



Laurie Luck, KPA CTP  
Box 1111  
Mount Airy, MD 21771  
(240) 848-3468  
laurie@smartdoguniversity.com



## Your Smart Dog

### Five Ways To Help Your Dog Listen

December 2009

**L**ast month's newsletter contained five reasons your dog