. He was a monster, a total monster and very close to being euthanized by my family when I had to spend a month in the hospital.

Once we began clicker training, things got a bit better but we still had the same problem with other dogs. And unlike Jane's dog, my dog had no use for ANY other dog. Enter Turid Rugaas and Jean Donaldson. Once I realized the power of observing behavior, and moving from purely observable behaviors, our progress truly began. I was able to get him focused on me, and incrementally move him past his worst fears. I circled and arced him down many a footpath, and he finally got to the point he could pass another dog without going into terror mode. This was a **BIG** step. Then we began using the same technique to allow the other dogs to come closer and closer. The hardest part was not tightening up on the leash. It's an automatic for Peek that he wants what he most fears: he would strain at the leash to get to the other dog, but they also terrified him.

So I kept moving into him, keeping that leash slack, and reinforcing any kind of attention to me. Finally, he was able to go nose to nose with another dog without sending off calming signals, and without

stressing. It was like a miracle, and one I never thought I'd see. He's a different dog today, and though he still is learning how to play with other dogs, he can now pass and re-pass quietly and without stress.

Good luck and I hope you will try this. It's worked so well for me!



ELIMINATION ON CUE

Eliminate on Cue

Here's a suggestion I'd like to share for those who are just teaching their dogs to eliminate on cue using the clicker:

Wait until the dog is almost finished eliminating, then click just before the dog has finished. If you click when the dog **begins** to eliminate - the dog may stop eliminating, and not empty out completely.

If you pair the click with the behavior - but almost at the end, then you set the dog up for success in both ways: the click marks the behavior the dog is being reinforced for doing, and the dog has sufficiently emptied his bladder or bowels.

One more suggestion that may be helpful: When you take the dog outside - preferably on leash, at first, don't play with the dog - just take the dog to the place it will be expected to eliminate and try to be as unobtrusive as possible. After the dog has eliminated, stay outside with the dog for just a couple of minutes and do something the dog finds

enjoyable. This reinforces that fun happens AFTER the dog has eliminated, not before.

Because going outside with its human can be a very pleasurable thing for a dog, Rushing back inside as soon as the dog has eliminated can result in a dog who takes its Time eliminating, because it learns that eliminating ends the outdoor experience.

To take the dog out on leash, allow it to eliminate first, then spend a few minutes allowing the dog to sniff, run around after you, play an interactive game, etc. can speed up the process of putting elimination on cue.

One last suggestion: Even when the dog is eliminating successfully each time you give the cue in its regular elimination area, the behavior is still not fluent. It's only halfway there. Adding distractions incrementally, changing substrates, changing areas where the cue is given - is all part of taking the behavior through to fluency.

Service dogs working in public will likely not always have the same type of substrate and environment in which they were taught to eliminate. The behavior is not fluent until the dog can do this behavior each time it is given the cue. A behavior is considered fluent when the dog respond to the cue in any environment, amidst any type of distractions, on any substrate.

This takes time and planning, and reinforcing the behavior hundreds of times in Places other than the backyard.

It helps to think about possible distractions and diversity that can interfere with the dog's understanding of responding to the cue. Examples could include:

- Eliminating on cue when a cat or squirrel runs by
- Eliminating on cue when a group of children are playing close by
- Eliminating on cue when there is a fried chicken leg bone within sight on the ground
- Eliminating on cue on a cement surface when the dog normally uses grass
- Eliminating on cue near an active ball game
- Eliminating on a

disposable pad indoors or outdoors when cued - Eliminating during a thunderstorm or other inclement weather

Separate cues for Urination and Defecation? I'm curious as to how many listmembers do give separate cues for these behaviors. I have never taught a dog to do this, and haven't personally found it necessary. Is it helpful? If I give a cue to eliminate, I expect my dog to empty out. I also realize that I do watch my dogs' behaviors closely, I don't "free feed" and have a good idea of when they will need to defecate as well as urinate. By not rushing the dog back into the house, I can also take a few minutes to watch the behaviors, and if the dog is still showing interest in sniffing, circling or not moving quickly, then I can pretty much tell the dog has to defecate and is readying itself to do so.

I have all male dogs, and though they will squat and urinate if cued on a specific substrate or area, their normal behaviors are to find the best smelling bush and lift their legs. Once they have urinated, they will move to another area a few feet away from where they urinated if they then have to defecate.

PARADISE LOST:

I am in the middle of having our yards landscaped, and one of the things I most wanted built was a good sized sandbox for the dogs to eliminate in, with hardy bushes, a big boulder, and lots of deep sand. It was getting impossible to keep up with all the yellow spots on the lawn, so I figured I'd teach the dogs to eliminate in the new area only. My husband dubbed it, "The Beach," and that was the cue word I taught to get them to all run out to that area to eliminate.

The dogs seemed to love that area, and the great selection of bushes, plus all the nice sand to kick their scent around. I began to quickly revel in my fast success of teaching them to use that area exclusively as their elimination station.

Yesterday, as the Mojave Desert sun beat down during the day, the dogs refused to go to The Beach, and instead picked areas under the trees to relieve themselves. I bent down from my wheelchair and felt that sand,

and it was like a frying pan. Of COURSE they couldn't go there! Not sure what the next step will be - either live with yellow spots on the lawn, or put up some type of trellised covering that I can cover with vines and keep the sun from heating up the sand so hot the dogs can't use the area. So much for my great ideas.

No matter where you are at in training for elimination, it always seems to be a journey that never quite ends.

Elimination on Cue

For service dogs, it's very helpful to have elimination on cue and fluent. Fluency means that the dog will respond to the cue immediately, every time, and in all environments. This means the dog has learned to respond to the cue when you ask it to eliminate on dirt, gravel, asphalt, grass, stones, on wet driveways and on pee pads.

It means the dog will eliminate when you give the cue in the park, when squirrels are running by, when cats hiss and sprint in front of the dog's face, when ball games are in session a few feet away, or someone is riding through the park on horseback.

It means the dog will respond to the cue and eliminate when other dogs are around who are on leash and off leash, when a group of children are trying to coerce the dog to play, or in a busy parking lot with cars driving by blaring rap music that bounces off the pavement like mini-earthquakes.

As Nancy also explained, having the elimination behavior on cue is extremely useful while traveling or having to walk dogs in bad weather.

Attaching a cue word to the behavior whether we use an event marker (clicker, word, etc.) or not and having the dog respond in everyday environments - our homes, backyards, or on walks in places the dog is

used to eliminating in - is only the first part. The behavior and cue may be understood well in these contexts, but not in others yet. The journey to fluency is not an overnight trip.

Before a behavior is fluent, or under "stimulus control," we have to offer our dogs opportunities to perform and learn the behavior in a host of different situations, with different environmental prompts or no prompts, with a plethora of different distractions, and on the most diverse group of substrates we can find. A dog may be very reliable responding to the cue in known environments, or known substrates only to be completely confused when asked to eliminate on a man-made object or on pavement.

My current service dog Finn is pretty good on responding to the cue in most situations, but the behavior is still not truly fluent, not under stimulus control yet. It's getting close, but there are still situations where he has not yet generalized the behavior, such as on a pee pad in a busy airport when a group of children are squatting in a circle trying to get his attention with squeaky, happy voices and treat bribery. Or on a tarmac at the airport where there is only oil-soaked asphalt and cement, and very loud jets, plus carts that beep and pull luggage around.

Some dogs will find it highly aversive to get their toes wet - not in the rain, but with urine spatter from eliminating on a hard, non-porous surfaces.

I don't think it's the method of how we teach the behavior that's as important as the diversity we can offer in teaching the behavior in every possible environment with every possible distraction we can find. However, it's my personal experience that using a clicker can make the process happen faster, and the journey through to fluency much quicker and smoother.

In my experience, in an unfamiliar environment, the clicker can become more than a marker - it can become a prompt that another fun learning game is about to begin, and this can help override small fears and distractions with dogs who have already learned to be operant. For

example, my service dog is likely to choose to ignore a piece of juicy steak if a child or group of children are approaching him - the children are of higher reinforcement value to him than a piece of meat, normally. I suspect this would change depending on just how hungry the dog was, but I've never let him get that hungry so it's just conjecture.

On any normal day, I could hold that juicy steak in front of his nose trying to lure him, and he'd still choose to offer his attention and focus to the children. But what happens when I pick up the clicker? His mind shifts into learning mode, because he has been reinforced consistently for playing clicker games of all kinds, and the reinforcers have always been varied. Sometimes the reinforcer is a food item, sometimes it's "premack" - a chance to do something the dog really wants to do more than anything.

An example of Premack is the pond in my back yard. Finn's greatest passion is to go out and herd the fish in the pond. There is no reinforcer stronger that I can offer, so I use an opportunity to do what he wants for a short while as the primary reinforcer for the learning session.

If any of you have seen the short streaming videos on the OCAD website of Finn holding a raw steak in his mouth while sitting quietly, you can look closely and see that his eyes will shift back and forth to the pond. He's patiently engaging in the exercise of holding what is normally a food item (he's a raw fed dog) because he suspects that they payoff after he hears the click is going to be a chance to go visit the fish again. If it's not, however, then he'll still remain in the game, because he has learned to enjoy the game of learning, has learned to accept treats in lieu of what he really wants - to see the fish! - but also, I realize, in hopes that the next reinforcer might be that opportunity to go interact with the fish.

If I want to ask him to try something really unusual in a store setting, for example, I'd likely go to a pet supply store and practice teaching the exercise a short distance from the caged birds, gerbils or mice. I can then use "premack" as a very strong primary reinforcer. The other day

I borrowed a skateboard from a kid who was skating around a group of dogs in crates outside for adoption at a large pet supply store. I asked the kid if I could use his skateboard for just a minute.

My dog very much wanted to greet the dogs in the crates as well as meet the children and adults all around the crates, so I set up the skateboard on the ground about 15 feet away from the crates. I cued the dog to sit several times in a row, quickly - on a curb, on grass, on gravel, on pavement - and then on the unstable skateboard. As the skateboard started wiggling under him, he sprang back up, but his focus was split between the dogs and kids and me with the clicker. The clicker won, along with the hopeful reinforcement that the way to get what he really wanted was to play the clicker game.

He was cued to sit around and on the skateboard many times, until the slight movement under him of instability was no longer a scary thing - just a thing that existed. The learning curve was reduced, I saw, by understanding that premack was going to be a big help in getting him to try something totally new when it was introduced. And yes, when he sat on the unstable skateboard for 5 seconds, I certainly did click and run him over to greet the kids and dogs as his reinforcer.

Normally, however, when I'm teaching a dog to eliminate on cue, I'm using food as my primary reinforcer with balls and frisbee tosses as a back up reinforcer so that I can vary the reinforcements as needed. Food is fast, and I can deliver it quickly. But in teaching elimination on cue, I don't normally need the kind of speed food can give me, so I most often mix up the reinforcers. But because I want that moment of success to be very distinct to the dog - I DO use a clicker, or if no clicker is available, I will use a very distinct sharp marker sound I make verbally - a "YIP!" (thanks Sherri and Virginia!)

When teaching elimination on cue, I wait until the dog is almost finished eliminating before I click. If I click too early, while the dog is still strongly in the middle of eliminating, it will stop the behavior. But if I wait until the dog is nearly finished, and click JUST AS The dog is finishing, but before he is completely finished - then I'm getting a clear

message to the dog that what he is doing at that very moment he heard the click is what he's going to be reinforced for doing.

Capturing elimination this way is a great way to start in your own backyard. But it's still only a rudimentary behavior at that point, and even if it's "on cue" at this point, it hasn't been generalized to distracting environments, inclement weather and changing/unknown substrates yet. It's still a behavior being taught that has a ways to go until fluency/stimulus control.

Of course it's easier to do this with puppies - they are sponges waiting to be filled. It's easier to teach a human child to work a computer game than it is a human adult. But it's also possible to do it with dogs of any age, especially once we teach them how to become clicker savvy, to become operant dogs.

Our backyard elimination areas provide tons of opportunity to teach Elimination on different substrates, as we can introduce pee pads, gravel, cement bricks, dirt, grass, bark mulch, newspapers, astro-turf sections and plastic sheeting into our learning sessions quite easily. You can start by laying the new substrate close to the area where the dog is already comfortable eliminating, until by successive approximation - clicking for getting closer and closer to each substrate before starting to eliminate - we can shape the dog to eliminate on the substrate itself.

We can then add distractions in this known environment, such as waving our arms, turning around in circles, opening and closing an umbrella, or dropping an item while the dog is eliminating. I don't add distractions as early as I do when I'm teaching a regular behavior, such as sit or target - but I add those distractions as soon as the dog is having success eliminating in a new area or on a new substrate and has been consistent in doing it for a few sessions.

INDOORS/OUTDOORS: for already housetrained dogs, eliminating indoors on ANY substrate can be a challenge. Even if a dog can eliminate on a pee pad every time you give the cue in an outdoor setting doesn't mean this is going to generalize when the pad is brought indoors and the same cue is given. It's a whole new ballgame,

and we have to lower our expectations, and back up a few steps until the dog comes to realize the same behavior can be done inside that is done outside. This one can be especially tough for mature dogs who have had a history of punishment for eliminating inappropriately indoors.

It may take a longer amount of time to teach the dog that in specific instances - when the pee pad is laid down on the floor and the cue word is heard - that it's okay to eliminate even if it is indoors. I use successive approximation again to achieve this - first reinforcing for going outside on the pee pad, then moving the pad successively closer and closer to the door of the house, then on the threshold, a foot inside the door, two feet, three, etc. until the dog will eliminate on the pad no matter where in the house it is placed down, once the cue is given .

In general, while it's not hard to teach a dog to eliminate on cue, it still takes a lot of time to teach the behavior into fluency and have the behavior become truly under stimulus control.

If the behavior is on cue, and fluent, then there is no reason for the behavior to be offered when the cue is not given. There is also the added prompt of a pee pad, which you place down before you cue the dog to eliminate.

While I can understand the concern, it all comes down to fluency. If the behavior truly is under stimulus control - is fluent - then the behavior will be offered only when cued, and immediately when cued, anytime, anyplace.

If you have a plan, to teach the behavior as I outlined - first outdoors, on different substrates, then with the pee-pad outside, and then on the pee-pad being moved to different places outside, and then closer and closer to the house - then you are teaching the dog to eliminate on this very specific substrate.

At the point where this particular substrate is generalized by the dog - when it's presented as a substrate, and the cue is given - then there is no history of "accidents" and no reason for the dog to generalize that the

bedroom carpet is the same as the elimination station you have set up and cued the dog to use.

Problems may well happen if the behavior is not taught through to fluency and the cue isn't under stimulus control.

Do you use a small area rug as a settle mat for your dog? When you cue your dog to settle on that mat, even when it's placed on carpeting - will your dog lie on the mat and not the surrounding carpeting? Do you teach a specific word that means "find your rug or mat and lie down on it until I cue you to get up again"? If you do, then you likely don't have problems with a muddy dog coming into the house, lying on light-colored carpeting while it's wet, because you have taught your dog to lie on a similar - but specifically different substrate when you give that cue to him.

For elimination on cue, it's the same concept. Teach the dog to eliminate on different substrates first, then take a specific substrate and teach the dog to eliminate on that substrate in many different environments: in the front yard, the back yard, the garage, on the sidewalk, etc. Once the dog can discriminate that specific substrate, then that's the substrate he will eliminate on when you give that cue to him.



LOOSE LEASH WALKING

Advice for Loose Leash Walking

There is no doubt the prong can work on many dogs, but remember, it works by the dog's avoidance of pain. I do understand that the GL can be aversive to some dogs, but at least it doesn't deliver pain.

But, neither product teaches the dog anything, other than to avoid discomfort by not pulling. I have a suggestion for getting past the need for any of this stuff.

Think circles. Circles are wonderful, and they can set the dog up for success, leaving tons of opportunities to reinforce without having to add any aversive into the pot.

By circling, I mean counter-clockwise circling, with the dog on your left. If you step INTO the dog's space - just one step, the dog has little choice but to move, and will immediately give you attention, which is your nanosecond to reinforce that very thing. I'm talking wide, arcing circles here, not tight ones. Just constantly taking a step into the dog's space, and gently coercing focus back on you.

You are just sort of creeping into his space like the guy in the SUV on the highway creeps into your lane, when he's talking on his cell phone. You'd just be inching into his "space" and instead of walking a straight line forward, you're walking just slightly counterclockwise in direction, so that it would look like a wide, long arc.

This takes care of both forging and lagging quite effectively, even if your timing of the click (or just chucking food) is not exact every time. Once he is maintaining pace with you in the counterclockwise direction, begin to turn in a wide outside circle, where he'll have to speed up to keep up with you.

Be ready with the clicker to catch him at the exact moment he is right where you want him to be. He can't lag if he's rushing up to get his treat, and that puts him back in position again. And he can't pull if you're on the inside and moving a bit faster than him. If necessary, start off again after delivering the treat with a few steps in the

counterclockwise direction, then move back into the figure 8's, so you have both inside and outside circles to work with.

When you move on the inside, and your dog is on the outside of a clockwise circle, he has to RUSH a bit to keep up with you. This is where rapid reinforcement really pays off - and it gives him a clear picture that sometimes he will have to move faster than you are to keep in position. You are TEACHING him this without using pain or fear of pain to suppress the behavior you don't want the dog to do.

Serpentines or figure 8's are GREAT for helping the dog learn to move with you all the time, and it is fantastic for desensitizing dogs to environmental stimuli. The dog has to jog a bit to keep up on the clockwise circles, and go slower to keep pace on the inside, counterclockwise circles. Again, rapidfire clicking and treating really helps to keep the dog engaged in keeping pace with you.

If you have a secure area in which to work, consider working off leash. It's just one more thing you have to deal with. If you keep rapidly reinforcing, you won't need a leash. The leash is really only there for emergency, to keep the dog safe in unfenced environments. And you certainly won't need a prong nor a gentle leader, except for those times when you simply gotta get somewhere in heavy distractions, which you know will set off his triggers.

When I speak of rapid reinforcement, I mean just that - I may get in 30 clicks and treats delivered in one minute of heeling practice. I keep the sessions short - not more than 3 minutes, and the dogs just LOVE It, learn at warp speed, and then it's just a matter of bringing in distractions incrementally.

The biggest thing is to find ways to maintain the dog's focus on you rather than just in avoiding pain. Think of what this could do if you have your prong on the dog, and he forges, feels the pain at the same time a fellow in a beard pushing a baby stroller comes by. The dog can quickly and easily attach the pain it feels on its neck with the presence of the bearded man or the baby stroller, and a brand new fear can be born. Using behavior suppressors like Prongs can be very tricky, and if

they can be avoided safely, it's always better to take time to teach what you do want instead.

But I do understand that safety is an issue, and that we have to make choices based on where we have to walk our dogs, and in order to get them outdoors to encounter scary stimuli.

One thought I have is that it may still be better to use the GL only to slip the noose over the nose when entering a trigger zone, where safety is an issue, and then, when the environment is more neutral, just to slip the nosepiece off and use the GL as a regular collar. It's there for safety when you need it, but it is not aversive enough - ie, it is aggravating, but not painful - so that the dog won't accidentally pair something in the environment with the pain he feels from the collar tightening on him.

I think off-leash teaching is ideal for a great many reasons. One big one for me is that we humans often tend to rely on the leash to cue our dogs. We may not jerk and pop the leash, but we often DO use just a bit of pressure to cue our dogs which direction we may be going next, etc. This can be so subtle we are not even aware we are doing it. So, working off leash takes away one more cue to the dog, and allows the dog to remain in thinking mode, solving the problem of how to maintain his position on both inside and outside circles, as well as straight aways.

Good luck to you

LLW and Sniffing

I like to approach the teaching of two separate behaviors - Loose Leash Walking - and "Ignoring Stuff to Sniff on the ground" - as two separate behaviors. Some dogs catch on quickly that being clicked while walking on a loose leash (which they are still in the process of learning) and that the clicks happen only when they are not sniffing.

But for many other dogs, the concept isn't clear, and you still have the sniffing behavior that will happen, that will be getting reinforced. Since this is such an innate dog behavior, I think it can be very resistant to extinction unless the message is taught very clearly and precisely.

What I have found that bypasses this fuzziness is to just go back, and teach only ONE thing at a time. If I'm teaching loose leash walking with a dog who does not already know not to sniff the ground, I'm watching the dog's body language closely. I'm aware of every muscle twitch, and can normally catch the dog's muscle movement before the head moves down to sniff something. When I see the change in muscle twitch, in minute head movement, ear movement or eye focus on something that I suspect may lead to dropping of the head and sniffing, then I like to be pro-active and do one of these things before the sniffing starts:

Click and treat before the head goes down

Say, "Let's Go!" and move forward at just a bit quicker pace
Arc into the dog's space one sidestep, so the dog will be aware of where your feet (or wheels) are

Arc away one side step and move out at a slightly faster speed

5. Turn a circle and then begin moving forward again.

I'll also be working in a different session (same day but not at the same time I'm focusing on LLW) to teach the dog to ignore things I know he'll want to sniff or eat. I may have 3-4 very short one minute sessions of this during the day, so the dog has several opportunities to learn to ignore really good stuff, and is also rewarded for doing so. This "Doggy Zen" is a fabulous exercise, and also great fun for the dog.

Just put something yummy in your hand, close your hand around it, hold it out toward the dog and let the dog sniff. Make sure the dog cannot get to the item. Say NOTHING. Let him sniff, try to get it, and eventually give up. The moment his eyes leave the object, CLICK and

give a treat from the other hand - a treat of equal value to the one he's sniffing.

Within just a few clicks, the dog will catch on that learning to shift his focus from the thing he wants and look away from it - will get him exactly what he wants. He just has to learn to give something up in order to get something - that's the "Zen" of it.

Once the dog is looking up at your eyes each time you put out your hand with the goodies in it, it's time to add the cue word for "ignore this and give me eye contact instead." To add it, put your hand out with the goodies in it, and give a neutral-sounding cue word just as the dog is shifting his gaze away from your hand, and just **BEFORE** you click him for doing this.

Be careful of the cue word or words you choose. Some words or phrases are just harsh sounding enough that when you give them during a time you're stressed, they will come out like commanding punishers, not as cues. There's a difference, for example, of the nice, relaxed, smiling cue phrase "leave it" said with with no emotion, as if you'd say, "pass the butter, please" and the commanding "LEAVE IT!" which tonally, indicates there will be an "OR ELSE SOMETHING UNPLEASANT WILL HAPPEN!"

I think if I were to choose a new cue word today for bypassing that urge to sniff, I'd likely use something I am not ever apt to say in a harsh way, no matter how stressed I may be, such as, "Spinach!" or "Chocolate" or "Butter," etc.

As you work toward opening your hand, and the dog is quickly ignoring what's in it, and looking up at you instead, it's time to start moving the hand around - move it up, down, right, left, and closer and closer to the floor. For those with feet, you can put the treat near your foot just in case the dog **DOES** go for it, so you can quickly cover it with your foot. If you don't have usable feet, but do have useable hands, you can do the same thing when you move to putting the treat on a different surface - say a low table or chair.

From their, you can work the exercise toward ignoring little bits of food in plates on the floor - and it may be helpful to back up, start by putting down low-value treats, such as dog biscuits rather than chicken bits - separated by 6 feet or so. As you get closer to the plate of goodies, you give your cue quietly, so the dog knows that he is to ignore that object coming up quickly.

When responding to the cue is well generalized, in many different rooms, outside and inside, then you can always up the ante some by working off-leash, and sending your dog through a "mine field" of treats. Off leash, back up again to a low value treat, and start with a single treat, not a mine field full of treats on the floor. Build up slowly with the amount of treats you have on the floor. Then build up by adding higher and higher value treats - meats, cheese, etc.

My first clicker trained service dog (Peek, a Papillon) was a major chow hound, and I remember during our certification test for Handi-Dog, that one part of the testing was to put sumptuous treats on a low table. We were to cue our dog to leave it alone, then we were to leave the room for 3-5 minutes (can't remember how long, it just seemed like HOURS to me at the time!). The dog was allowed to choose whether to follow me, or stay in the room with the treats. I rolled into the bedroom, and in horror, realized Peek wasn't following me. I really had doubts he could bypass cream cheese, pot roast and lunchmeat when I wasn't right there. But he did. He just lay there on the floor and didn't make any attempt to get the goodies. But I sure sweated it just the same.

You may have success teaching both LLW and "leave it" at the same time: many do. But just be aware that it can be confusing for some dogs, and if you aren't seeing quick progress, then it may behoove you to just go back and teach each behavior separately. That's Karen Pryor's advice, and I've found that it has paid off well for me to try to teach only one behavior at a time, and that it really doesn't take any more time this way. I can teach both behavior exercises every day, just not in the same session.

Good luck, and I hope you soon have success in working with OC to build strong new behaviors!

Loose Leash Walking Aid

My 5 yr old Border Collie SDIT is doing fabulously well at loose leash walking 95% of the time. In stores, crowds, in traffic - he remains on a loose leash, pacing himself to my power wheelchair in the right "close" position at my side.

Yet, he still has a few "triggers" in certain environments - the park, where other dogs and kids are running around, in our neighborhood when we start out on a walk, and all the outside dogs are barking behind a fence, and when kids are trying to get his attention. And especially, on the last leg toward home, where he knows he'll soon be able to go herd his precious fishes in the backyard pond.

I have tried many approaches to loose leash walking in these particular trigger environments, with only limited success. I've done rapid clicking and treating, delivering about 50 clicks and treats per minute, and this works fairly well, but I wear out quickly.

Finn's normal preference to walking by my chair is slightly ahead, with his shoulders at the front of the chair. This doesn't work for me, as if I have to turn the chair toward the dog, he often gets clipped by the wheels because he's not in a position where he can quickly "check in" or watch where the front casters are going.

We've done caster-avoidance work with the clicker, and that's worked splendidly for all the non-trigger areas, using rapid clicking and treating until he had generalized the desired position in which I wanted him to walk next to my chair.

But the trigger environments are still problematic, and my only recourse was to put him into a no-pull harness or use a Gentle Leader on him. While these products do work, they don't teach him anything. Once the tools are removed, the "out front" position is resumed.

I have worked constantly on not allowing the leash to ever get tight. Tight leash means "stop" and loose leash means "go." But in the trigger environments, he is incapable of generalizing this: he's too much in a state of arousal, and my only recourse is to put him into a down-stay and move away from him. He will hold a down-stay amidst the heaviest of distractions. But that doesn't get me across the park.

Talking to Sherri Lippman on the phone today, she mentioned maybe trying some type of PVC piping that stuck out of my chair on the side, to help remind him of the position, while not allowing him to move forward past the piping.

I thought about just targeting, but I know from experience that in trigger environments, his targeting also breaks down as his arousal increases.

So instead, I used Sherri's idea but used my expanding target stick extending out from my chair, sitting on it with my thighs. Too high. Finn just walked under it. I finally ended up holding the target stick in my hand with the leash, and pointing it to the ground, but extending it to its full length. I put a tennis ball on the end so I could bounce it on the ground if needed.

We had a great session - 15 minutes of walking, jogging and running around the housing development with all the barking dogs and toddlers, and he remained in position, was able to see the wheels as I turned the chair towards him without getting his toes clipped. His arousal levels also were muted, as he never got a chance to forge out a bit, but was busy making sure he didn't hit the target stick.

Once we'd done about 10 blocks, figure 8's circles, stops and starts, automatic sits, sitting, downing, standing near barking dogs behind fences, and I had his full attention, I removed the target stick and

headed back home. We made it 5 blocks to the park, through the park, and back home again without the target stick, with Finn holding that nice loose leash position with his nose no further forward than the front wheels, just where I needed him.

But rounding the corner of our block, the arousal started up, and I could see it creeping with his head and tail position, and reduced "check in" behaviors. I quickly extended the target stick again, ball to the ground, and he instantly backed off, walked and trotted quietly at my side again. I put the stick away about 600 yards from the house, and he walked in position the rest of the way to our door.

We had a nice game then of frisbee and ball, so he could run and jump around!

Most of the dogs I've worked with for service work have been started as puppies, and I've taught positional heeling off-leash before I ever put a leash on the dog. So it was pretty much a non-issue. But with Finn being an older apprentice service dog, who had spent years able to run freely in front of his humans, greet other dogs and people at will (he has exquisite social skills), this is a whole new game for him. And though he picked up the idea quickly in most environments, checking in with me nicely - it was still difficult for both of us in the hot trigger environments.

Using the target stick as a barrier really helped get the message across that "be a tree", "Penalty yards," and rapid clicking and treating for position were not quite making it. But the combination of the barrier, plus the clicking and treating worked superbly.

Just another thought for those who are struggling at times with tight leash behaviors, and yet still need to get from point A to point B. I find the barrier stick helps a great deal with this particular dog. Thanks, Sherri - for the great idea!

Teaching LLW

Just as it takes a little while for a child to learn to walk, it will take a bit of time and commitment to teach Spot to walk on a loose leash.

I find loose leash walking one of the most rewarding things to use, and I start by teaching it off-leash. I don't want to be stuck using any equipment, and my goal is to transfer the off-leash walking right to the leash as smoothly as possible.

When you're in the house, you can begin this process by just clicking and treating each time Spot comes to the position at your side in the cart where you want her to be. This will quickly become a default position, because good things always happen when she's there beside you. You can practice inside circles, outside circles, and short straights indoors.

When you're taking her out for a walk, I'd be really, really careful about putting the cart in reverse when she starts to pull - it can be damaging to her neck, and I personally feel it's overkill, really not necessary. The key to loose leash walking and not pulling is consistency: never move an inch forward if the leash is at all tight. Move forward only when the leash is loose and there is no pressure there. This is sometimes really difficult when you first move through the door, and that's when it takes the utmost in patience to not give in and let the dog pull.

But if you commit yourself to not moving forward when the leash is tight, then you're starting out the walk on the best possible note. Think of "red light/Green light" - tight leash is red light, all forward movement stops. Loose leash is green light: forward movement begins.

Far more helpful, I feel, when the dog is aroused and tugging, is to break the focus by circling in your cart into the dog's space. It will force the dog to offer you attention, and give you an opportunity to reinforce that wanted behavior at the same time the leash automatically loosens. Do you remember when I was doing this out in the back parking lot with my reactive pup in Orlando? Spot was good as gold as Harry and

I circled our way around until Harry finally calmed down, and could walk in a straight line. My goal there was to diffuse the reactivity by breaking the focus on your dog, and to maintain loose leash because when the leash tightens, the arousal can quickly escalate.

Did you happen to see Harry in the hotel, during Sue Ailsby's class, when he and Carol King's Yorkie Heart were sniffing each other? Harry was fine until I accidentally moved and the leash tightened, and that immediately tripped his arousal trigger.

It's often the same when you're walking your young dog, and there are so many arousing, interesting, distracting things around to focus on! So I use that circling into the dog technique to break the arousal focus, and regain focus and attention on me.

The problem I have with "be a tree" completely is that when the dog is straining at the leash, it's not only very hard on the dog's neck, but puts that opposition reflex into high gear, and the dog strains harder until he finally gives up. In training operantly, we want to set the dog up for success, so that the straining doesn't happen to begin with. And this is why I marry the two techniques - to prevent neck injury, to reduce the time the dog feels neck pressure, and to get the dog's attention back on me, where it should be.

For those who use chokes, prongs, etc., this is in no way a condemnation of the equipment that works for you. But since I know Candice personally, have seen her marvelous little dog, and the skill with which she is studying clicker training, I'm sharing a clickerly way that works well for me.

I have used this technique with shelter dogs of many breeds and sizes, not just my small Papillons. Like you, I have no ability to get into a struggling match with a dog - my body won't allow it. So I teach off-leash and loose leash walking from the beginning, so we don't get into a war of wills, but can practice a dance of harmony.

Just one way to approach it, and certainly not the only way. But having seen Spot, and how well you handle her, I think this will work for you

two. She's a delightful pup, and you're doing a terrific job with her. Take a bow, gal!



RECALL

Chaining the Recall

My criteria of that behavior was to get her to have an instant reflex of a head turn when I gave the recall cue. I got it reliably. The instant I gave the cue, that head turned so fast and right on because my timing was right on. My mistake was not clicking too soon, my mistake was I didn't do all the steps in the chain. They are:

1. Call the dog
2. Dog turns to you (could be head or whole body)
- Usually when head turns body follows.
3. Dog comes running to you
4. Dog approaches you
5. Give treat.

Back chaining this behavior would be...

- A. First criteria train the dog to approach you. When behavior is reliable then....
- B. Second criteria train dog to come running to you from a distance
- C. Third criteria train dog to turn towards you then come running, then approach you.
- D. Fourth train dog to turn towards you and get this behavior solid so it is so on reflex they don't think when you recall them, they just do.

You train D last and this is what I spent too much time on. I should have had the other three solid before doing the last part of the chain. I should have spent more time on B and C.

The weak part in my chain was she wasn't running to me, but taking off and that's not what I heavily reinforced like I did with the head turn reflex. I got that head turn beautifully with great timing.

I still do not see the relevance of D to an automatic recall. You said you had a lot of trainers advise you, and I assume they encouraged you to work on D, the head turn because they thought the head turn would stop the dog, presumably.

I think of the head turn as a component of the attention response to the dog hearing his name or a specific cue to stop, look and wait. I think it's a real safety response to teach your dog to stop, look at you when it hears its name called - not to come running to you. Your dog might be on the other side of a busy road, and if it is used to running to you the moment it hears its name, then that could get him run over.

Though I personally do not teach the head turn as part of the recall, it's only because I use the dog's name as a focus cue first, and that's where I get my head turn. The dog's name is given with a slight pause before the recall cue, so the dog first stops whatever it's doing, looks to me upon hearing its name, then moves then the recall cue is given.

I might not want to recall him after his name - maybe I want him to sit where he's at, or turn around, or find an object or lie down. The name becomes the focus cue to turn his head, find my eyes, and wait for whatever cue may come next.

But I do shape head turns all the time. I may need the dog to turn its head so it can see an item I want it to retrieve, or to prepare to move in that direction, or to watch for a car turning a corner quickly. I shape head turning and nose dipping and a whole lot of other things - many of them totally useless in a practical sense. I mean, shaping a dog to crawl through a patio chair, then rest a paw on one rung and chin on

the seat - isn't exactly something I will likely ever find a **PRACTICAL** use for.

But what these shaping sessions do is teach a dog how to problem solve, to be creative and work through a little bit of frustration in order to find a behavior that will be reinforced. They teach a dog to offer lots and lots of behaviors rapidly. This is a very valuable skill for a dog for a dog working in many different environments, especially highly ambiguous ones that service dogs work in.

Though what you may reinforce in any given session may not be something you'll ever need in real life, it's the skill building/problem solving practice that is so valuable.

This type of non-directed learning may seem totally ridiculous to those who are used to focusing only on directed learning - teaching specific behaviors with direction, but non- directed learning exercises in creativity and variability are super for taking training to a higher level.

In other words, we can teach a dog to do specific behaviors and get these behaviors fluent in all 4 D's (distraction, distance, duration and diversity) in many directed ways, and that's fine. But there may be times when we are forced to cue a dog to do a behavior in a context he has never before performed that behavior.

Or, we might be in a position in an ambiguous situation where we have to shape new behaviors on the spot, from a distance, in order for the dog to come to our aid.

For example, imagine a dog who has practiced pushing through frustration, learned to try lots and lots of behaviors and not shut down in daily problem solving exercises. Now imagine that you've had a tire blow out late at night, your car careens off into the ditch, and you have no way to get help because your cell phone has been accidentally put into the trunk of the car in your backpack by a clueless, but well-meaning friend.

You are a powerchair user, and cannot get to the trunk to get your cell phone out and call for help. You can, however, open the door, roll out of the car, and lie on the ground. If your dog is used to thinking of problem solving as a really great game, you have a chance to get that phone.

You can, from a prone position on the ground, shape your dog to move away from you, place a paw, two paws on the seat, turn its head to the left, target with nose on the dashboard, and press. Even if it takes many nose presses to find the right button, the really operant dog will eventually be able to press the right button that will open up the trunk of the car.

You can then shape the dog to move to the rear of the car, to the back of the car, and even though out of sight, to do a paws up and then jump into the trunk of the car.

Since it's likely that your service dog will know a cue for everyday items, and where they normally are kept (cell phone in the backpack) then once in the trunk, giving your dog the cue to fetch the cell phone will likely be enough for the dog to grab the backpack and bring it to you.

But wait...what happens if the backpack gets stuck on the jack handle on the way out, and the dog can't complete the retrieve? The operant dog will keep at the problem solving game until it finds a way to get to the phone. It may paw the bag, or use teeth to try to manipulate the zipper, or nose to poke through an open area, or it might tear at the pack with teeth and nails until it can get to the phone, and bring it back to you.

It's not that well trained dogs who have learned through directed learning couldn't figure out how to get into a backpack to get a phone - I presume most could if motivated

enough to try. But what gives the problem solving dog the edge is the speed and fluency of already having learned to solve these types of

problems on a daily basis, in every type of environment possible, and from a distance, when the human can't be there to guide them directly.

We all have heard of the "Lassies" who do extraordinary things to help or save their humans. But what is so neat about advanced levels of clicker training, is that it gives the everyday dog a chance to be a Lassie, to tap into their problem solving abilities and learn to enjoy that process of problem solving, so that in a pinch, it's just the normal thing to do, even when in stressful or unusual places.

This is a LONG stretch from what you originally mentioned, Jennifer, and I realize I'm going off on a tangent here not related to teaching the recall. But I also know that Christy is a skilled shaper, and that she understands the value of the pure exercise of shaping behaviors, whether they are going to be used for tasks/behaviors in the dog's repertoire later on or not.

The exercises of breaking behaviors down to the smallest pieces is also how we teach the dog to move through the process of frustration, of gaining fluency within the 4D's, and a really big thing is that it helps the HUMAN understand how many parts there are to what may look like a simple behavior chain.

By practicing these steps individually, we are not only teaching the dog that each component needs to be fluent in all 4 D's, but we are teaching ourselves to see those parts individually. That's important because when we see a problem crop up, we have the knowledge to find where that weak link is, and to zero in on it quickly and fix it.

There are always TONS of different ways to teach behaviors, and there are many times when it's not practical to use non-directed learning to teach a specific behavior, task or skill. But practicing non-directed problem solving is part of raising the bar, and taking the dog to new skill levels. I

In some ways, dog training is sort of like the Supreme Court to me - if all the justices are from the same political party, and all very liberal or very conservative, then the opinions are going to be swayed heavily to

one way or the other. But if the Supreme Court has an equal amount of justices from each end of the spectrum - and some in the middle - then we are apt to get decisions that are broader in scope, and more applicable in ambiguous situations. The input to make that final decision comes from each end of the spectrum.

In dog training today, we have so many more options open to us. We can use both directed and non-directed learning exercises as needed for teaching our dogs a wide spectrum of behaviors and responses. It's not that one approach is better than the other, it's that having a dog who is skilled at both directed learning and non-directed learning gives you options that are very beneficial to have.

As more people with higher level physical disabilities learn to train dogs - and each good handler is on a path to becoming a good trainer - we now have science to guide us in how to communicate with and teach dogs in a hands-off way, even from a distance, even if we have very little body movement.

Some of the trainers on this list have worked with eyeball targeting as a way for a person with no head movement, only eye movement - to cue their dogs where they want them to go. Eyes right, move to the right. Eyes left, move to the left. Eyes up, move away from handler. Eyes down, move toward the handler. Blink cues a stop. Double blink and eyes right, mean move to the right side of the chair. Etc.

These can actually be taught at a distance with a very operant dog, by the person with the disability, by spitting food, or if help is available, by having someone else deliver the treats where the dog is working. Though tossing treats is considered a "no no" by a good many service dog trainers and handlers, it can be a very effective and non-problematic way to get treats out to a distance location. Used correctly, it does not lead to reinforcing sniffing or hovering treats off the floor.

The round about point here is that teaching a dog to broaden its ability to work

independently, to problem solve, and watch intently for very subtle cues - is extremely liberating and empowering for people with high level physical disabilities. And for the rest of us, too!

You share that:

“Well, looking at the owner doesn't mean the dog is coming back. My old dog taught me that in spades. If my present dog knows where I am, he feels free to go explore because I'm not "high priority".”

It's an easy fix to teach your dog that his name or a specific word or sound means, "Stop, make eye contact" and wait for a cue from you. You can make this behavior fluent so that you DO become a high priority. It's not really about priorities - it's about conditioning the dog to respond to any given cue whenever its given, in any environment, amidst any distraction, and in any context.

Personally, I get much better recall results if I hide from him, because I've played hide and seek to make his recalls fun.

And you can do the same thing with an attention word cue, making those learning sessions great fun for him. Learning SHOULD be fun, it should not be boring, or unduly stressful or forced. There's just no need for that with anymore. We can instead do very short sessions, several times a day, to keep it really fun and in a very short time, the behaviors become conditioned. It's not about boring repetition and drilling a dog until they are so sick of it they just want to shut down. It's about creating very fun learning sessions that the dog always looks forward to doing.

Much of this is way off the specific points you were writing about, and I just brought it up because some of the things you wrote made me think of different reasons for different types of behaviors and different teaching approaches, and how things that may not seem valuable may end up being very valuable as time progresses.

Teaching Recalls

As a wheelchair user for 25 years, I have not found teaching recalls much different from when I had legs.

Run or roll backwards to first induce the behavior? Sure. Same. Then clicking when the dog is in motion toward you, and feeding when the dog gets there - usually on a second or two later.

With puppies I love the "round robin" games, with family members sitting on the floor, each with treats. Each person makes a sound to entice puppy to come to them (not saying the cue yet - just tapping the floor, or clapping hands or slapping hands on thighs). Then as the puppy is in motion coming to them, they add the cue word and immediately click, feeding when the puppy arrives in front of them.

In general, I like to teach attention games first, so the dog knows to "look to the handler" when it hears its name, or in other words, to stop and look, rather than to come running at the sound of it's name. "The Find my Eyes" games are great fun, and oh-so-helpful.

Then, with teaching recalls, I get the behavior first (again, round robins or people sitting in different areas of the yard, room, etc.) then start adding the cue word while the dog is in motion, just before the click - which also happens while the dog is still in motion.

I do use backing up as well, as you suggested - and I think it's great, because it can build a nice "front" position getting the dog to come straight in toward you. Again, I do it the same way in a chair I would teach it on legs. I think I tend to do this more once the dog is already familiar with the cue word to some extent.

I like a different cue of "front" instead of the recall word for this behavior, though. So I think I tend to wait longer to do the backing up,

turning a quarter turn, etc. because by that point I'm already thinking about the new cue word/behavior I am teaching. "Front" to me is actually a compound behavior - it's not just a simple recall, but to move toward me, maintain a 12 inch distance from my chair (no nosing my crotch, thank you!), and if I stop, the dog stops and sits. When I turn the chair a quarter turn left or right, it's the same as someone who is bipedal turning a quarter turn with feet. The dog still has to find the front position of my body/wheelchair.

As I mentioned, I do prefer to teach the attention games of "find my eyes" first, so the dog automatically already knows to find that position where your eyes are focused, and that is such a nice "lead in" to teaching a "front" position.

When I teach a dog to do a "front" position when the dog only knows a recall cue, I often get a dog who will move in too close or stop too far away. So unless I give an initial compound cue, the "front" position becomes the "default" positioning part of the recall.

For example, if the dog is off sniffing in the yard, I'll use the recall word to get him moving toward me, and then as he is in motion, I'll add the cue word for what position I want him to take when he gets to me - front, side (right side of my chair) or close (left side of my chair, heel position). Once this is fluent, I can, if I choose, work on actual compound cues - those cues given initially together at the same time - the recall cue and the position cue - before the dog is in motion.

I might cue the dog to "come"... "front" or to "come".... "close" or to "come".... "side" - the compound cues are given together, but each cue word is given clearly with a slight pause (less than a second!) between the recall cue and the positioning cue.

When teaching the added behavior, I'll put emphasis on teaching the cue word for the the newest behavior. Since I establish the recall cue first, I'd say, "come.....FRONT" or "come.....SIDE"

As a side note, I have to add that I'm not a real fan of the cue word "come" as much as words that can come out less harsh during a

stressful times - like the word, "Here." But, since my dogs already have been trained to use that word, I use it but constantly practice reinforcing myself for saying it in a NON-commanding way. It becomes almost a two-syllable word, from a tonal standpoint. My voice raises in the beginning, then falls at the end about 3 notes. This is for ME, not the dog. It's to help ME remember that this is not a command, but a cue. By reinforcing myself each time, I then set myself up to have a default tone of voice when I'm under stress, so I don't end up shouting "COME!" in a dictator-ly way!

I like using the clicker for recall teaching - using it while the dog is in motion, coming toward you, and you can be 90% sure he will get there quickly. I also use high-value treats when I start adding distractions.

The recall isn't fluent and "on cue" until a dog can bypass distractions - the bouncing ball, another person calling the dog, food on the ground, squirrels/cats/ little critters, children jumping around and dancing or offering the dog a slurp of ice cream cone, - and still come running toward you each time. That's the real world for service dogs.

But wait - it slices, it dices, it Julienne's - it's the Recall-0-Matic! I also teach the dog to do behaviors before it gets to me, once the positioning behaviors are already in place. I may want cue the dog to recall, then halfway to me, cue the dog to "down" or "sit." Then cue the dog a few seconds later, after that behavior is happening instantly when I give the cue - to come the rest of the way to me and take a position.

The sequence may then be "Come".....(halfway mark)....."Down".....(few seconds later)....."Leash" (fetch leash on the ground before coming into position)....."Close" (find the "heel" position at my left side.)

Ideally, we can work toward being able to give compound cues (cueing multiple behaviors with the initial recall cue, such as "leash, side, COME"). I'm working on this now, but not quite all the way there yet. I'm still working on a compound cue of only three behaviors given initially, such as "Finn" (first cue - name means give handler attention -

look and wait)...."Side"....."COME." Once he's got that, I want to work on "Finn" "Leash" "Side" "Come."

I give the recall word last, when teaching the compound behaviors, so the dog doesn't start flying toward me the moment the recall word itself is out of my mouth. The "come" or "here" word is the last of the cued words to be given.

So my teaching plan for a recall might look a bit like this:

1. Entice the behavior (clap, squeal, run backwards, etc.)
2. Click while dog in motion toward you
3. Deliver treat when dog gets to you
4. Start adding cue word just before click
5. Changing positions slightly (giving while you're facing a quarter-turn to another direction)
6. Adding distractions
7. Adding more distractions
8. Teaching in more distracting environments
9. Adding a positioning cue while dog is in motion (positioning upon arrival)
10. Teaching positioning cue with distractions
11. Teaching positioning cue with more distractions
12. Teaching positioning cue in more distracting environments
13. Adding "wait" or "down" or "Sit" or "leash (fetch leash), etc. while the dog is in motion
14. Teaching added behaviors as in #13 with distractions
15. Teaching added behaviors with more distractions
16. Teaching added behaviors in more distracting environments.
17. Teaching compound cues (name-leash-side-COME - or, "look at me, fetch the leash, take it to the left side of my chair, and now COME to me!"
18. Adding distractions
19. adding more distractions
20. Teaching in more distracting environments

The real experts on the compound cues are Sherri Lippman and Virginia Broitman, who do presentations on compound cues and also adduction at their workshops and at the Clicker Expos. I'm still in the learning phase myself on teaching the compound cues.

But learning about compound cues has really made me think of the recall differently - as the "Foundation" behavior for a whole lot of other possible compounded behaviors. There is no end to how much we can use it and what we can teach the dog to do. Fascinating stuff, and really

does "take it to a new level." So much is possible with clicker training! I am still learning to see the possibilities, and it totally boggles my mind.

Magic Emergency Recall Cue

My service Papillon "Peek" has been off-duty due to a slipped disc, and he's starting to get "cabin fever." I've been using management for the last couple of weeks to keep him quiet, but now that the pain is not so acute, he's rip, roaring and ready to boogie.

Yesterday, I took him on a short walk. Free of house-confinement at last, prancing instead of walking, he's a bundle of nerves and energy. Every bit of that energy went into Lunging after the lizard who had the audacity to skitter right past Peek's nose. Peek shot like a cannon out to the end of the leash, hitting the end of his 1/2 inch flat collar. The collar clasp breaks from the force, and Peek is finally free.

I'm so stunned by this unexpected performance, I can't get the words "Leave it" out fast enough to cue him to return his focus to me. I just open my mouth and watch bug-eyed as my dog still in red service dog dress, sprints across the driveway and toward the road.

I know my chances of getting this dog back after such a lengthy confinement are pretty slim. "Peek, Come!" is not going to do it. Not when he's on lizard patrol, something that my "untrainer" husband has reinforced hundreds of times on their nightly walks. And not when his prey drive has been triggered. Clearly, I'll have to bring on my "big guns."

My emergency cue word. That one sacred word so strongly associated with "good things, really, REALLY good things" in my dogs' mind now, that even when the dog is in manic mode, adrenaline and endorphins surging, he will still respond. And for me, that word is "COOKIES!"

"Cookies" means more than "cookies" to my dogs. It means the best of tidbits, the best of interaction with me, and it means "there ain't nothin' on the planet better than stopping whatever you're doing and running to mom." It's grueyere cheese and nuked garlic chicken and liverwurst and pot roast. It's also toy fetch games, targeting games, tummy scratches and undivided attention and everything wonderful all rolled into one.

I see Peek heading for the road at warp speed, with Rocky Balboa determination in his body language. Nothin's gonna stop that boy. Frozen with fear, I finally squeak out the magical cue word: "COOKIES!"

Peek slides to a stop like a baseball player hurling into home base, turns his head, looks at me. Then he pauses for one second, two. He's making a choice here. I have stopped breathing and pray for resuscitation soon. But, after two seconds, he races back to me, leaving the lizard to cross the road and get smooshed.

I am overjoyed! He responded! He responded to the magical emergency cue word even when the deck was stacked against it! I highly doubt my "cookies" could be any more reinforcing than that lizard and getting a chance to "get out of jail free" and be dog again, run without pain and chase fast-moving objects.

But what I do see is that he is now strongly conditioned to respond to this magical word, - so well conditioned that it has become a default, and still works even in the face of incredible distractions.

I have nothing but a few crumbs in my treat bag, but I give him the ultimate treat when he gets to me: the bag to lick out. The forbidden fruit: the bottom crumbs of Mom's wheelchair bait bag. He licks and moans in ecstasy, then takes the piece of near-moldy string cheese I keep in my on-board emergency kit, and nibbles it as I mete it out from my closed fist. Jackpot!

Then he gets happy voice, hugs, kisses and a chance to do spins on my lap in the powerchair, another favorite carnival ride of Peek's. I slip my

emergency collar on him (also carried in my emergency kit!), let him down from my lap and continue the walk. An even bigger jackpot.

He gets no points for taking off, a totally unacceptable behavior for a service dog, but one I completely understand considering he's been in jail for so long and in pain so long. He gets big points for coming back when the enticement of chasing that lizard was nearly unbearably wonderful. And that's what I choose to focus on.

And I get points for taking the time to teach a really reliable recall and having instituted a cue so powerful it could bypass his hardwiring.



RETRIEVE

"Hold It" Behavior

I am wondering if a "hold" taught using OC is as reliable as one taught by force training.

Sometimes it just takes a really good question to bring out all the lurkers on this list! In my opinion, a backchained retrieve taught through to fluency (that's the key - **FLUENCY**) is even more reliable than a forced retrieve.

Why do I believe this? When we're backchaining a complex behavior such as the retrieve, every step of the way the dog is learning in a very supportive, positive manner, willingly engaged in the process of

learning. The dog is not learning how to avoid pain, but enjoying the process of problem solving, becoming a thinking dog.

When there is no "or else I will hurt you" as part of the learning process, the dog becomes very comfortable having new elements added that will make the learned behavior even more challenging.

Backchaining allows the trainer to get each tiny piece of the behavior chain well understood before moving on to the next part of the chain, using the 4 D's to guide the trainer as to when to move on to the next step of the chain. Distance, Duration, Distraction, Diversity.

The step-by-step process for backchaining a fluent hold and retrieve can be found in many places - here in the OCAD shared files, or on Sue Ailsby's superb "Training Levels" website at <http://www.sue.ch@me.ca>, on the Clickersolutions website at <http://www.clickersolutions.com>, and in numerous excellent books and videos by operant trainers, many of whom are on this list.

As to the efficacy of a backchained compared to force-trained retrieve, the end result depends on the skill of the teacher, which is certainly true of a force-trained retrieve as well. The bonus of backchaining is that we get extremely solid behaviors in a host of changing environments, because we have included the 4 D's as part of the steps of learning each link in the chain.

For example, when we start with a "hold" behavior in backchaining, we don't wait until the entire retrieve chain is taught before adding the 4 D's. We don't focus on the go-out, retrieve part of the chain when we're first teaching the hold.

Once the dog is able to sit and hold an object for a specified length of time, we'll add a step away in any direction, two steps, three - to add distance. We might add a bit of distraction, stretching our arms out while the dog is holding, or moving a small amount while the dog is holding, or dropping an object on the floor, etc.

We might add a bit of Diversity by jiggling the dog's collar while it's holding the item, or by petting the dog gently and moving up towards

vigorous petting while the dog continues to hold the item. We may add duration one or two seconds at a time.

What the skilled teacher learns is how to shift between the 4 D's, while keeping the criteria low enough to always set the dog up for success instead of failure. With no fallout from using force and pain to teach, what we now see is extreme reliability in a dog who has learned to expect the unexpected, and doesn't shut down when something they have not directly experienced happens.

We can add as much diversity as we can think of, but we can never truly duplicate what can and does happen out in public. However, we can teach the dog to continue on in the face of the unexpected, and without need of direct commanding to do so.

For example, I once had a van break down during a nasty winter rainstorm, and had to rely on my dog's ability to problem solve with enthusiasm. Though he'd never had to work outside in the middle of a thunderstorm, he'd been exposed to so many different distractions of sight, sound, movement, environmental changes, substrates - that he was quite comfortable crawling through cold puddles of water to get under the van, grab, hold, tug and back away, while pulling a large plastic bag out from under the van where it had lodged and covered the air intake.

In addition, the dog was also able to follow cues taught with the same 4 D's to then take those pieces of plastic a distance away from the van to a trash can, do a paws up on the can and drop the pieces inside. All while I stayed inside the van nice and dry, and gave verbal cues when I could not see what the dog was doing. That's pretty reliable.

Or, here's another: My dog is fed a raw BARF diet. Raw meat is what my dogs eat on a daily basis. If you check the shared files section of this website, there's a video folder that contains a video clip of my dog taking and holding a t-bone steak, while I add the 4 D's. You'll see him holding the food quietly and willingly as I walk away, leave the yard, come back, pet him, jiggle his collar, move all around him, and finally release the steak on cue, when I ask for that release.

It's listed in the Video folder under "FinnSteakHold". In service dog work, this is the kind of reliability and fluency we often need most.

For many of us, picking something up from the floor is just not possible. What if that something is a highly coveted food item to the dog? When we teach the retrieve through backchaining, we work up from holding easy items to items that may trigger innate responses - such as fuzzy, squeaky toys, cloth items of all kind (many dogs want to shake and kill play items like this) all the way up to the most delectable food items. We may drop a hot dog, a steak, lunchmeat, whatever - on the floor, and we don't necessarily want the dog to eat that item. But we also can't wait until someone comes to pick it up for us, as it may have to lay there all day long until a family member comes home.

In teaching the dog to hold and retrieve a very diverse list of items, including food, we have help immediately when we need it, even when it seems like way too much to ask of a dog to ignore meat on the floor.

I would like to invite all of you who have video footage of teaching the hold and retrieve through backchaining, to share a short video clip of the process with the list, by putting it in the video folder in the shared files section. I know we have a lot of excellent trainers on this list with some outstanding video footage, showing how fluency is built and how reliable it can be when properly taught.

I think many of us with dogs who have a fluent retrieve would gladly put our dog's skills to test against any force-trained retrieve to show just how reliable a backchained retrieve can be, and how a dog shaped to retrieve in this method will exude confidence and control, and a decided lack of stress when encountering something novel thrown into the challenge. This is not to say I believe a force-trained retrieve is not reliable, just that it's no longer necessary to use pain, coercion and threats in teaching complex behaviors through to fluency.

The fluent dog will retrieve any item, any place, in any condition, any environment, every single time the cue is given. That means in the park when someone throws a frisbee in front of its nose, or a ball, or when a

squirrel runs past their nose, or when someone drops a whole plate of food in front of the dog while the dog is performing a retrieve.

Trainers of different methodology can argue about efficacy/fluency of their chosen method until the cows come home, and may never agree. It's all just talk and supposition. However if the proof is in the finished behavior, then there's no argument. It's pretty hard to argue that non-force trained dogs are not reliable when a finished, fluent behavior chain can be demonstrated and reproduced any time it's requested.

Picking Things Up and Releasing Them

"Problem - I can get her to pick things up, but I can't get onto the next step. If I don't click treat for the picking up immediately, she drops it again. Can someone please break this down for me?"

The problem is that you don't have a "hold" behavior yet. It's a LOT more challenging to teach a retrieve based on a play retrieve. Make it easier on yourself and your dog by learning to backchain. More on this in a moment.

With a Papillon slated to pick up tiny objects, the "hold" behavior is the most important behavior you will teach. When you teach the hold properly and incrementally, you will end up with a dog who can pick up tiny objects - such as pierced earring backing plates- -with its front teeth, and hold it quietly and firmly while delivering it to you, then continue holding the object until YOU cue the release word.

This means before you can consider the "hold" to be fluent, the dog will learn to hold the object longer and longer, a second at a time, until you can:

- touch dog while its holding the object
- jiggle dog's collar while it's holding the object

- tap on the edges of the object while dog holds object firmly
- rub hands all over dog while it holds the object
- ask dog to change positions while object is in its mouth
- tug on object but dog won't release until you give the cue word.
- bounce a ball or drop a book while dog is holding object

Backchaining the retrieve means you teach the behavior backwards - from the last behavior to the first, and each "link" of the backchain is trained to a certain level of fluency before the next step of the chain is attempted.

There are any number of posts in our archives about shaping the hold, plus there are copious excellent posts in many clicker sites that also go into detail.

For online resources, I suggest listmember Sue Ailsby's "Training Levels" - a free online book that will detail how to shape the hold, and get you set up for success so that the whole chain of the retrieve is solid, with no weak links. <http://www.sue.eh@me.ca>

Also, the Clickersolutions.com website has many articles on teaching the hold.

If you're someone who does better seeing the behaviors being taught, then I recommend the training video, "The How of Bow Wow" for being able to see the different parts of the retrieve chain being taught and brought to fluency. <http://www.dogwise.com>

Backchaining will allow you to proof each segment of the chain before moving on, and will make learning faster and much clearer for the dog.

But, until you have a solid hold, you don't have a retrieve. Too many dogs pick up items willingly, but either spit them out at their handler or play keep-away. Approaching teaching the retrieve in a scientific way - with the backchained method - will bypass problems with the retrieve, because each step is a separate and unique entity, yet will be put together at the end for a fluid, solid, chained behavior.

Your ultimate goal? To have your dog be able to retrieve items such as the dumbbell, which rests in back of the canine teeth, as well as the front teeth - for tiny objects. To have your dog be able to retrieve food items - even high-value food items such as lunchmeat, steaks - without eating them. You never know when you'll drop a piece of lunchmeat on the floor, and need your dog to be able to pick it up, give it to you without eating it.

But first, the **HOLD!**

Good luck and happy teaching.

Picking Up Small Items

I have a dog with a very small mouth. I'm sure others will address problems that may crop up with dogs who have larger mouths.

With my dogs, I use a backchained retrieve to begin with, and since the most important part of the retrieve is the **HOLD**, this is where I concentrate with small objects. I start shaping with bigger objects and get the hold very quiet, very firm so there is no mouthing at all of the object.

Jane has brought up several times on this list that she feels the take/hold/deliver part of the retrieve is the foundation of the retrieve, and that it's so important, we may want to consider it a totally separate part to concentrate on. I totally agree. Without this foundation, the rest of the retrieve quickly crumbles.

In teaching a dog to pick up small items, this is even more essential, because the dog's safety and welfare are at stake. So I don't ever start with tiny items. I start large, work down to smaller items, once I have a really good foundation of take/hold and deliver.

On teaching smaller items, I also only reinforce holds that are front-teeth held - the dog has to hold the object quietly with front teeth only. (this is also helpful for picking up items such as glasses, where you can shape the dog to pick up the glasses by front teeth, and on the center nosepiece only, not on the lenses).

I have my dog pick up a lot of very small items, many which are dangerous, so getting that hold firm and quiet it a "must" or I'm doing my dog a great injustice.

Things I routinely drop that my dog picks up:

- pierced earring backing plates - pierced earring studs - straight pins
- needles - dimes - paper clips - safety pins - marbles - beads of all sizes - thread

Again, these can be dangerous objects for dogs who do not have a really solid hold, or who shift items around in their mouths at first. So I wouldn't even attempt them unless the dog was shaped to grasp, hold and deliver the items carefully each step of the way.

This is not something I would begin with early on, as I'd stick to larger, safer items and get that nice, quiet, firm hold and deliver first. Then, when that part of the retrieve chain was really solid and well-generalized, I'd begin introducing smaller items.

Reason for Directed Retrieves

I like what my program-trained, hearing dog does for dropped objects. Very simple. She gives me her "I heard it!" behavior, namely a paw on the leg, while sitting in front of me. Then doesn't retrieve it. I can now ask for a retrieve if I want the object picked up. Prevents her from grabbing a possibly dangerous item, yet alerts me to the fact that I've dropped something. Seems safer to me than hoping I can get a "leave

it!" in before she's got it in her mouth. Especially if the object is small, or has rolled or slid away from where it hit the floor.

I had my dog doing auto retrieves for keys all the time. But I decided to teach him to alert me to the fact that my keys had dropped, rather than just fetch them because.....

Once, I was in the van, used my handy-dandy super sharp keychain sized Swiss Army knife to open a package, while the keys were still hanging in the ignition. I forgot to close the knife.

I then put the keys on my chair, but attached them to a bungee cord that got dislodged, and the keys dropped on the floor. My dog immediately grabbed them, and as he brought them to me, I see that razor-sharp blade swinging back and forth, just grazing his lips. OH MY!

I'm sure it's a great idea for those with more "follow through" than I possess, but for ADHD types like me, just be sure you don't keep dangerous items on your key chain. I'm not about to live without my Swiss Army knife, so instead, I'm just not allowing for any retrieves except directed ones.

Retrieve Pointers

"1. Do the teamwork videos show how to get a good hold and retrieve?"

In my opinion, no. It lacks a solid 'event marker' to tell the dog exactly when they are doing it right, what they are getting the reinforcement for doing. In my opinion, only a backchained retrieve gives us the kind of fluency we rely upon in service work. I'm biased, of course. But when I assess a fluent retrieve, I want to know that my dog will do the behavior every time it is cued, under any circumstance, in any

environment, with zero latency, and in addition, do the behavior with enthusiasm.

I expect the dog to be able to maintain that hold on an item when I:

- tug on its collar
- rub it's body vigorously
- bounce a ball next to him
- change positions and move around him
- move out of sight and back into sight again
- when asked to continue holding and then do a sit, a down, a stand, a turn around, a circle around.
- when asked to hold high-value food items, such as meat and cheese.
- when the doorbell rings, when other dogs are present, when cats walk or run by, when a frisbee in the park flies by the dog's head.
- when pelted with sumptuous treats, such as cheese or chicken bits.

I am not convinced that other positive methods are nearly as efficient at getting this kind of fluency without boring the dog out of its mind. If I had seen that kind of fluency with the Teamwork program, I would be the first to recognize it and herald it. I lived in Tucson, I trained in Tucson, and I know many people who are Top Dog graduates. I've worked with several of their students who could not get their dogs to retrieve and even after months and months, gave up in frustration - both the dog and human.

I have never seen the kind of fluency I feel is easily within reach with clicker training. The Teamwork approach is not punitive, is okay as far as it goes, but in my opinion, it does not go far enough to achieve truly fluent results in a short enough amount of time. I have done copious lure and reward training, and it was clicker training that allowed us to begin to move forward at warp speed. It's the missing link. That event marker, that allows us to shape and fashion each tiny piece of the behavior chain very carefully.

It's clicker training that allowed me to quickly teach my Papillon, Peek, to retrieve rather dangerous small items, such as straight pins, needles, pierced earring backing plates - because I was able to quickly shape the

hold with the front teeth only, and then able to add duration so that I could be certain the dog would hold that item firmly and safely in his front teeth, with his lips raised so as not to get pricked.

This kind of precision is very hard to attain with simple lure and reward training, because lure and reward is just not surgically precise enough to teach it within a necessary time frame. It's like trying to do delicate surgery with kitchen shears.

This is also why clicker training is now the norm on movie and tv sets, because the director may change what the animal has to do while its on the set, and the trainer only has a few short minutes to teach a whole new set of behaviors or chains before the camera is back on the dog. There is no time to put things on cue, to do a few hundred repetitions in order for the dog to begin to generalize a behavior. The handler may have 15 minutes to teach 6 new behaviors to do in a row, and clicker training offers us that kind of quickness and accuracy. On a TV or movie set, every minute is big dollars. Clicker training rules!

I just ordered them and can't wait for them to come in the mail!

There is much to enjoy about them, and I don't think they are bad, just not cutting edge. There are some good ideas for teaching dogs while in wheelchairs, using crutches, etc., and those are some very helpful divisions.

However, if I were to teach a retrieve, I would NOT use their methodology. Not because it's bad, but because it's inefficient. I would, instead go to any number of excellent clicker shaped resources, such as the Broitman/Lippman DVD "How ofBowWow" (Takeabowwow.com) or to Sue Ailsby's site (sue-eh.ca) for a step-by-step guide to getting a totally solid and fluent retrieve, and to Barbara Handelman's site (dogtrainingathome.com) for her free video clips showing how to shape that elusive hold. But the Teamwork videos? Some good general service dog handling advice, but not what I would follow for quick and effective teaching of perhaps the most important behavior we require of our service dogs - that solid, fluent retrieve.

"2. With regard to what objects to get them to practice on with at first for hold, what should I use when I have a adolescent that still likes to chew on everything?"

You know, there are lots of discussions and different thoughts on this. I'm flexible enough that I'm willing to use whatever I think will get the job done quicker, as I know I can always expand the objects - especially the dreaded metal ones - later on, once the behavior chain has been built. So I'm not inclined to make learning less than great fun, because I don't see that it's necessary with clicker training.

Right now, with a new adolescent dog, I'm using a bully stick, because he is used to putting it in his mouth, and will readily open up his mouth for it. Now, I could use a different object, but using something he already enjoys putting in his mouth just makes it easier for me. I'm not worried, because I know that as time passes, and he is used to holding the object he likes in his mouth when I pet him, jiggle his collar, bounce a ball next to him, run my hands over him, ask him to sit, down, stand, etc. - then I know it will be easy to start introducing new items. I see no rush in this.

Others may disagree, and that's what we're all here to talk about - offering our own suggestions in a way that allows for disagreement without rancor, without nasty retorts and put downs. I often learn that someone enlightens me on something I was not previously aware of, and I'm always grateful for that information. (as long as it's presented in a clickerly way, not in a punitive, corrective manner.)

I have started with dumbbells, paid close attention to where exactly I wanted to dumbbell to be held by which teeth, and quite frankly, I am not an obedience competitor, so I don't care. I care that the object is held firmly, without mouthing it, without rolling it around, and without drooling all over it, and that it be held firmly and calmly until I give a definitive cue to release it onto a table, into a basket, into my hand, whatever.

'3. Spot has become very "treat" oriented. Once the treats come out he either starts being very good (i.e. goes right into a sit, etc.) or he doesn't pay attention to the object I want him to try and take and give but just concentrates on getting to the treat. Any suggestions there?"

Yes, absolutely. You have touched on something I've seen so much of during workshops - dogs work great in the presence of food. Or, dogs get so distracted by where the food is normally kept, that they don't really try new things. Food is a wonderful primary reinforcer, but when a dog becomes too food obsessed, it's time to shake things up a bit.

If you normally put your treats in your right or left pocket, put them on the table instead. Or put them in a hip bag behind your butt. Just don't keep them in front of you where the dog can focus on them, and don't always get the treat from the same place on your body or chair. Mix it up.

Also, practice getting eye contact in the presence of treats in your hand. Just hold really good treats in your hand, and let the dog drool over them, but not get them. Close your hand over them if he attempts to mug your hand for them. But as long as he continues to stare at the treats, he doesn't get them. BUT, the moment he looks into your eyes - BINGO! Click and let him know that looking away from those treats and offering YOU focus is what is going to get him a treat! And give him a treat from a pile on the table, counter, or somewhere else out of sight.

"It seems our biggest obstacle is attention span. It's like he has ADHD!"

I know all about that. I have a two year old rescue with the same uh..attributes. <G>

Even if I get him in a really relaxed state he still has a hard time focusing on what I am trying to get him to do.

I think clicking and treating for eye contact all over your house, is one of the best things you can do! Get the dog's focus on you, get eye contact, and you have the dog where you want him, in a state capable of learning. But until you have that offered focus, you don't have a dog in a state ready to learn. Distractions happen, yes. But you can work in very small segments - like when you're in the bathroom, for 1-2 minutes at a time. This will add up quickly. Just practice FOCUS! Allow him to get bored and offer eye contact, and then click and reinforce it. Then turn away a little, so the dog has to move to find your eyes - again, when he does, click and treat. Play these games all over the house. FIND YOUR EYES! It builds focus and attention span.

I guess that's why I am really looking forward to the teamwork DVDs. I seem to learn much easier when I can see things done rather than trying to figure out through written instructions if I am doing the steps right.

Then I truly suggest hopping over to Barbara Handelman's site([Http://www.dogtrainingathome.com](http://www.dogtrainingathome.com)) and looking at the free video clips there that show SHAPING a the behaviors with clickers, and also to Sue Ailsby's site at <http://www.sue-eh.ca> to get the Levels program step-by-step, and to consider purchasing one truly excellent video that will give you nearly all the foundation service dog behaviors you will need: The How of Bow Wow by Broitman and Lippman, available at Dogwise, or on Karen Pryor's site, or on Amazon.

"Thanks again for the "hold" tips though! I am hoping to start trying this tomorrow and see how well it works."

You're welcome! Good luck to you.

Retrieving Different Materials

I appreciate your sharing of the steps toward desensitizing the dog to the sound of the ring, and want to see if I have the steps straight here.

1. Unplug phone, teach dog to fetch it.
2. Plug in phone when fetch is fluent, turn to lowest volume, and have assistant call from another house line or from a cell phone.
3. Click and treat for no fear of low volume ring while in phone's proximity.
4. Click and treat for fetching of phone while low volume ringing.
5. Up the volume a notch and continue shaping retrieve of phone
6. Up the criteria by adding other people in the environment while continuing to shape the response.

Is this correct, Rita?

This is a really good exercise for even those dogs who are not sensitive to the ring, but as Judith suggests in her scenario, "What happens the first time it rings while he's carrying it to me and how do I teach him to get and carry a ringing cordless phone?"

I use a toy phone for demos which is battery operated and has a lot of phone sounds. While retrieving it, my pup activated the buttons and it began giving off a very loud busy tone. He dropped the phone, jumped straight up, landed on the other dog, who chewed him out. Then the pup went back to the still-noisy phone, circled it a few times, sniffed it, picked the handle up tentatively, and brought it the rest of the way to me.

Yup, I upped the criteria too quickly, and didn't shape through the SOUND of that phone, just the retrieving of the quiet phone, so I set my dog up for failure. From now on, I teach this using Rita's far more incremental approach.

Shaping the Reliable Retrieve

Jane, try just going back to that first back chaining position: having Spot sit in front of you. Then rub something wonderfully smelly on the glasses case, just a smidgen. And hold it out in front of you. Say nothing, do nothing else. Spot will most likely reach his head out and sniff. When he does, click and deliver a treat. Repeat, repeat, repeat until he's following that object up and down, right and left.

Then hold it out again and up the criteria just a little - don't click for that sniff. Wait for something else. Spot will probably bump it with his nose (don't click for this! It's very reinforcing and can become a behavior quickly. For some reason many dogs really, really like to bump with their noses.). Hold out for a slight parting of his lips or an opening of the teeth - you'll get it. And when you do, click, treat, repeat, repeat, repeat!

Verrrrry gradually, keep upping your criteria, asking for longer and longer bites and holds on the object. And I mean second by second, building up very gradually. Soon he should regard holding this object without scorn. It's all part of a swell game, right??? He gets to MAKE you click and feed him - life is soooo good! And ain't the learning game a blast?!

Once he has that object nailed, move on to tougher ones, but make them at first similar in texture and consistency. Perhaps a toothbrush, or a curler, or a little envelope or a small plastic baggie, a plastic spoon or fork.

Once he is comfortably accepting and holding these items, start introducing metal objects the very same way. Keep the sessions very, very short, and the rate of reinforcement very, very high. We have LOTS on this in the archives, and Morgan has many fine posts explaining why it's so important to do this.

Teaching Hold Retrieve

Glad to hear that OC is working well for you in training your 10 month old Aussie. You mention that:

“He has strong prey and toy drive.”

and that:

“We are having some trouble with the take/hold and directed retrieving.”

You note that he will go out, fetch items you point to with a target stick or laser pointer, and is fairly reliable about bringing the objects back to you. Your concern is with paper objects and small items, such as pill bottles - items that are not large, easy to hold items, which you mention he is "reluctant to even do a take-hold."

You also mention that he gets distracted and bored with the take/hold/carry exercises.

The problem area is the take/hold/give of a variety of objects, and fortunately, this is not a difficult link of the retrieve chain to fix. It just takes consistency and a bit of lateral thinking, along with a plan.

1. "He has a strong prey and toy drive." Since backchaining a retrieve bypasses these proclivities, my advice is to bypass tossing toys to him, not allowing him to chase, pounce, etc. toys during any learning session. The goal is to NOT trip the play trigger, which is often movement induced or induced by the presentation of objects he enjoys playing with. Until the take/hold/give is strong and reliable, and very fluent - it can be detrimental to use toys and other play or chase objects as reinforcers.

2. Your sessions will likely be more effective if you begin by having a **SHORT** session (no more than 3 minutes) at a time when you know your dog is hungry. Before breakfast and dinner are good times to begin. Use high value treats for building the take/give/hold. Use tiny treats, such as pea-sized pieces of chicken or smelly cheese, and soft food so that it doesn't take time to chew. Use a kitchen timer so you don't accidentally make the session longer than 3 minutes.

3. Start with larger items you already know the dog is not reluctant to put in his mouth. The object is to engage his interest, and get a very rapid rate of reinforcement going so he will remain engaged in the game. You're going back to the foundation here, so don't plan to send the dog away from you for this initial exercise.

4. Start from scratch as if the dog has never retrieved before. Does your dog already have a solid "give" or letting go of objects on cue? This is important. If not, work on this first. The release cue should be really well understood and immediately responded to upon the delivery of the cue.

5. Put the object out in front of the dog and click for head movement - even muscle twitches - toward the object. Click just before he gets to the object. Do this just a couple times, then hold out on the click until the dog offers to open his teeth in preparation to put his teeth around the object. Click this a few times. Move the object slightly left and right, then up and down, so the dog has to move his head slightly to put his teeth on the object.

6. Hold off on the click for a slightly longer closure of teeth around the object while you continue to hold the other end of the object. If the dog immediately opens his mouth, hold off a bit longer and get a second bite. Click at the moment that second bite happens, not the first bite. Do this a few times, as you build from two quick bites into one longer bite, that may last a whole second.

7. Stop the session. You should be near the 3 minute point.

8. Change positions and ask for a known behavior he enjoys doing, and responds to quickly - perhaps a sit, a down, a paw touch or targeting. Click and treat for a minute on any or all of these behaviors.

9. Stop the session before the dog is sated. Let this session last just a minute or two. Go do something else.

10. Before you feed your dog, do another short 3 minute session on the hold only. Don't let the object out of your hand, and if you drop it, pick it up yourself rather than letting the dog do it. You may be able to get a 2 second hold during this session, especially if you are using an object the dog already is comfortable fetching.

11. Do only 3 minute of this session, then stop, and repeat the one minute session of behaviors he already knows and enjoys doing. This is the "relaxation" learning part, where the dog doesn't have to work hard, think hard, can just earn a few rapid clicks and treats for something he already knows how to do.

12. Start your next session again while your dog is hungry, before breakfast or dinner. Follow the same pattern as before: Hold the object out in front of you, ask the dog to "take" it and then, work only on the hold, and in getting a second longer hold. You're looking for a solid hold, not mouthing the object at all. Watch the dog's body language closely: if you see he's getting just a bit frustrated, and he's about to let go of the object, cue the release/give word and treat the dog immediately. You don't have to click. It's more important that you give the cue word to release while the dog is still holding the item. Immediately give the treat for responding to the release cue.

13. If the dog is not engaged in the game, look to your rate of reinforcement and your timing of the click, or for asking too much too quickly - as probably reasons why the dog is getting frustrated and disengaging. Don't force the dog to play the game if he's shutting down. Instead, get up, move around, ask for a couple quick behaviors he knows and click and treat rapidly for them. Make them interesting by changing position while you cue the known behaviors - turn a quarter turn and then cue the behavior, etc.

14. Put the dog in his crate for 15 minutes. Allow him to just chill out and let the arousal level subside.

15. Take him back out after 15 minutes and try the hold exercise again. Make sure even if he's doing well that you don't frustrate him by doing more than a 3 minute session. It takes a LOT of energy and concentration to learn the hold, so make each session short and rewarding, and finish up by allowing the dog to earn "non thinking" clicks and treats for a minute with known behaviors.

16. Before you even introduce other objects the dog doesn't like to hold, get a good 10 second hold going with the items he does like. This will make it easier to introduce distractions while he is holding the object. The first things to introduce might be to touch the dog on the neck while he is holding the object, then immediately cueing the release word before he drops the item. Touch one side of the neck gently, then in the next repetition, touch the other side. Touch his chest. Touch his collar. Touch his side. Touch the other side. Touch his leg, and the other leg. Tug lightly on his collar. Rough the hair up a bit on his back. Gradually build a tolerance for being touched while holding the object.

17. Once he is comfortable being touched while still holding the object quietly and firmly, touch the object in his mouth lightly. Then tap it lightly. Tap both sides. Then put just a finger's pressure on it, pushing it backwards slightly. The pulling it forward slightly. You are establishing here that the object is STILL to be held firmly, even if you touch it, touch his body.

18. Once he is comfortable holding the object several seconds - at least 6 seconds or so - while you touch him, tug on his collar, touch his feet, ears, chest, back, then you can ask for position changes while he is holding. Be ready to cue the release. He'll likely find this confusing at first. Cue the release if you even suspect he's going to first drop the item before responding to the position change cue. Start with easy, well known position cues. If he's sitting while you're working on the hold,

ask for a stand. Work towards holding the object while you cue him to stand-sit again. Then stand, sit, stand, sit.

19. Once he really has that hold well generalized while being touched, changing positions, and holding for 10 seconds, then I feel it's time to start introducing objects he doesn't enjoy as much. Many trainers start introducing other objects immediately, but I've found it more helpful to get that solid hold with an object the dog already enjoys putting in his mouth. In my experience, it's a whole lot faster in the long run, and less frustrating to the dog. I don't up the criterion by adding different items because that's teaching two things at a time: hold an item, and hold an item you really don't like to hold. I think it's more effective, personally, to teach the solid hold for a good 10 seconds with known and enjoyed objects, to keep the frustration low and the success rate high. There's plenty of time to introduce new objects once the dog really understands that the solid take/hold/give sequence.

20. When introducing new objects, back down to the beginning for short while and click for reaching out to sniff the item, to touch it, to open teeth on it, to hold it firmly and gently for one second, then two, three, etc. To keep the dog from being frustrated, do the new items only for a minute or so. Then introduce the known item, so he can relax, not have to think or process the new item information - he can just relax and have success holding the item he enjoys.

21. Build a 3-5 second hold of each new item before introducing another new item. In between new items, offer the dog the old item to keep the interest high and the frustration low. Be prepared to back up, do a quick review from sniff-touch-open mouth with each new item.

22. Be careful about new items you introduce: some things can be very aversive, such as cigarette packs, which can have bitter fingerprints of nicotine all over them. Or NCR cash register receipts, which are coated with a very bitter chemical. Or pill bottles that may have bitter powder on the outside from taking out a pill and then handling the bottle while you put the cap on. Money can also be very challenging - so much of it has bitter cocaine residue on it, and other really awful stuff. Start with "clean items." Empty envelopes. Empty pill bottles that

have been washed on the outside. A pencil washed clean. A fresh emery board. A clean spoon. A spool of thread. Vary the sizes, textures, weights of objects as you introduce them. And always, stop early and give the dog an object he does enjoy holding already so he can relax, have success without thinking or being frustrated.

23. You have not yet introduced the go-out portion of the retrieve, and the reason is that you don't have a real working retrieve until the dog truly understands taking-holding-releasing items offered from your hand. Introducing the go-out and fetch portion of the retrieve early is one of the main reasons dogs develop mouthiness, shaking of soft items, refusal to pick up certain items. Get your **HOLD** fluent first, then the "go out" part of the retrieve will be a snap.

24. When you start to teach the go-out part of the retrieve, don't throw the object, as it will likely trigger a play response. Instead, start by teaching the dog to pick up the object from the floor while sitting, then holding it until you cue him to release. Then push the object away a few inches and repeat. A few more inches and repeat. Turn around. Do the same thing. Sit in a chair, push object with foot. Do the same thing. Build distance very incrementally, only a few inches at a time.

25. If the dog is coming back, spitting the object out instead of standing or sitting and waiting with the object in his mouth for you to cue the release, then you've moved too fast. That's good information. Back up and get each distance increment solid before having him go out further.

26. Build distance slowly and carefully with soft items, such as toys - anything that may trigger a play response. Get a really solid hold with these items - 30 seconds, and be able to touch him, tug on collar, lift feet, examine ears, touch entire body - while he still is holding the soft item. Then put the item on the floor or on a chair close to you so the dog doesn't have to move any steps to get the object, then hold it until you cue the release. Build that distance only a few inches at a time.

By building that firm hold, and introducing non-desirable items in between practice holding desirable ones, you'll be setting yourself and your dog up for success.

Good luck!

Work vs Play Retrieves

This is my biggest fear with teaching a retrieve other than using backchaining: it can tap into the dog's natural instincts and if the trainer is not extremely vigilant, can lead to reinforcing some things we really may have problems down the road correcting. We sure don't want, for example, an assistance dog to be so wild about retrieving that he constantly picks up objects we have not asked for. It might be a knife, a razor blade, a dangerous pill.

I noticed myself when I tapped into my dog's chase instinct, that the excitement of the chase triggered severe mouthing of the object, and this took months to correct. And, because it was reinforced so long in my naivety, it is somewhat default when excitement is at a peak: my dog will start mouthing the object, and I have to back up a step, reinforce the quiet hold a couple of times, and then he remembers. But his first instinct during times of adrenaline surges, is to mouth those objects, not hold them quietly. I get more drool as well, when the excitement is triggered.

It seems you have a weak link in the retrieve chain, that's all. To "fix" it, simply teach the retrieve again, but this time a "working" retrieve. You already have a great play fetch retrieve. All my dogs have two very distinct retrieves. A working retrieve, taught in the normal backchained manner, and a play retrieve, where they are allowed to chase, pounce, shake, kill and run off with the object, play keep away - basically, anything goes. Then they have their working retrieve, where they fetch

any object I point to, pick it up and do a "paws up" on my chair, and hold the object until I cue a release.

Your weak link is the hold, so go back, start at ground zero. Put dog in a sit in front of you. Use a neutral object, like a pencil to start. Not a toy, not the dreaded metal - just a nice innocuous object that's not connected to play or anything he really may dislike.

C/T for a sniff of the object Move object up, down, sideways, C/T for targeting. Then up the criteria, wait for just a bit of frustration and let him offer something else - usually a bump with teeth, or if you're lucky, he'll open his teeth slightly and maybe even put his teeth over the object. C/T

Up criteria again, and wait for a more solid bite. This is where you really have to have your timing down and finely tuned. It's all in the mechanics. You want to second by second build that hold. Just hold off on the C/T until he has held the object a full second, then two. Hold the end of the object so it doesn't drop, and only reinforce those really solid bites.

Now his penchant for not holding items may get in the way here, so a few tips. If he's really wired, really motivated, he is going to probably want to spit the object out immediately and building that hold second by second may be very difficult. You may want to shape this part at a time when he's very relaxed, has had lots of exercise, and is hungry, but not famished.

I have to tell you that in my first attempt at teaching the backchained retrieve, I made the dire mistake of not getting the hold solid first. I then continued to reinforce the "spitting" of objects at me just because I was so excited he was actually putting anything in his mouth. Prior to that, he would projectile vomit each time I tried to put anything in his mouth - not forcing it, but just gentle coercion. NO WAY! It was THIS dog who taught me about the mistakes I had made. And the weak hold link was my downfall.

So I had to go back, re-teach that link. But I had no luck at first. He was just too excited. I had to wait until late at night when he was responsive, but not gung ho let's boogie. Then I put him on the bed and began the backchain again. This time I was able to get a two second hold and that's all it took. Once he realized the game wasn't speed (fetch it, spit it as fast as possible), he began to hold longer and longer.

I had to stop all tossing of objects, or anything that would engage his excitement, and just concentrate on that one single link. I also found the use of a Keep Going Signal to be helpful with this particular dog, though with most other dogs I have had little use for it. But Peek was so antsy that I taught an almost "freeze" position with the KGS. When I held my hand palm up to him, he'd freeze in that position. This really helped me to get that 2 second hold. I'm not a big fan of KGS's, but in this particular case, it was the key to getting the information to my dog.

I think it's important to let the dog tell you what is working and what isn't. And if one thing just isn't quite doing it, you may have to tiptoe through the raindrops and slightly adjust how you are presenting it.

By this, I don't mean skipping any of the steps in the retrieve chain, but just being flexible.



SHAPING

60-Second Speed Clicking Sessions

**"How about an overview of a "Speed Shaping Session?"
Could you just pick a behavior as easy a SIT and take us
through one of your typical speed shaping sessions?"**

I'm by no means the queen of speed shaping! I guess I should have called it "Speed Clicking" because I wasn't really shaping behavior, I was using a behavior already on cue and very fluent just to see how many repetitions I could get in a one-minute session. I tend to goof up on phrases a lot. Sorry!

There are many on this list who are a whole lot better at this than I am, and far better at accuracy along with that speed. I often screw up and click too soon or too late, when I'm really intensely concentrating. But during speed clicking, I don't worry about being a nanosecond too late or too early. The dog already knows the behavior, so I can afford more inaccuracy than I could if I were shaping a new behavior, and that click was telling the dog exactly what muscle twitch or subtle body movement it was being clicked for at that very moment in time.

I just did several one-minute speed shaping sessions with Finn a few minutes ago to see how many repetitions I could get of a known behavior already on cue in 60 seconds. To count it, I counted out 50 treats ahead of time and put them in a bowl, figuring I would not get that many clicked and treated, so I could easily count how many treats I had left to figure out how many reinforcements I could deliver in a single minute of clicking.

When delivering the treat after each click, I delivered it in a different place each time, just slightly so that the dog would actually move OUT of the sit to get the treat. The movement was minimal though - just enough to get him out of the sit. I didn't care if he went down or stood up, as long as he changed from a sitting position to get the treat.

I can deliver a LOT more reinforcers when I'm just clicking a speed session for a head movement or foot movement or body movement or simple target, but I can't get as many clicks in when the dog actually has to move out of position, because that takes a good second or two seconds each time.

I set myself on the couch with Finn on the floor in front of me. I put on the kitchen timer for 70 seconds, and got myself positioned and mentally geared up for 10 seconds, until the timer hit the 60-second mark.

I cued "sit" and as his rump hit the floor, I clicked. The click ended the behavior and he'd immediately start to rise, with his head moving to whatever position I delivered the treat in. I varied it by only a few inches - up, down, right, left. As soon as Finn took the treat, I immediately cued sit again, repeating as above.

I was able to get 38 clicks in a one-minute session. There were 12 treats left in the bowl when the bell rang. BTW, clumsy person I am, I duct taped the bottom of the paper bowl to my lap so I wouldn't

I then did a session of free shaping, for one minute capturing only a head flick. I don't have that behavior on cue, though it's certainly one of his favorite easy behaviors he consistently offers during any free shaping session.

I did not set the timer until he had chosen which behavior to offer repeatedly. Sometimes he does a paw thing, but most often he'll move his nose, and that turns quickly into a head flick. The head flick is good because I can get in more repetitions in the same amount of time. During the head flick session of one minute, I was able to click and deliver 49 treats, leaving 1 treat in my bowl that started with 50 treats.

I also use VERY small treats, the size of lentils - even for big dogs. I like sticky, squishy treats that I can deliver quickly, that the dog doesn't have to chew.

Counting out the treats and using a kitchen timer really works well to keep an accurate count of how many actual treat deliveries - reinforcements - I am able to do.

I also did a speed drill with three behaviors, mixing them up. Those were down, sit and stand. I randomly cued one of these three

behaviors each time, and was able to only deliver 31 treats in a minute during the first one-minute trial. Then we did a second one and I was able to deliver 36 treats.

On the third trial, I decided to ask for three behaviors in a row before clicking, since Finn is already very clicker savvy and knows the cues well for these three behaviors.

So I set the timer for 60 seconds, and cued in random order any of the three behaviors: "sit-stand-down" or "sit-down-stand" or "sit-down-sit" or "down-stand-sit" I wanted to keep the delivery of the cues as random as I could so the dog wasn't picking up on a pattern of behaviors, but rather listening and responding to each behavior. But I cued 3 behaviors in a row before I clicked the last behavior and delivered the treat. During that session, I was only able to get in 19 clicks. But I was asking for three behavior per click.

I find the speed drills are great fun for all my dogs, and quite often I screw up - they rarely do. I fumble my treats sometimes, or I give a wrong cue, or I click too soon or too late, and waste a second uttering a curse word. Life happens, especially when you're as airheaded as I tend to be!

I also am a big, big fan of totally free shaping sessions, which Virginia Broitman calls "variability sessions," where I just pull out the clicker wherever I may be, and let the dog pick some behavior or something around us in which to interact. Then I start rapidly clicking that repeated behavior. I didn't run this session this today because I ran out of treats and now have to head to the kitchen to make up a new batch of sticky chicken brownies. The other 4 dogs are outside right now giving me the evil eye because they didn't get their chance to have a clicker session yet. Guess I'd better head to the kitchen NOW and get those chicken brownies baked and cut into tiny pieces!

Free Shaping: Untaught Behaviors

I have been coping with a back injury, and constant pain the past 6 weeks, so I have been letting my 5 dogs down horribly. I have done literally nothing with them, as I haven't even felt well enough to click them when I'm in bed. Boy, were we all overdue for some FUN!

Today, I was able to sit up for a few blessed hours without excruciating pain, and I used some of that time to capture offered behaviors with each dog, one at a time. The sessions were short - only about 5 minutes each, but each dog had a blast offering behaviors. And each dog got clicked and treated at least 150 times in their individual sessions.

Here's a quick overview of how our "untaught" behavior sessions evolved.

I went outside with each dog, and let them go to any area of the yard they wanted. Then wherever they chose, I just used what was there and started capturing behaviors. One dog sniffed at a round potted plant base I hadn't put away, so I clicked that. Then I started rapidly clicking any interaction with the object for just a couple clicks, and began holding off a second each time until the dog offered a different behavior. The dog touched the object, then put two feet on it, then four feet, then lowered his head, and finally did this funny balancing things with four feet on it while touching his chin to the ground in a bow.

A perfectly "useless" behavior, but the object was just to have a thinking session, allow the dog to problem solve and find something new to offer me, and to capture each new little thing offered, and build a new behavior. So we went from a sniff to that funny stand and bow - 5 wonderful minutes, where the dog must have offered 26 behaviors I could have captured and built upon to make something new. We both had fun!

The next dog interacted with an overturned patio chair, and I captured him putting one paw on it, then two, then poking his head through, then front paws on the ground and rear paws on the chair in the air,

then that pose with a paw wave. Again, totally 'useless' behavior, but for the dog, a great 5 minute session of offering as many behaviors as he could come up with, as I rapidly clicked and treated.

The third dog meandered over to the pond, and I captured a head turn. I kept rapidly clicking that head flick, then caught him moving his rear leg up, and finally got the head flick and the rear leg kicking at the cattails.

The fourth dog chose the pile of twigs I never got cut up and thrown out before my back injury, and I started clicking for sniffing and moving into the twig pile. I kept clicking as he moved muscle by muscle into the pile, until he looked like a contortionist, head under one branch, leg over another.

The fifth dog picked the big tree to interact with, so I started clicking for head flicks toward the tree, then muscle twitches and steps around the tree until he was circling the tree. Then I started capturing movement in the opposite direction. Each time the dog flicked his head at the same point in the middle of the tree, so that became part of the behavior - move in a circle around the tree, stop midway, touch the branch, continue on around in the circle.

I used no lures, no hand or body prompts, I just captured what I could and let the dog start offering behaviors, and built on each behavior I found interesting.

Nothing was put on cue - that was not the reason for the session. Each session had no expected outcome, but was just as Morgan calls it, "free behaviors" and Virginia calls "variability sessions." I had no idea what I might click when I went out with each dog. I just started clicking rapidly and letting the dog find new things to offer. I try to capture muscle twitches and very tiny movements if the dog "gets stuck" and isn't offering a lot of behaviors. Then, invariably, that starts the dog offering something new that I can capture.

It's just capturing something offered to keep learning a thinking exercise, and to help the dogs continue to be creative and free in

offering something different each time. But it's also, just as important - an exercise for ME to hone my timing skills with the clicker, my observational skills. I need it as much as my dogs.

If I only work on behaviors I'll put on cue, then the dog and I both become bored quickly. I need those short rapid "free shaping" sessions to keep me fresh and creative as well!

It was such a joy to be able to get out today and do this, and I realize how much I have missed being able to do these "abstract" thinking sessions with my dogs the past 6 weeks.

For all of us, it was a good day. Just 5 short minutes with each dog was so great for all of us! productive for all of us.

Oops! on Variability Sessions

In one of my previous posts, I did a horrible and incomplete job when I talked about "variability" or "creativity" sessions of free shaping. I didn't finish my thought, and as such, it came out all wrong. I had an ADD moment - sorry!

When I talked about a variability session, I should have explained that it's not about repeating behaviors, but using a behavior to elicit other behaviors, get the creativity going, and clicking something different each time. It doesn't have to be built upon the first behavior clicked, but often in my variability sessions I build upon an offered behavior, clicking a new variation of that behavior each time.

For example, I might roll outside with a dog and stand near an overturned chair. I'll click the dog for doing some type of interaction with the chair - likely with a nose or paw. It might be touching a rung on the chair. Then I'll click again when another behavior is offered, maybe sticking a paw all the way through the rung. Then the next

time, sticking a paw through and resting chin on a paw. Or sticking two paws in. Or sticking a paw through and lifting a leg to touch another part of the chair at the same time. Whatever may be offered, as long as it's creative and different, I'll click it.

But it doesn't have to be using the same body part, or offering variations of a behavior. It can be any behavior that's not the same as the last one clicked for. It could be backing up around the chair, dragging the chair, sitting on the chair, crawling under the chair, jumping over it, whatever. And I don't limit it to one area, either. I may move freely around the house or yard, letting the dog find something to interact with, or even just freely offer some behavior with no prompts around at all, and then start capturing creative offerings from that. I just tend to love prompts because it can be so darned funny. Like watching the number of things a dog can do with a plastic flower pot.

These sessions have no purpose in terms of teaching specific behaviors. The purpose is to get the dog acting creatively, and offering lots of different behaviors rapidly. It's an exercise in building creative thinking skills, and speed in coming up with new behaviors.

Someone just wrote me to tell me I'd blown it in my explanation, and when I went back to read it, I realized they were so right! Sorry about that, folks. Color me distracted and admitting to goofing up once again.

Shaping Advice

The other piece of advice I have is to NOT TALK during the shaping process. Don't coax her, don't coerce in any way, don't signal with inadvertent body cues. It's so hard not to do this, especially for those of us who have come from traditional training or lure-based training. It takes constant work NOT to over cue all the time. But it also drives the dogs nuts. They can't concentrate on the click if they are trying to

watch you for inadvertant cues. So your shaping will come along faster if you can take yourself out of it as much as possible, and simply let the click work as a communicator. SO HARD, I know, and ohhhh, how I commiserate with those who do this. It's a constant struggle for me!

Shaping Leave It and Release

Would you mind sharing with the list how you teach leave it and drop it?

Sure!! There's no right or wrong way, but lots of ways to train these. Here is how I'm currently doing it.

DROP IT:

I begin with the dog tugging on a toy, then I blow in his nose when he's close to me, and the moment he releases the toy, I click or if my hands are busy, I say "Yes!" and let the treat be the chance to tug more. (if the dog does not enjoy tugging, then treat instead!)

Let dog tug again, and just before you blow in his nose, say "Out" or "drop" or "give" or whatever cue word you choose, then blow. The moment the dog lets go, mark that moment with a "yes!" or a click and again allow the dog to begin tugging again.

It should take only 2 or 3 minutes, if that, for the dog to get the idea that letting go is not a bad thing, just a pause before something very good happens again.

This is really a handy cue to have on ALL dogs, because when your dog scarfs up a fried chicken bone on the sidewalk, you will have a way to get him to let go before he ingests it and puts his health in jeopardy. Also, this sure makes playing tug not only a fun game, but a training session!

And for those of you who would like to teach your dog to pick up things from the floor, having a release cue established is the very first thing you will need to shape a backchained retrieve.

LEAVE IT:

Begin with two types of treats: one really sumptuous pile of nuked garlic chicken or something equally tantalizing, and one pile of so-so treats, just a step up from kibble.

Put one pile of treats on a table in back of you. Put one pile in your hand. Sit on the floor. Hold your open hand to the dog with the so-so treats in it and when he begins to sniff the treats, fold your fingers up over them so the dog can't get them.

If the dog is really a chow hound, totally persistent, take your hand totally away. The object is a bit of "doggie zen" - you have to give up something good to get something better. so if the dog "mugs" your hand, put your hand up over your head and ignore the dog. Make no eye contact, don't say a word - no scolding, no nothing. Just ignore the dog for a few seconds.

Then bring the treats out in your hand again in front of the dog. Watch closely, because you're looking for the ONE moment when the dog backs off, looks away from the treats. Chances are, when you fold your fingers over the treats, he will back off. The moment he does, click or say "YESSS!" and give a treat from the really, really GOOD pile on the table behind you.

Repeat this process until the dog looks away, backs away or ignores the treats in your open palm.

Once this is happening, add the cue words "leave it" - said in a neutral, non-confrontational voice. This is NOT a punisher, only a cue to tell the dog to back off at that moment in time. You are not punishing him, only giving him information so that he can make a choice.

To add the cue word, offer the bait in your open palm and say "leave it". Whisper it. You don't need to say it roughly, but nicely, as you might say, "Thank you." The dog is already reliably pulling away from the bait, and has the idea without you having ever said a word. Now you're just associating the word with the behavior. That's why we add the cue AFTER the behavior is pretty well learned. Until the dog is doing it reliably, adding words only muddies up the water, confuses the dog. Once the dog is backing off, say "leave it", then click and treat.

Now, lower your hand toward the floor, and in several different directions. Repeat the above, then move it into another room, outside - wherever you can. It takes a while for the dog to learn to "generalize" the behavior. Just because he knows how to "leave it" in the kitchen facing north doesn't mean he will understand he has to also do it in the bedroom facing east. So you back up a few steps, re-teach the behavior in each new environment, setting the dog up for success. This usually only takes a couple of clicks to get the brain in gear in a new environment.

Once you can lower and raise your hand and the dog will back off, put treats on the floor and watch closely! Now is when the chow hounds think "free meal" and will jump on it. Be ready to put your palm OVER the treats. You don't want the dog to get those treats because if he does, it is very strong "variable" reinforcement.

What does that mean? Well, variable reinforcement is something that happens not every time, but it has happened before and probably will happen again. Like a slot machine. You know when you put your quarter in, each pull of the handle won't net you a payoff. But you have gotten a payoff before, and you suspect you will again, so you keep on chucking in those quarters and hoping the bars will come up with three cherries. That's the power of variable reinforcement. SO you don't want your dog to get those treats on the floor!

Keep repeating the "leave it" and click and treat, never allowing the dog to have the treats on the floor, but only the other treats you will give him from your hand.

This all goes very rapidly, and within 15 minutes you should have a pretty good behavior going the first time you try it.

Again, once your dog is effectively ignoring treats on the floor, you can up the criteria and walk him by the treats, saying "leave it" before you get to the treats on the floor. But be careful: don't tighten up on that leash involuntarily and make 'leave it' a punisher. The dog needs to make a choice, and make the choice you want him to make. He will, if the reinforcement is strong enough.

Good luck and happy training!

Shaping "Leave It"

Here's how I shape the behavior:

I put scrumptious treats on the table, and in one hand, I hold less-scrumptious treats. Might be a Milk Bone in the hand, and nuked garlic chicken bits on the table.

I hold the treats out in my hand to the dog, palm open. When the dog comes to sniff, I close my fingers around the biscuit, saying, "Leave it" in a neutral voice. I don't use this as a punisher, just as a cue. I don't snarl it. I whisper it. The moment the dog backs off even a fraction of an inch, I click and treat him with the garlic chicken.

This is "doggie zen" - where the dog has to give something up to get something better.

I repeat this a few times, and by the third try or so, the dog no longer is mugging my hand, so I usually am able to leave my palm open, get a nice 5-second or so "leave it". At that point, I jackpot and put it all away, make a big fuss, play ball or do something fun.

Later, I go back, do it all over again. Usually by this time the dog has the idea, and won't touch the stuff in my hand. I click and jackpot liberally, moving fast. I hold my hand up, down, turn around, do it in every room, do it outside, so the dog can learn to generalize that the behavior should be performed in every environment.

Finally, when it's pretty solid, I add tastier and tastier treats, always saving the BEST for the reinforcers. Then I move to putting the teaser treats on a paper plate on the floor and walking the dog by them. I say "leave it" BEFORE the dog has a chance to sniff, and click and jackpot when the dog walks by the dish. I repeat this many times, and again, move it to other environments.

Finally, I add powerful treats to the dish on the floor, and jackpot the dog each time he ignores them. I then scatter treats from the plate across the floor in a line, and shape through that.

I then take the whole show on the road, doing this at malls, stores, etc. When my dogs are really generalizing this well, I drop treats on the floor, put the dog in a sit-stay, move to the other side of the room, and do a recall THROUGH the food. But this is waaaaay down the road, and only when I am sure he will respond correctly. I try to set the dogs up for success, and this is one behavior so important that I don't want any variable reinforcement creeping in. Meaning, I don't want to up the criteria too fast or the dog may eat up the treats en route, and then I have effectively variably reinforced this behavior.

Let's hear from others on differing approaches! There's so many ways to shape this behavior. I'd love to read others!

Shaping Through Fear Behaviors

To reduce static electricity in arid environments, just wipe the dog's coat down with a non-scented dryer sheet. Works wonders!

For shaping a dog to do something it's balking at doing, I like to go back to square one and targeting. This effective solution was really brought home strongly to me during the last Clicker Expo in San Diego, where I saw video footage of about a dozen horses who had had horrible experiences being trailered, and all who refused to go into a trailer. Each horse was chosen because it had such an aversion to the trailer that other techniques simply would not work without stressing the animal totally.

What the video showed was how quickly every single horse progressed from balking totally to moving all the way into the trailer by its own choice, without any coercion or force. It was very motivational for me to see how well targeting worked for something like this. These horses had some heavy-duty fear issues going.

The film showed the horses quickly being taught to target an object, and then the clicker trainer skillfully captured muscle twitches, head movements toward the target, body leanings toward the target, leg lifts, and finally individual steps. The target was moved closer and closer to the trailer and finally into the trailer, while doing rapid clicking and treating.

Every single horse moved into the trailer, out of the trailer, and in and out several times after the clicker session - of its own volition. No one touched the horse. It was all done simply by targeting and scalpel-like accuracy of capturing movement toward the targeted goal.

This is how I approach anything my dog balks at. When first partnered with my current BC, he would balk at certain things he was unsure of - tarps flapping in the wind, air coming up through the grating of across the entrance to the grocery store, etc. I don't think he had any previous bad experiences with any of these, but just that they were new things to him, and he was a bit unsure of meeting them head on.

I didn't coax him, just targeted him through them, capturing head movement, muscle twitches, leaning toward it and finally single tiny steps forward at a time, clicking for each step. Sometimes I had to back

down a bit and click again for just lifting a paw. But with a short rapid reinforcement session with the clicker, he was able to successfully handle the things he found initially fearful.

I think in this particular dog this also went very quickly for me because he was already an extremely clicker-savvy dog, and understood clicker sessions very well. They were also a "comfort experience" for him, something familiar and good that he DID understand very well already, paired with the scary thing. So it was perhaps in part a bit of classical conditioning along with the operant, in that the scary thing was paired with something good (classical) - in this instance, not chucking food, but focusing on a rapid clicking session, which was already a positive thing for him.

I could have just chucked food and moved closer and closer to the scary thing, but instead, I found that a rapid clicker session was faster and more effective in overcoming his hesitancy.

With a dog who was not clicker savvy already, I would approach it much the same way, only I'd be doing daily clicker variability sessions - just teaching the dog how to OFFER behaviors that I could click, not behaviors I'd necessarily want to put on cue. The object is just to get the dog to start thinking and problem solving and offering behaviors during a clicker session, then picking one of those behaviors to click and treat.

If any of you have a chance to attend one of the three upcoming Clicker Expos in 2005-06 in Minnesota, Tucson or Rhode Island, you'll be able to see those phenomenal videos of how well this technique can work. You'll also see a mind-blowing video of how interrupting a dog during a shaping session can "poison the cue" and set the dog's learning back quickly.

I think the Clicker Expo is so relevant and helpful for those in the service dog field, because almost every single presentation is in some way geared towards things service dogs and their handlers need to know to function in public smoothly and stresslessly. The expo also gives handlers some really solid tools for learning to shape behaviors

quicker, more accurately, and get behaviors generalized in a host of environments. There were so many service dog people at the last Clicker Expo!

Shaping Wait at Doorways

There are many ways to approach shaping a "wait" at doorways. I thought I'd throw out a couple of ways which I have used with success, and see if others have ideas to share as well. This is another essential behavior for service dogs, which can be approached in many different ways.

Currently, this (first post below) is what I'm doing. The second post is how I was originally taught to shape this behavior. Both worked.

TEACHING DOG TO WAIT AT DOORWAYS

First, close the door of choice and walk the dog to the door. Have him beside you, on leash. With very gentle restraint (this is not a punisher!), stop the dog from moving forward by putting very slight pressure on the leash. The moment the dog stops, click and treat.

Circle away and approach the door again. This time, the dog will probably stop on his own, so be ready. The moment he stops completely, click and treat. Be sure the dog is standing still when you do this. You don't want to reinforce when the dog is moving, only standing perfectly still.

Repeat this, and ease up on the tension on the leash just BEFORE you click. After a few more repetitions, if needed, the dog will be hesitating at the door without requiring any tension on the lead. By tension, I mean any forward movement against the leash. With the door closed, they can't go through it so you will only need the lightest touch, and "tension" is very subjective here. Fingertip tension.

Again, circle back to the door and this time, while the dog is pausing for just a few moments, reach out and jiggle the door handle. Watch your dog carefully from your peripheral vision to be sure you can "catch" the dog standing still, and reinforce it. Click and treat or verbally mark and treat the moment you have jiggled the door handle and the dog has not rushed to try to get out of the door. Repeat this a couple of times, each time jiggling the door handle a bit longer, turning it.

Circle back again and this time open the door just a crack. Click and treat for not moving. Repeat a few times.

By now you can easily add the cue signal for "Wait". Either use a verbal "WAIT" or a hand signal, of an open palm just BEFORE you click.

Next, open the door a few more inches. Repeat the procedure, each time opening the door a few more inches.

If at any point here the dog starts to move forward through the door, just quickly close the door. This tells you that the dog has not quite understood what you are asking of him. Go back to opening the door only a crack, or just jiggling the door handle. The object here is to "catch" the dog doing it right, so that you can reinforce that in his mind.

Once the dog is waiting when the door is completely open, start to walk through the doorway. You might have to do this one foot at a time. When you're all the way through, give a release signal to the dog. Some folks use "OK" or "Let's go". Use whatever the dog already understands.

This should all take about 15 minutes, that's all. Once you have the dog successfully waiting at the door, move the whole act to another door. Don't assume that because the dog understands the cue at the front door, that he'll also understand it at the back door. Dogs in general

don't generalize these things quickly, and you will need to re-train the behavior at each new door in the beginning.

It won't take as long, of course, but you may have to click and treat for first pausing, then open the door a few inches, etc. Just a "refresher" to set the dog up for success. You don't want to have to correct for what the dog really doesn't understand, you just need to show the dog that at every doorway, the same behavior applies.

Then, take the dog outside and do the same thing going IN. Once the dog is doing it reliably, take the show on the road! Put the dog in your car and do the same thing, having the dog wait until you give the release signal so he doesn't bolt out of the car.

This is also great for busy streets you must cross. You can also go to shopping centers and practice going in and out. But remember, each time you add a distractor - something the dog finds interesting, you have changed the criteria and may have to back up a few steps. For instance, the dog can be doing it perfectly in the house, in the car, on street crossings, when there are no other people around.

But throw a child giggling and skipping by the dog into this scene, and this is a whole new behavior for the dog to learn. Each distraction must be introduced slowly, and the dog learns that this behavior has to be done even when a cat runs by, when people are present, when a car backfires.

This is so helpful to know, and a week of diligent practice could save your dog's life one day.

ANOTHER WAY:

Several of us trained our dogs to wait at doorways in a class situation, during our service dog training classes. Here's how it was approached:

1. We move forward with dog in "close" or "heel" position.

2. We hold our hand out flat, palm facing dog, and slow down. C/T for dog slowing down, incrementally coming closer and closer to stopping, but without the automatic sit. (In our "Wait" cues, we want the dog to stop at the door, but remain in a stand).

3. When dog is stopping each time hand signal given, we begin adding verbal cue.

4. Once verbal cue is added, we begin phasing out hand signal. Some people choose to continue using hand signals, however. I'm one of them, but I'm notorious for over-cueing my dog with body language. (Big reason why I need a chicken clickin' workshop so much!)

5. When verbal cue is fairly generalized, and dog will stop and stand in any direction inside and outside, we begin training it between expanding gates.

6. When we get to the gate, we cue "wait" and we keep moving through doorway/gate while dog stands, incrementally extending the time by seconds we ask the dog to stay.

7. We then release the dog by either "Okay" or "Close" or "Heel" or "good" or whatever cue is desired. I like "Fetch leash", personally, because I always use a short leash and must drop it each time I enter a doorway. Dog fetches leash, comes through door, gives it to me, and then moves into "finish" (close or heel) position.

8. We begin our shaping at the training facility, then practice daily at home, in every single doorway in our homes, going each direction.

9. At training facility following week, we begin to add distractions. People, noises, other animals, shouting, objects dropping, etc. All incrementally, of course!

10. At home during the week, we continue to practice "wait" and add new distractions. Doorbells, telephones, neighbors, cats, squirrels - whatever.

11. When dog is nearly fluent in behavior, we begin work at front door, adding our heaviest distractions - UPS drivers, neighbors, cats, noises around the corner, children running, etc.

We do not use the "wait" cue for long term waits, only short term ones. For long term waits, we either have the dog sit-stay or down-stay. For certification testing, one of the tests is to put the dog in a down-stay or sit-stay at an open door, and the owner/handler has to leave the premises for 3 minutes.

There are many ways to shape a nice "wait", and this is just the way I first learned and the method I used in the beginning. Most dogs have a good idea and stand well on the first day, but don't generalize it until all the differing environments and distractions have been added.



STAY

Building Duration and Quiet Behaviors

How long has this dog been with his human partner? How green is the team?

You mentioned that you had the problem during training, but didn't mention if it was a constant problem, or one that just cropped up due to the discomfort of the bladder infection. Is this a busy, anxious dog? Does he whine when nothing seems to be happening? Or is the ap and down and whining only happening in this one environment? Is the dog food fixated or just normally food motivated? How old is the dog?

I think, ruling out medical reasons, I would go back totally to the basics of teaching him to hold a position, and then to lengthen the time while adding distractions. When I had this problem with my very upbeat, anxious dog, that's what worked the best. I just started over, pretended he never had any lessons in staying in position, and taught it all over again. I also had to keep treats off me, as he had come to anticipate that treats would always come, and that whining would help them come sooner.

This was a very busy, active, hyper type of dog, and also a youthful dog, full of unchanneled energy - not the laid-back service dog candidate I'd hoped for, but you gotta work with what you have, and that's what I had. The re-teaching worked beautifully, and when in restaurants (always problematic for this chow obsessed dog), I bypassed using food treats as reinforcers, instead using TTouch circles when I'd reach down, to reinforce him for remaining in position.

Building duration and quiet behaviors can be a real challenge with some anxious, hyper dogs. So when I'm faced with this challenge, I just go back to the basics and teach it all over again, and really work in tinier pieces, building up gradually to longer quiet times of non-movement. When I'm teaching, I do use food treats unless the dog is just too wound up and food fixated. Then, I'll switch to other reinforcers I know the dog likes - such as toys, feathers, TTouch.

I also wanted to ask if you'd ever tried an anxiety wrap for training duration of quiet downs. I have found it immensely helpful. Once, when Harry Potter was young, we had all four dogs in our local restaurant where we trained quite often. Harry was having great difficulty remaining in a down, so I went into the bathroom with him, put on his anxiety wrap, put the SD vest over it, and went back to the table. He never moved an inch after that. That worked so well that I decided I'd use it all the time with him for working on building duration on stays.

I also have found that with young dogs, getting adequate exercise before doing down-stay lessons can be very helpful. I found that if I

went into a restaurant before giving him a short workout, he'd be much more restless. But if I gave him a run before we went in, then worked outside a few minutes, asking for quieter and quieter behaviors, he was set up for success, and ready to relax.

Good luck!!!

Freeze in Position

Have any of our listmembers found a need for a cue word/phrase that signals "freeze in whatever position you are now in"?

I have found this to be one of the most helpful safety behaviors I've taught my dogs. My cue word is "wait" and it literally means "stop moving and hold that position you are in when you heard the cue." The dog may be walking along next to me, or doing a directed "go out" or chasing after a lizard. But when they hear, "WAIT!" they stop instantly and wait for the next cue.

This has helped me immeasurably as a power wheelchair user. I exercise my dogs daily from my very fast powerchair, and have had a few near-tragedies. Once, an off-leash dog surprised my dog-in-training, and my dog quickly darted to the rear of my chair, instantly tangling the lead line on the tire tread, which pulled it through the belt drive on the rear wheel. The Papillon was flipped end over end a couple times and began to struggle to regain footing, which was impossible, since the cord was far too short, and holding his head near the ground. I quickly cued "WAIT" and the dog froze in position on his side, legs splayed outward and waited for me to get to him.

I credit that "freeze in position" cue for helping keep him from strangling and overly-stressing. Though stunned, he had such a strong default response to that cue that he responded immediately, even with the rush of adrenaline.

Another time one of my adolescent dogs slipped a collar, and headed for the busy city street, chasing after a rabbit. I was able to holler out the "WAIT" cue and he stopped immediately, froze in that standing position, head turned back to see what I'd ask for next. He had not yet generalized non-reactivity to fast moving rodents, but he had generalized that "wait" cue, which I teach at 8 weeks and reinforce daily, through to adulthood.

When I move through a doorway, I often drop my leash and allow the dog to move behind me, so that the leash is not strained and doesn't get caught on my chair tires. As soon as the dog moves through the door, I cue a "wait" and this gives me time to turn around, face the dog, change the wheelchair gears, and cue the dog to fetch his leash and take up a sitting position at the side of my chair.

If I have to send my dog through the metal detector without me at an airport, I can cue the dog to move forward off leash as many steps as needed, then offer the "wait" cue for him to remain motionless until I get to him and put his service dog uniform and equipment back on.

Or, I can send my dog forward through any store door and cue a "wait" then catch up to the dog, cue the dog to fetch his leash and resume a sitting position next to my chair.

I also use this as MY "default" word when I can't remember other cues, such as "leave it." Sometimes, in a bit of brain fog, I see an environmental hazard coming, such as a Kentucky Fried Chicken bone on the sidewalk, and I can't seem to remember the "leave it" cue quickly enough. But because I have reinforced the "wait" cue so many times daily, I can use it much the same way: cue the behavior so the dog doesn't move in toward the food I don't want him to eat.

The "wait" cue has become my default safety signal, and one I can readily retrieve from my memory when I'm stressed, and seem to forget other cues.

I first taught the "freeze" behavior by walking the dog next to me on a loose leash, and going up to a door. Then stopping, c/t for dog

stopping with me. Then hand on doorknob, door open an inch, two, three, four. Each time I upped the criteria opening the door a bit further until it was wide open and we'd both stop at the door each time.

Then I began moving through it an inch at a time, reinforcing quickly and heavily for the dog not moving when I began to move again. Once I could get all the way through the door, I upped the criteria again by turning around, doing circles, going away a few feet, a few more, a few more, while the dog stood there in the doorway not moving.

Then, when the behavior was generalized in that place, I attached the hand signal first - the downward hand with palm facing dog's face. When that was generalized, I added the verbal "wait" cue.

I didn't fade the hand signal, because there are lots of times I can't do a verbal (in movies, for instance) and must rely on a quiet hand signal. But I used them alternately so that it didn't become a cue to have BOTH hand and verbal combined to trigger the behavior.

Then, when we had it nailed in the open doorway, we just started doing it all over the house in every doorway, then out in the open rooms, where we'd just stop anywhere and do it without the doorway being a cue.

Then I began to get the dog to generalize it in other positions - when he took a few steps forward, turned around, etc. so he would learn that the cue word was relevant in every position - next to me, in back of me, moving away from me forward, right, left.

Then when that was generalized, we did further and further go-outs (working on a Flexi leash, starting close to us, then incrementally further and further away)

Then we did the exercises all over again when the dog was sitting, lying down, whatever. It was hilarious when I'd catch the puppy stealing tissue from the trashcan in the bathroom, cue "wait" and he'd freeze in

place, one paw on the trashcan, and a wad of used tissue hanging from his chops, eyes locked to mine waiting for the next cue!

I also taught the puppy to wait at every street corner doing the same thing. It's now generalized so that he automatically does it without a cue. But he still responds to the cue when I give it in other situations.

I've found it works so well that I rarely use "leave it" anymore - I just cue "WAIT" and the dog freezes in position.

Is this clear as mud?<G>

The Myriad of Workable Ways to Teach a Stay

It's so interesting to read of the many creative and very workable ways to shape a good solid stay. I have experimented with this in many dogs, to see if one way really worked better than another for me. Though I have little solid data to share, I can say that no matter how I chose to teach the stay, with clicker, without, delivering food while the dog was in position or not, - - they all worked splendidly when consistency and incremental tiny steps were used.

I think this is the wonderful thing about having a full positive reinforcement toolbox at our disposal. We can try what feels right with the particular dog we are working with, and know that there are many workable variations if one does particular way does not seem comfortable to us or the dog.

That rock solid stay is one of the most essential behaviors we have to have at our disposal in service work. Before our dogs go out in public as a working service dog, they have to be able to do a three minute out-of-sight stay in an extremely distracting environment. This may include in park settings, with off-leash dogs, cats and kids running wild, or in a

busy department store with carts rattling by, kids with sticky fingers reaching to pet the dog, or in an airport where luggage, humans of every shape, size, nationality and age bustle by in haste, and jets shake the floors.

The key to success in any variation of how we teach is, I believe, in consistency and keeping the dog's attention while the game is being played. Obviously, this means we add duration very incrementally, never asking the dog for too much, too soon. If the dog "breaks" his stay, it's not the dog's fault, it's trainer error. Too much has been asked of the dog too soon.

What's too much? We may have "lumped" instead of "splitted" - by asking starting the dog at staying for a few seconds, then jumping to 30-40 seconds the next session. It's a recipe for failure, because the dog is still learning the rules of the game.

Or, we may have added too many distractions too quickly, before the dog had come to accept and be comfortable with the ones we have already added, and begun to generalize those distractions in new environments.

This is why, no matter how we approach teaching that stay - we remember to move consistently in a very incremental manner, and to allow time for the dog to generalize the stay in changing environments before adding more heavy distractions and duration.

I work for duration before adding ANY distractions. My first distraction may be just to step backwards one step. Then two. Then to slowly move my way around the dog. Then to make wider and wider circles around the dog. Then to move away in the distance a ways, and then to move out of sight.

Once the duration has been built with these mild distractions (movement from the handler) I take that on the road and start teaching it again in different neutral environments (outside the front door, outside the rear door, in an empty parking lot with hubbub in the distance, but not close to us, etc.

Once the behavior of remaining in place is generalized and comfortable for the dog in mildly distracting situations, we go back to the training center and start upping the criteria.

We may first add dropping a soft item while the dog is staying in place. And then a harder item that makes a sound when it hits the floor. Then a louder item - maybe a plastic cup, and then a clipboard or book that makes a louder OOMPH! when it hits.

We then raise the criteria by moving a bit closer to the dog and dropping the items while they remain in place. Then moving to one side and the other, and doing the same thing. And then in back of the dog.

Stepping over the dog while the dog remains in position is another excellent distraction, but can be a very scary and threatening one if the dog has ever been stepped on, or if the dog is small. When I start having people walk over my dogs, which are tiny Papillons, I start with a very low criteria - just getting close to the dog, raising the foot an inch, two inches, three inches, stretching out the leg over the dog's back, and finally placing it on the ground on the other side of the dog. This may take a week of sessions, where adding loud distractions may have taken only a couple of short sessions.

I always let the dog tell me what their triggers are, their fears, and then I back up to always work right on the edge of that fear, without tripping the dog's trigger completely.

In the advanced service dog classes, it's totally amazing to me to see 6 dogs lying quietly on the floor with the owners all out of sight, while the assistant handlers are whizzing between the dogs on roller blades, pushing shopping carts, dragging noisy pull-toys, tossing down clip boards, pots and pans, metal urinals, pushing wheelchairs, using crutches, walkers, scooters. Other assistants are dancing, hollering, laughing, clapping hands, making squeaky noises, or flapping their arms like birds as they move between the dogs in a down-stay around the room.

The dogs become so ho-hum about these distractions, and come to expect the unexpected. But the work is not done - it's still just in progress. Those same dogs now have to do the same thing in more and more distractive environments: in that park where the squirrels are darting past the dog's nose, where kids with lolly-pop-sticky fingers are trying to catch the dog's attention, where cats may saunter by. Or in the grocery store in front of the meat counter or in the dog food aisle or in the restaurant. Or in a busy hotel lobby by the entrance door.

There is no fast way to teach a rock-solid stay, because it just takes time for the dog to generalize that behavior when any of the criteria changes. But the more we can teach the dog in ever-changing environments, and ever-upping distractions, the more solid the behavior comes.

It's no wonder that while the dog can quickly learn to flush a toilet or open and shut a door in a host of distracting environments in just a few short sessions - learning that rock solid stay in distracting environments is still one of the most challenging behaviors to teach to fluency. And it just takes time and consistency and incremental movement toward the final goal.

I think it works with a clicker, without a clicker - that this is not the most important part of teaching this particular behavior. It's consistency, slow upping of all criteria, and never pushing the dog past its limits or triggers, but always working right at the edge of it.

The same approach works for me when I'm trying to learn something technical. It really doesn't matter what technique the teacher uses to teach me. I can adapt to the slight differences. What matters is that the teacher moves slowly enough to keep my interest, to keep confusion at a minimum, and never pushes me past my overload limit. If that happens, I'll quit. But if the teacher moves me through the learning stages - especially the early learning stages - very incrementally, always building on my success in each area until I know it forwards, backwards, inside and out - then I am hooked, I'm part of the game, I'm engaged and I'm enthusiastic.

Keep up the good work, listmembers! It's so nice to see fresh faces, and the enthusiasm of learning to work in harmony with our animals. It's such a dance of joy when we remember those simple basics of rate of reinforcement, slowly upping the criteria, always watching the dog's body language and never tripping the dog's triggers.



TARGET

Chin Targeting

"Could you give me a little more detail about the chin targeting?"

I'm offering one easy way, but by no means is it the only way, nor necessarily the best way. It's just a way that I find works easily for even those just starting out with clicker training. I tend to do more "free shaping" as my dogs are all very clicker savvy, and ready to offer behaviors quickly when I pull out the clicker. With a dog who is not clicker savvy yet, or with a novice whose timing is not yet consistent, I tend to use a bit more lure and target.

CHIN TARGETING:

Sit down, and put your clicker in one hand, treats close by. Stretch your other arm out so that it's across the front of your dog's neck area, held horizontally like a "fence" between you and the dog.

Lure with a treat from your side of the "fence" until dog's chin is resting on your arm. Click and treat. Repeat this several times, then slightly change positions, moving your arm up a few inches or down a few inches, so that the dog has to actually move his head in those directions to get his chin on your arm.

There should come a point fairly quickly where the dog will automatically start his chin moving toward your arm before the lure comes out, just from the movement of your other hand. At this point, you can pretty much fade the lure, and let your other hand's fingers become a temporary target. Dog sees your fingers come up toward the other side of the "fence" and instantly offers to put his chin on your arm. Be ready to capture that movement as it's happening at first, since you are fading the lure. Don't try to build duration of the chin sitting on your arm yet, just capture the head movement toward your arm with smaller and smaller finger target lures from the other side.

You should be able to fade the finger target fairly quickly at that point, as the dog picks up that putting his chin on your arm is what's making the click happen. He won't need the target lure, and the sooner you fade it out, the better. Lures can be an "added baggage" trap if not used carefully.

Once the dog is reliably moving his head toward your arm, putting his chin on your arm for just a moment or two, you can start adding duration a second at a time, holding off just a moment before clicking and treating.

Start doing the exercise in different positions while you are still sitting down. Hold your arm up a couple inches, then down a couple inches, then move your body to the right a few inches, to the left, etc.

At this point, the dog has the idea that there is chin action involved in the game. So you can bring back the finger target from the other side of your hand again, just long enough to get the dog to put his chin on the palm of your hand, rather than on your forearm. This should go very quickly - just a very short session or two.

Start changing the angle of your arm, so that you're swinging your arm out from your waist so that it's parallel with the dog's body, not across the front of it. Keep this transition very subtle, or it can get confusing for the dog.

Once the dog offers the chin to your palm, (and you should need no luring or targeting for this, other than the movement of the target arm/hand with palm up), start adding duration again, a second at a time.

Pick a cue word to attach, ("friend" is one I like for this behavior, but anything will work) and begin attaching it by saying it just as the dog's head is already moving toward your palm, and just before you click. Lower your criteria while adding the cue by not asking for duration at this point. Even if the dog only touches chin to your palm for a second, that's fine. You can work on duration again once the dog pairs the cue word with the behavior.

Build just a few seconds of duration, then start taking the game on the road. Go into other rooms, sit on the floor, stand up and bend over, lie on the floor - it's a new game each time you make these changes, so don't fear backing up just a step or two and using the finger target if necessary for the dog to get the idea that the same behavior he offered when you are sitting is going to be rewarded when you're lying down, etc.

Get volunteers to offer their palms to the dog, while you click and treat. Have them then change positions so the dog can start to generalize with the new people.

Take it on the road again and get more volunteers to offer their palms.

This all takes longer to write up than it does to teach! <G>

Eyeball Targeting (and shaping)

"Would this have anything to do with teaching the dog to look where you are looking?"

Very close, but not quite exactly the same. What eyeball targeting is about is getting the dog to learn behaviors from a distance, without having to start up close or do any hands on, then add distance. You begin shaping from a distance, tossing treats. Yes, tossing treats are a big "no no", but I've been convinced by some mighty fine service dog trainers that tossing treats is only problematic when it's not done correctly. I've seen the eyeball targeting shaped at a distance, with thousands of tossed treats, and still seen the dogs not show an increase in hovering behaviors in general.

So with eyeball targeting you are capturing very, very subtle movements in the direction your eyes are going. At first, you're clicking for head movement, muscle twitches, not necessarily waiting for huge pieces of behavior, such as a whole footstep. That's where many people well versed with traditional methodology get frustrated: they are looking for bigger chunks of behavior, rather than "shaping" and building on very tiny, subtle behaviors. I also think sometimes novice clicker trainers think you have to wait for everything, rather than set it up for it to happen. I'm not that patient, in general. If I lure, or toss a treat to get the dog moving in a specific direction, I fade that prompt very quickly - maybe 2-3 repetitions at most. And I keep up a very, very high rate of reinforcement so that the dog never disengages, until the dog really has the idea of what the behavior is all about.

But I think with any type of eye cues, the dog FIRST has to be offering you "drill a hole in your face" attention, so that they will seek to find your eyes no matter where they are: if you turn right, the dogs move to find your eyes, etc. If you lie down, the dog finds your eyes there, too.

The person who taught me this takes in shelter dogs, and for the first few days, the only thing she does is click for attention. She has piles of treats on every counter, and she clicks the dog constantly each time the

dog seeks her eyes. She varies the positions, rooms, adds distractions, etc. until no matter what she's doing, that dog is waiting for her to look in the dog's direction and reinforce that eye contact. I think Helix Fairweather has a very similar "find my eyes" game as part of her agility course, and Peggy Tillman and many others have also outlined this in their books.

That really is the foundation for any type of eyeball targeting. To continue, start clicking for attention, then toss the treat far away from you. Before the dog can come all the way back in, click and toss another treat so the dog quickly begins to expect to be reinforced a distance away from the trainer. And because the dog is now so conditioned to look for the trainer's eyes, it takes only the most subtle prompt to get the dog moving with the eyes.

Tilt your head slightly and that prompts the dog to move just a smidgeon to focus on your eyes, and that's the movement you start shaping very incrementally. Then fade the head movement and only keep the eyeball movement. Recently Sherri Lippman did this with one of her GSD's, and said it just worked superbly for her as well. But Sherri Lippman is also very, very committed to teaching eye contact and focus as a very strong default behavior. Watching her shape behavior boggles my mind, she's so adept at it. Same with her "Bow Wow" video partner, Virginia Broitman, who has the most exquisite timing I have ever seen. Masters at shaping behavior, and I learn something from them each time I watch them work.

"What I've done in the past is to stare at a certain spot and wait for the dog to look in that area. Then C/T. I guess I could put a treat down there and then look at it and wait for the dog to follow the scent and then C/T again when he gets it???"

You could, or you could use targets, as Sue Ailsby does. It really is one of those things you can be terribly creative in teaching - there are a lot of creative ways to approach teaching it. I admit it took a real leap of faith to start tossing treats. But I have tossed treats with my current SD washout, Harry Potter, with absolutely no increase in hoovering

behaviors noted. He may be too reactive for service work, but by gum, he's great about offering me eye contact and not sniffing the floor out in public. I was frankly, shocked. I truly thought it would be disastrous, but I took that leap of faith and trusted Sue, and now I'm glad I did, because tossing treats opens up a whole new realm of shaping behavior possibilities!

Ironically, my biggest "hoover" dog is the one I never, never, never tossed treats to, Cappy. Too bad there's not a song about vacuum cleaners I could teach him to dance to, doing spins and sidepasses with his nose to the floor. He'd be great at it. <G> (actually, that's a pretty funny idea for a comic freestyle routine. Hmmmmmm.....<G> !)

For example, you want the dog to retrieve something that you see and he doesn't. Or touch something that you see and he is not aware of. I'm sure you get the picture.

I think I'd be tempted to go the scent route on finding objects. Sherri Lippman was just talking to me about why she teaches this to all her dogs. One night she was out with her dog, got to her car, and dropped her purse on the ground. The contents spilled all over. It was very dark and she couldn't find a thing. But she'd taught her dog to find objects by scent, using the cue "find MINE", so the dog would retrieve anything in the direction she pointed that had her scent on it.

And here's where non-directed learning really comes in handy - when Sherri had what she thought were all the contents of her purse back, she cued the dog to get into the vehicle, and the dog refused. Since this dog knew that cue well, and had never refused it before, Sherri realized something was amiss. So she offered the cue one last time, "find MINE" and the dog crawled under the car, inch by inch, until it retrieved the ink pen pressed against the inside of the tire. Just because Sherri thought all the "find mine" objects had been retrieved, the dog knew otherwise, from scent training.

I think if I needed the dog to retrieve items I'd see and he didn't, and there was a whole houseful of items with my scent on it, I'd teach laser

targeting and simply keep a tiny keychain laser with me all the time, for those items I haven't put on name recognition.

Hand Targeting

Targeting is when the dog touches a specific object with nose, paw or other body part. The object can be anything - your hand, knee, a target stick, a piece of painter's tape, a post-it note, etc.

Using your hand for an initial target can be a simple way to begin, and builds a very useful behavior for service work. You can present the hand in many ways: with fingers down, hand made into a light fist, presenting the palm or back of hand, etc.

If you want the dog to target a specific part of your hand, such as your fingers or your wrist, you can use a bit of food scent on that part of your hand to initially lure the dog to it, but it's not necessary. Most dogs are curious enough to want to sniff what is put before them, so it's a matter of capturing that moment when the nose makes contact.

I think the food smell can be helpful for trainers who lack visual ability to see when their dogs are moving toward the target. But food smell can also be over-used, and become a prompt that becomes problematic, so using it sparingly, just for the initial lure, is more than enough.

Let's say you want your dog to target your two fingers. Rub a bit of cheese or meat juice smell on your fingers - not much, just a tiny little bit. Hold your fingers out and allow your dog to come and sniff them. The moment the dog touches your fingers with its nose, click or use your verbal marker as the touch is happening, and give the dog a treat immediately from your other hand.

Timing of your marker - whether it's a click or a verbal sound, is crucial. If the dog touches your hand and you click a second later, you may be reinforcing the dog for wagging its tail, looking right or left, or licking your fingers. Your goal is to catch the dog right at the moment you feel that touch, so the dog has a clear picture of the exact behavior it's being rewarded for offering.

Repeat this several times, holding your hand out a few inches upwards, downwards, to the right and left, so the dog clearly understands that the game is to touch your hand no matter where it is presented.

Once the dog understands that touching your hand gets the click to happen, then you can start moving your body around, so that the dog has to move a step, then two, three, etc. to reach your hand.

You can then attach the cue word. You attach it **AFTER** the dog learns the behavior. This is done because until the dog understands what behavior you want, any words are just noise and have no meaning, just muddy up the learning process. But as soon as the dog has performed the behavior repeatedly, you can begin to attach the cue word.

You can attach the cue word by saying it just before you click or use your marker word. It's a bit harder when you can't see the dog moving toward you, but by this time, your dog is already touching your hand reliably each time your hand is presented. Present your hand, and say, "Touch" (or whatever word you choose) then click or verbally mark the moment when the dog touches your hand. The cue word is attached just before the dog's nose touches your hand.

Be sure your cue word is not in the same tone and duration of your marker word, if you're not using a clicker. You still need that marker word to be very distinct, crisp. Sherri Lippman uses "YIP!" as a verbal marker when she doesn't have a clicker on her - it's a good marker sound, crisp, distinct.

After 25-30 repetitions, the dog will likely have the cue word paired in its mind with the behavior of touching your hand. Most dogs pick this up very quickly, regardless of age or breed. It's a great game for them,

and I love to imagine what they might be thinking. I suspect something like, "Wow, how cool is this? All I have to do is touch the human's hand with my nose and they make a funny sound and give me a treat."

It is important to "take the game on the road" and teach the same behavior in different rooms, outdoors, while you're sitting on a chair, standing up, lying down, facing away or to the side. You can't assume that because the dog offers the touch reliably each time when you're in the kitchen standing up, that it will understand the same behavior can be offered when you're lying down on the bed, or sitting in the lounge chair, or out on the sidewalk with cars passing by.

Hand targeting is one of the most helpful behaviors to have in your dog's repertoire. It's a way you can move the dog from one place to another without holding the collar or using a food lure. Once the dog learns to follow your hand, you can teach positions very easily without any "hands on" modeling.

It can also be used as a leadership default behavior during stressful times, distracting times - with the dog automatically seeking to touch your hand when distractions are present - very helpful for blind or visually impaired handlers. It might be to let the handler know a child is approaching, an off-leash dog, etc. so that the handler can then be alerted that something distracting is about to happen.

Luring and Targeting

"Luring and targeting - are they really the same?"

I use luring at times to start a specific behavior I want to teach my dog. It can be efficient and fast, and as long as I fade the direct lure quickly, it's not problematic. It doesn't teach my dog to think, and I realize that and use it sparingly.

I don't think luring and targeting are the same, though they may seem like they are essentially the same. In luring, we use the primary reinforcer - food, whatever - to get the behavior. The dog follows the food for an instant reward.

The propensity for the dog to learn to do nothing unless the trainer is holding food, then follow the food for a reward is what Gail Fisher notes as promoting "reinforced inactivity" or "learned helplessness." The dog learns to wait because waiting for the lure is rewarding and "good things" happen.

Kay Laurence refers to it as "directed and non-directed learning." Not that one is necessarily bad and one is good, but that we should understand how they each differ, and how we can use each approach effectively without having "fallout."

When the target rather than a direct food lure is used, the reinforcer is not given until a behavior has been offered. We are not cajoling the dog into moving toward the target, but shaping behavior by clicking and feeding tiny bits of behavior that lead to movement - muscle twitches, head movement, stretching, foot lifts, etc. The dog thinking process, not the presence of food, is controlling the dog's choices. The dog has to think and offer a behavior before the food appears.

Waiting doesn't provide a positive consequence, so targeting can bypass the potential of learned helplessness. The dog is motivated by knowing that offering a behavior will result in a "reward," but the dog has to do something to make the reward happen. Food doesn't appear until a behavior is offered. Food is a consequence of offering behavior first.

The horses in Jesus Rosales-Ruiz' video footage had been lured a lot to help them move into the trailer, but the fear of the trailer was stronger than the desire for food. Luring couldn't get them into that trailer. Yet, with targeting, the animal was constantly rewarded for offering tiny bits of behavior that lead to a step, and forward movement, until they walked into the trailer.

Kathy Sdao has written: "Which of you is doing more work, you or the dog? If you are doing more movement than the dog, then you are 'helping' too much. Let the dog move. Just wait and watch."

I was a coach in Kathy Sdao's learning lab at the Minnesota Clicker Expo, and I saw so many dogs that, during a learning session, relied on the handler to prompt, cue and lure behaviors. They had learned to wait for help, not offer behaviors that hadn't been coerced or prompted. This observation confirmed to me that prompting, luring - can result in a dog who will always wait for the handler to do this. What happens when the handler is not able to directly lure the dog? During an accident, or when stuck in a wheelchair in inclement weather, how can this effect the dog's ability to help the handler?

The more I work with service dogs, the more I believe that in raising the bar, handlers need to become better trainers and communicators and that this is even more important than what we teach our dogs. When we learn what reinforces OUR behaviors, and how reinforcement works - all types of reinforcement, then we can better understand how what we do with each interaction with our dogs effects how quickly/slowly/fluent our dogs learn.

The greatest service dogs I have ever seen at work are those who can think outside the box, who are capable of learning at a distance, learning new things in very difficult environments, or when the environment or normal prompts suddenly change. I have not seen that this type of reliability, - based on a reinforcement history of creative problem solving - is possible with dogs who have never had an opportunity to make decisions; dogs who have always relied on luring, and prompts. It just doesn't offer the dog a chance to work through a tiny bit of frustration and solve a problem.

When working through fear responses, I likewise have not found that a lure can compete with the efficacy of targeting. Luring can get the message through for initially teaching many behaviors, but it doesn't teach the dog how to rely on its own cognition to work through a problem.

Targeting, though seemingly close to luring, or the other side of the coin - is really not the same thing. There is a subtle but dramatic difference. Luring comes with baggage, and of of the biggest is that it sets the dog up only do behaviors unless they are in the presence of food. Luring doesn't HAVE to do this, but it usually does because we as handlers/trainers get just as dependent upon instant success. It can be a double-edged sword for the dog and human, if we're not very aware of what is happening in terms of reinforcement.

Another drawback is that sometimes food is not a strong enough primary reinforcer to get past a fear response. It also can set up the scene that whenever the dog is frustrated, fears something, to wait and the trainer will help him out, come to his aid. This is why I would not encourage the use of direct luring to get a dog into an elevator, or into situations which may elicit certain startle/fear responses. There are times it just won't work to override the fear response.

When we encourage targeting - whether to hand, target stick, whatever object - we encourage the animal to make a conscious choice and offer something we have not bribed the dog to do. The history of reinforcement for offering behaviors then becomes a default response for the animal rather than learned helplessness, or waiting until food is present. The target removes the need for food to be instantly present while the animal is learning to change a behavior or learn a new behavior. It also allows those with high level disabilities to teach these responses/behaviors when we are unable to physically use a direct lure.

I think luring can become an easy habit to fall into for a handler, as it can give us instant gratification, just as it gives the dog. There are times it's very helpful, and certainly an effective tool to have in our trainer's toolbox, but it's a tool that can become crutch and stumbling block for teaching a dog how to problem solve when it's not used effectively and wisely.

Kathy Sado has also said that she feels luring is something that should be utilized by advanced trainers, not novices, and after thinking about this for some time, I have to agree. She shares her thoughts that "When

we lure, we are overriding their learning process, rather than stepping back and letting them do it."

I use lures less and less the more I learn, and the less I use lures and the more I use targeting or shaping, the more I set my dog up to problem solve in ambiguous environments and when the unexpected happens. Directed learning - the food lure - does not promote thinking and problem solving. Useful at times? Absolutely! But it can also be a real trap, and one that can be easily avoided by using a target and doing more shaping of behavior instead of luring behavior.

Paw Touch

"Even though I Dremel his lovely nails to a trim length and he is not nasty about it my back door is getting torn up from his scratch to come in. I do not NOT NOT want to encourage a bark. So I want to make some kind of backdoor doorbell different from front and teach him to push it...ideas???"

You can put a thong of bells outside the door, but if you have the TV or radio on, you may miss it. So my suggestion would be to explore the possibility of putting in a regular button-type doorbell just for Jack, and teaching him to target it and press and hold it firmly to alert you that he needs to come back inside.

I'd also be very careful when shaping the behavior, Rhonda, as that natural urge to "rake" the paws could end up scarring the wall surface by the door. I'd teach the dog to press and hold first on the floor target, then move the target up incrementally while keeping the dog pressing and HOLDING quietly with the paw instead of raking, until the target is where the dog will normally be working.

With many dogs it's just as easy to teach the quiet, motionless hold on the vertical surface, but with paw-oriented dogs, it can be a real

challenge, so I normally shape this on the ground first, to be sure I'm not reinforcing any raking of the paws and nails.

Actually, I really need to install the same thing, and for the same reasons. When ringing the thong of bells doesn't get our attention, the pup will scratch wildly at the screen because it makes more noise. You have motivated me not to put this off any longer!

Now if not-really-grumpy-old-Fred could give me some tips on how to install one of these things, I'll be off and running. <G>

Target Work

I would have never figured out the targeting problem I was having had it not been for the handy-dandy, spiffy-cool, totally awesome telescoping targeting stick that Kay Laurence offers on her website at <http://www.learningaboutdogs.com/shop/clickers.html> . I have the 46 inch giant target stick, and it's a gem. In fact, hands down, it's the best, most balanced, easy to use target stick I have ever tried.

By the very long extension of the stick, you can really get some distance training going, and it will show you how well your dog has generalized touching the tip, rather than just at some place along the rod.

I have done about 4 sessions with each dog today - very short, just 3 minutes each. And I'm seeing marked improvement, to the point that with two of the dogs now, I can put the target stick in my hand, grasping it in the middle, and holding it parallel to the floor, and the dog will find the right end to target.

Interesting that when I up the criteria just a bit - and set the stick ON the floor instead of holding it just above the floor, the dogs still have not figured out which end to touch.

My goal is to be able to put that target stick on the floor, in every increment of 6 inches of extension at a time, spin it like a bottle, and then have the dog target the proper end when it stops spinning.

Until I have the dog really understanding following that tip only, I don't have a good targeting behavior on my dogs - not strong enough to have them follow that tip when default responses are apt to happen, such as it does when I ask my dog to follow the target to move in a circular pattern in a new direction.

I have reinforced so many thousands of inaccurate targets that I now have exactly what I taught: touch it anywhere, and it's worth a click and treat. I got what I reinforced.

This is a humbling, very humbling exercise for me, seeking out all the weak points in my training this way. But I do see the difference in my puppy, with whom I have never accepted "good enough" and shaped far more accurately from the beginning. I have never had a problem getting behaviors I want, so that's not what I'm after. I know I can get the behaviors. But what I want is instant clarity, understanding, and precision now, and that's why I'm going back to kindergarden to "tune up" my training.

So here's the challenge for listmembers using a target stick - see if **YOUR** dog truly understands to touch only the tip, and not other places on the rod.

1. Grasp your stick in the center of the rod and hold it parallel to the floor at dog's nose height. Which end does the dog consistently touch?
2. Put your target stick on the floor and see which end the dog consistently touches.
3. Spin the target stick on the floor and see if the dog can touch the right end when it stops spinning.

4. Extend the target stick to full length behind you and see if the dog will target the tip only.

5. Touch the tip to the floor and see if the dog will touch only the tip when you are holding the handle.

How did I get to this point of working on this particular problem? Well... I was using the handle end of the target stick as a "third hand" to aid in guiding the dog's rear end. He kept targeting the stick. And I realized he couldn't tell one end from the other. My goal is to get the dog to realize that when I hold the handle, the tip is to be targeted. And when I hold the tip, extending the handle, the dog is NOT to target it, but move away from it.

To all of you who have motivated me to work on these foundation behaviors, I thank you! I have allowed "good enough" to guide me for way too long. And now I need to go back to kindergarden and really make certain the foundations are rock solid.

Targeting Buttons

"How did you zero in on the elevator buttons?? I'm having a difficult time with that. They are pushing everything "around" the button. I've tried putting cheese spread or peanut butter on the button (which doesn't help the button work - sticky!) It's basically a hit or miss."

I'll be glad to share how I shape this behavior, though I'm sure there are many many ways to approach this. Hopefully, you'll get several responses of how others train for accuracy with this task.

I use a paw touch for elevator buttons as well as handicap door openers. Because I have a toy breed SD, accuracy is a "must" for me. If

a toy breed dog hits the handicap door opener off center, often the mechanism will not trigger. So from the start, I shape for accuracy.

I do this by starting out on the floor with a piece of white typing paper on which I've drawn an inch and a half circle, blackened in with magic marker. I laminate the paper, tape it on the floor.

I use a target stick to target the dot for the dog, Dog walks onto the paper and when he hits the dot, I click to mark the exact moment I want him to remember, then I reinforce with a treat.

I repeat this, withholding click for any paw touch not on the spot, reinforcing only those which are accurate.

Once the dog is accurately touching the spot dead center each time, I withhold the click for a moment, then two, then 4, then 6 - until the dog is holding the paw on the dot firmly for several seconds, until I cue him to release. This helps me in a couple of ways.

First, the dog is not developing a hurried paw-striking behavior. He's being incrementally reinforced for accuracy and firm hold. Second, I have a chance to develop a "pause" cue here for later work with multiple elevator buttons.

With a quiet, solid hold on one spot, with the dog looking then to you for direction, you can add direction cues (right, left, up, down). I'm lazy, and have not done this. I slightly cue with my body positioning instead, but if I needed it, I'd train it at this point of the behavior chain.

Then, once the dog is holding the paw firmly on the floor for several seconds, looking to you for direction before releasing paw, I move the paper to a wall, and tape it up as low as I can, with the bottom edge folded, so the bottom third of the paper is in horizontal and the top two thirds is vertical. The dot is on the vertical portion.

I have dog target the dog in this new position a few times, then add the other cues as needed. After this is fluent, I move the paper up the wall

a few feet at a time, until it is in the position most elevator buttons are in.

This is a long and windy explanation of something that takes a lot less time to teach than it does to explain. This usually happens rather fast, within minutes. Maybe 3-3 minute sessions unless directional signals are being added, with may add a day or so to the training.

There are tons of other ways to teach this behavior, but this is a way that has worked for me sitting in the wheelchair and using toy breed dogs. For larger breeds, the floor work may not be necessary. But if you don't get accuracy on the spot putting the spot on the wall to start out with, I'd go to the floor. Because the dog will naturally put weight on the paw as he stands on the dot, and that helps to develop a longer and longer hold on the spot, instead of the quick strike of the paw, which often leads to inaccuracy.

Targeting into Elevators

Sounds like Spot is really doing very well! The elevator has always been a challenge for me as a wheeler, since they are a lot like power door openers: so many different types, timers set at different pause times, doors wide to very narrow, and some that have door-open stop switches and some that require you to have a finger on the hold-open button at all times.

It's very challenging to teach a dog to trust elevators if they have been clipped by elevator doors, pressed between chair and doors, etc. in the past. I had a similar reaction from one of my Papillons (Cappy) when he was in-training, and he got clipped by a door and squeezed into my chair.

What I did to get him past not trusting elevator monsters is to find an elevator that DID have a door open hold switch - often found in hotels

- and set the door to stay open. Then I targeted the dog closer and closer, until he chose to walk in on his own, without trying to bribe him with treats. It was very much a step-by-step thing, and I didn't rush him. I let him choose to move forward without any coercion at all, just holding the target stick a few inches in front of his nose so he'd have to move a single step to touch it each time.

Once inside, I recalled him out again, did a few sits, downs, things he already knew and was fluent in doing in public places. Then I targeted him again to move into the elevator - this time, he could go two steps at a time to reach the target. He moved in much faster this time, having had a totally unstressful successful attempt the previous time. Again, I recalled him and did a couple other things he liked to do just to keep him relaxed.

We did the in and out a half dozen times before I got into the elevator with him. We rode up several floors, then when I opened the door, I again set the hold switch so the door remained open. I cued Cappy to forward out the door before me. We again went in and out a few times, now without the need of the target stick. I exited the elevator - door still on open-hold, and cued him back into the elevator. Then I moved in with him, and shut the door, and we rode back down. At the bottom, I again switched on the hold-open switch, and cued him to move forward out of the elevator, and followed him. I cued him to "wait" about 5 feet outside the elevator door. As I moved through the doors, I paused to flip the switch to close the doors again.

If Cappy had been more hesitant, or shown signs of stress, I would simply have lowered the criteria and only had him move in and out of the elevator without ever closing the doors that day, or asking him to ride in the elevator. My object was to have a totally unstressful session, and I was prepared to only work him on going in and out of the open elevator that day.

From that point on, I was extremely careful that **EVERY** time he went into an elevator, it was a good experience, and that there was no chance the door would close on him and bump him into the chair. When I couldn't control the elevator, though, I will admit to using the

small dog option - which I realize you don't have - and cue him up into my lap for safety sake.

The worst elevator experience I ever had was at Tufts Animal Expo, where the convention center had a very, very narrow door and only a couple seconds of pause with the door open before it closed, and no hold switch to keep the door open without my having to be inside the elevator to hold the button. I had my other Papillon, Peek, with me then, and he nearly got strangled when the door almost closed on the leash. I was in a rented cart then, and literally dove over the top to get my hand in the door before it closed completely. I was shaken, Peek was fine.

But that episode helped me realize the potential for disaster that elevators can be, and why I could never have an "unguarded moment" when entering or exiting an elevator again. I literally had to have a plan in place each time I went into a new elevator, to be certain I could keep my dog safe; or I would again exercise the small dog option of cueing the dog up into my lap before going through.

I don't have that option anymore with Finn, my Border Collie. So I have to be certain I have a plan, and conscientiously follow it to keep him safe each time. It's one of those times I miss the 10 pound service dog who can so easily jump up into my lap!

I really think targeting is very effective, and far more effective than bribing/luring a hesitant dog into an elevator. I realized the strength of targeting when I saw the videos of Dr. Jesus Rosales-Ruiz at the San Diego Clicker Expo, who showed several horses who had all had previous very bad experiences being trailered, and would not go into the trailer without coercion/force.

What I saw in those videos cemented me on why targeting is so effective in this type of situation. The animal is free to choose WHEN it's ready to move, and we can capture very tiny increments of movement - even muscle twitches, if necessary, to keep the horse engaged in the targeting game and keep up a high rate of

reinforcement. The animal gets so engaged in the game that it seems not to realize it's getting closer and closer to the dreaded monster.

I realized during those videos that for me, way too often luring did NOT have this type of result, and an animal that's fearful of moving into something that has previously been unpleasant will refuse to follow direct food lures. Yet, when we target that animal, doing "micro-shaping" can capturing teensy-tiny bits of movement - even muscles flexing - the animal gets the reward instantly, and that high rate of reinforcement works splendidly to change the behavior.

Targeting Problems 101

"How well do your dogs target? Can the target the very TIP of the stick or have they generalized that touching the stick anywhere along the length is the name of the targeting game?"

With shock, I realized I have three dogs - count 'em, THREE - who cannot target the end of a target stick with any real generalization. And I have one dog - the puppy - who can find that tip, no matter how small, in any position I put it in, even when I lay the target stick horizontally on the floor.

The other three will throw nonstop behaviors when touching the stick somewhere along the stick doesn't net them an instant reinforcement. They will try to pick up the stick, roll it from the center with their noses, their paws, sit on it, lie down on it, but they haven't a clue about finding that tip, unless it has a huge golfball sized target on the top. And even then, in some positions, they will still go for the rod part itself.

This was a rude awakening to me this morning, as I went back with all four dogs to the very basics, in an attempt to find out where my

training was breaking down. I tend to be a lazy trainer, a sloppy trainer, and though I'm perfectly capable of shaping in very tiny pieces of behavior, I realize that most of the time, I'm way too casual and teaching my dogs to generalize "close" rather than "on target."

This is what I meant when I talked about puppy shaping, and focusing on the foundation behaviors, rather than teaching the tasks themselves early on. I have found that the mistakes I made with the other dogs have come home to haunt me, and most of it is due to not getting each foundation behavior FLUENT, really fluent - before chaining that behavior to another behavior. "Good enough" is simply - not good enough.

I used the target stick problem as an example of why I feel the foundation training is far more important than the "flash."

I found out I had a problem with the target stick when I was working with Peek on circles. We have never, never, never worked on counter-clockwise circles, so in attempting to shape this behavior with a target stick, there was that inevitable point where the stick would become the target instead of the tip of the stick, and Peek couldn't get past that point. He simply could not grasp following that tip in a direction he had never been asked to go before.

I put each dog through 3 minute sessions this morning, finishing with the pup, who never made a mistake. He found that tip no matter where it was hiding. The other dogs just kept offering different behaviors because I had reinforced them so many thousands of times for simply following the any part of the target. And now that I want broad circles, I can see the breakdown in understanding due to my own sloppy shaping.

This is a rude awakening for me, and a real wake-up call to move past accepting "good enough" and get back to shaping in tinier pieces, looking for precision. In the beginning, it only takes a few extra minutes to get that precision. But if we allow the dog to generalize the "close enough," then that's what we'll get down the road when we may indeed want real precision.

So for now, my teaching with my dogs is "back to foundation basics." I see myself on tape with way too many superfluous behaviors, as well, and I realize my dogs have come to generalize all these movements - grandiose hand signaling, head positioning, body positioning, inadvertent cueing - as part of the cue signal itself now. And that without all that "stuff," I am not getting the behavior I'm looking for.

So my "back to basic foundation" training is not only for my dogs, but for myself - to clean up a sloppiness that I have created, and to learn to shape the tiniest bits of criteria, and to be certain that the final single behavior is really generalized before using that behavior as part of a chain.

Today, our targeting sessions included:

1. touching tip of stick in "front" position
2. touching tip of stick when 6 inches of telescoping length is added, working up to 3 feet
3. touching tip of stick when the tip is lying on the floor
4. touching tip of stick when it is raised in the air, requiring two paws off the ground for nose to make contact.
5. touching tip of stick 2 feet to the right, and left, in short and extended positions, and on the floor
6. finding the target end of a stick held parallel to the floor at dog's head height
7. finding target end of stick 3 inches off the floor, held parallel to the floor
8. finding target end of stick on the floor, on the right, left, front and behind positions relative to my chair.
9. finding the target end of the stick when target stick is closed to one foot length.
10. finding target end of stick when target is extended to its full length of four feet.

Waving from the back of the kindergarden class,

Teaching the Paw Touch

Here's how I do it to keep from scratching.

I teach the paw touch-and-hold on the horizontal first, before the vertical. That way I can also extend the length of the contact with paw firmly on the floor. And the dog uses the natural 'step' to put weight on it, which means no raking happens automatically. It's basically a step, then hold paw in that place you just stepped.

Then, I move the target close to wall, and do it all over again.

Then, I put the target half on the floor, half on the wall, and try to get the dog to step-touch right on the crack between wall and floor. Then move up just a scosh so the dog is mostly touching wall, not floor.

All the time, I'm continuing to keep the criteria low, so I don't get the raking, by only clicking for 5 second or more touch and holds.

It's at the junction of the floor and wall that it's a bit dicey, but if the dog has had a chance to get reinforced a dozen times or so for stepping on target first, then putting that pressure on the target with the paw happens automatically. I just never pay for little raking slaps, only strong, sturdy touch and holds.

Now, that's what I used to do when I started. But with the last two dogs, I do remember doing more practice having the dog touch my hand instead of the wall. But the touch again had to be strong, firm, and quiet, and no nails allowed. Then I'd sit by the wall or counter, have the dog touch my hand while it was held up, like the wall, and move my hand closer to the wall. The hand was the target.

I don't recall why I did that, but it was probably because it was easier, and I didn't have to keep getting onto the floor, but got the same results. And I could practice the hand touch with the paw anyplace in my chair. I didn't need any other target.

I used to carry blue painter's tape with me. I like that a LOT better than sticky notes. It's low tack, so it doesn't ruin anything, and I can carry it anywhere easily by just winding a few feet around a pencil and toss it in my purse. I could then rip off a couple 2 inch pieces and make an "X" on anything, and that would be the target and it wouldn't come off, plus it didn't trigger the dog's desire to fetch the object. Oh yeah, that was Finn. He was wild for trying to fetch anything he could get his teeth on. But he couldn't fetch my hand. Yeah, that was it. Can't remember a durned thing anymore, but I can piece it together with a bit of logic.

One more thing - never pay for a rake, never. If you use your hand, keep your palm UP straight so the dog can't hook the nails and let the nails hold the paw there. Pay for touch and holds ONLY in the center of your palm, whether you are holding your hand vertically or horizontally. With Peek, I used to practice both ways, randomly and constantly, because he was a natural raker. But he got it.

Gee, thanks for asking! You just made me feel useful, a real rarity these days!



ZEN

Leave It

Jane shared a good plan for teaching "Leave it" in tempting environments, with some excellent tips for setting your dog up for success. Click and tossing cyber-chocolates, Jane!

I thought I might add just a few pre-training details, since Jane covered working directly in the tempting environment so well.

A few things that may help set your dog up for success:

1. Teach "Leave it" as a **cue** rather than a commanding punisher - meaning, deliver the cue word in a neutral voice, just as you might say, "Pass the butter please" at the dining room table. It's very easy for us humans to accidentally morph into using "Leave it" as a verbal reprimand/punisher, considering the punitive society in which we live.

With clicker training, however, the phrase is not meant to mean, "Stop what you are doing **OR ELSE** I will hurt you." "Leave it" is simply a cue phrase attached to the already learned behavior.

2. Think about how you deliver that cue phrase to the dog when you are frustrated, hungry, fearful or busy. Do you often use it with a punitive tone of voice? If so, it may be helpful to consider thinking and teaching a new cue word that has no punitive connotations to you. It doesn't matter to the dog - you could say, 'Strawberry' or 'Cupcake' or any neutral word that you don't normally say with any kind of stressed voice.

When clicker training was just becoming more widely known, a decade or so ago, trainers were often using the word "wrong" as a supposedly neutral "no reward marker," meaning, if the dog tried something but it wasn't something they could earn a reinforcement for offering, the trainer would say "wrong" so the dog would know that behavior just offered would not get them a click and treat.

One problem with that use of "wrong" is that the word itself is punitive in our society a great deal of the time. And, under stress, in times of duress, when we're hungry, upset, cold, pms'ing or whatever - we often tend to deliver that word very abruptly with a punitive tone. The

neutral and soft "wrong" now becomes "WRONG!!!!" and turns into a punisher instead of a simple verbal no-reward-marker.

So, if you're still considering cues, still early in the training process, it may be worth considering to find a totally neutral word that has absolutely no punitive tonal qualities to it in our society. That way, if you are stressed, you are not apt to use the word with a punitive tone. It's pretty hard to say "strawberry" harshly!

3. When teaching the behavior, start close up with the "doggy zen" method of having treats in your hand, and reinforcing the dog each time it ignores the treats and looks up at you. Then, when you move to food items on the floor, have the dog on a leash. That way, if the food becomes just too much temptation due to its location on the floor - a natural scarfing up behavior for dogs, after all - you will be able to keep the dog from getting its head all the way down to eat the treat.

People who walk also often use their feet to cover treats on the floor. I don't have that luxury, having no feet. But I do remember how successful all the dogs were in service dog clicker classes at bypassing all the most sumptuous treats you can imagine - cheeses of all kinds, meat of all kinds, on the floor, on plates on the floor and low tables, etc. By graduation, we had to be able to give our dog a 'leave it' cue, leave the room for 3 minutes and trust the dog would not choose to snarf up the goodies.

4. Each time you change something in the dog's environment, you can expect the dog not to quite understand the cue in the new context. For example, just because the dog understands and responds to the "leave it" cue at home, or in the training center, does not mean it will generalize it in a more novel environment. A trip to the grocery store, the pet store, or outside on a sidewalk where people drop fried chicken bones- - will be a whole new ball game.

Be sure to **TEACH** the behavior again in each new environment, not just try to "proof" the behavior in those places right off the bat just because the dog is really reliable at home or other known environments. You are either setting the dog up for success in new

environments or setting it up for failure. If the dog is not ready to avoid sniffing in a grocery store, the inclination many people have is to say, "LEAVE IT" in a harsher, more abrupt tone, and a with louder voice.

If you find yourself doing this, then it's "information" for you - and means that the dog is just not quite ready for this particular environment yet, and that you need to go back to basics, and TEACH the behavior again, as if it were the first time - in that environment.

Jane had some great tips for what may be too attractive to the dog's sense of smell in these novel environments - food items down low, clothing with many human smells on it, etc. (Thanks, Jane!). Each time you approach a new area of a store where you suspect your dog may be distracted, back up and start rapidly reinforcing focus on you, the handler.

It helps to think of what you DO want the dog to do, rather than to focus on what you DON'T want the dog to do. So, if you want the dog to avoid sniffing all the bags of dog food and rawhide chewies, be prepared to start down that aisle using rapid reinforcement and very high-value treats your dog really enjoys. That's setting the dog up for success.

As you progress, remember to continue reinforcing the dog for making the choice to NOT sniff and offer you attention/focus for a moment, instead. That's certainly worthy of a click and treat!

Happy Training!

Leave It Again

Begin with two types of treats: one really sumptuous pile of nuked garlic chicken or something equally tantalizing, and one pile of so-so treats, just a step up from kibble.

Put one pile of treats on a table in back of you. Put one pile in your hand. Sit on the floor. Hold your open hand palm-up to the dog with the so-so treats in it and when he begins to sniff the treats, fold your fingers up over them so the dog can't get them.

If the dog is really a chow hound, totally persistent at mugging your hand, take your hand totally away. The object is a bit of "doggie Zen" - you have to give up something good to get something better. so if the dog "mugs" your hand, put your hand up over your head and ignore the dog. Make no eye contact, don't say a word - no scolding, no nothing. Just ignore the dog for a few seconds.

Then bring the treats out in your hand again in front of the dog. Watch closely, because you're looking for the ONE moment when the dog backs off, looks away from the treats. Chances are, when you fold your fingers over the treats, he will back off. The moment he does, click and give a treat from the really, really GOOD pile on the table behind you.

Repeat this process until the dog looks away, backs away or ignores the treats in your open palm.

Once this is happening, add the cue words "leave it" - said in a neutral, non-confrontational voice. This is NOT a punisher, only a cue to tell the dog to back off at that moment in time. You are not punishing him, only giving him information so that he can make a choice.

To add the cue word, offer the bait in your open palm and say "leave it". Whisper it. You don't need to say it roughly, but nicely, as you might say, "Thank you." The dog is already reliably pulling away from the bait, and has the idea without you having ever said a word. Now you're just associating the word with the behavior. That's why we add the cue AFTER the behavior is pretty well learned. Until the dog is doing it reliably, adding words only muddies up the water, confuses the dog. Once the dog is backing off, say "leave it", then click and treat.

Now, lower your hand toward the floor, and in several different directions. Repeat the above, then move it into another room, outside -

wherever you can. It takes a while for the dog to learn to "generalize" the behavior. Just because he knows how to "leave it" in the kitchen facing north doesn't mean he will understand he has to also do it in the bedroom facing east. So you back up a few steps, reteach the behavior in each new environment, setting the dog up for success. This usually only takes a couple of clicks to get the brain in gear in a new environment.

Once you can lower and raise your hand and the dog will back off, put treats on the floor and watch closely! Now is when the chow hounds think "free meal" and will jump on it. Be ready to put your palm **OVER** the treats. You don't want the dog to get those treats because if he does, it is very strong variable reinforcement.

What does that mean? Well, variable reinforcement is something that happens not every time, but it has happened before and probably will happen again. Like a slot machine. You know when you put your quarter in, each pull of the handle won't net you a payoff. But you have gotten a payoff before, and you suspect you will again, so you keep on chucking in those quarters and hoping the bars will come up with three cherries. That's the power of variable reinforcement. So, you don't want your dog to get those treats on the floor!

Keep repeating the "leave it" and click and treat, never allowing the dog to have the treats on the floor, but only the other treats you will give him from your hand.

This all goes very rapidly, and within 15 minutes you should have a pretty good behavior going the first time you try it. I've rarely had dogs who don't have the idea in the first couple of minutes.

Again, once your dog is effectively ignoring treats on the floor, you can up the criteria and walk him by the treats, saying "leave it" before you get to the treats on the floor. But be careful: don't tighten up on that leash involuntarily and make 'leave it' a punisher. The dog needs to make a choice, and make the choice you want him to make. He will, if the reinforcement is strong enough.

Teaching "Leave It" with Live Things

First, it sounds like Spot has already been reinforced for enjoying the behavior of chasing animals. You will most likely have success at reshaping these responses if you can also control the time he spends loose in the back yard, un-supervised. Remember that each time he runs for the squirrels and deer, he is being reinforced, and that reinforcement is tapping right into the Spot's hard-wired prey drive. So, management of Spot's outside time will certainly make your job of behavior modification easier.

I'd consider approaching this just the same as if a dog were displaying fear/aggression/overexcitement, etc. behaviors at other dogs he sees. Start with a low criteria, build up incrementally. Find out at what distance Spot begins to respond, and begin your desensitization program five or 10 feet in back of that. That is, if Spot is reacting to a squirrel at 50 feet, begin your desensitization at 60 feet away or so.

If Spot is so excited about this now that he's upon his back legs pulling, then I'd advise you get a Gentle Leader or Halti to help manage the situation just until you have him a bit more responsive to you instead of the object of interest.

As soon as Spot sees, smells or hears the distractor, he will begin his posturing, or his ritual for moving out and moving at the animal. Catch him just **BEFORE** he does this, and get his attention with rapid reinforcement and a high-powered primary reinforcer. If you are too late, catch Spot's attention in some other way. He will most likely **NOT** respond to a simple verbal cue like the sound of his name when he is really focused on the other animal.

I like to use my body to break the obsession. I use my wheelchair and move slightly into the dog, not hitting him, but moving **INTO** his private comfort zone forcing him to give **ME** attention. I watch for that

moment, quickly reinforce, then continue a high rate of reinforcement while still arcing into the dog, if necessary. This circling or arcing is really useful, as it breaks the obsession, sets the dog up to focus on the handler, and maintains the focus while the object of the dog's obsession is still in view: as you keep gradually moving INTO the dog, the dog continues to give YOU the attention.

You'll probably never convince Spot that squirrels and deer are not madly interesting, but you CAN get him to look to you for leadership. And your leadership should clearly let Spot know that giving YOU attention is far more rewarding than the thrill of fixating on the other animal. This will also help hone your skills of observation of Spot's behaviors, and practice in watching for calming signals, and for those moments when you can capture his attention again.

Incrementally close the distance, moving closer to the object of obsession. This may take a while, and it's not going to happen in a couple of sessions, but you should be able to fairly quickly be able to break the obsessing and stop the lunging at the end of the leash, and re-establish your leadership.

Good luck and keep us posted! You are not alone in having to deal with this problem. I have spent the last three years of my life working my service dog through these same things. And again, my dog was strongly reinforced during the entire first year of his life, when I was too ill quite often, to deal with the problem. By the time we began our desensitization program, he was truly obsessive.

He will most likely always have this as a default behavior, if left to his own. But I use management for those times he is off-leash. He gets no unsupervised time in the yard. He does get time, but I'm there to watch and provide leadership, if necessary. On leash, we no longer have a problem getting him to give me the attention. That's good enough for me. I don't expect him to be "perfect", only to respond when cued.

One more suggestion: Do you have Jean Donaldson's "Culture Clash"? Her instructions are most detailed, easy to understand.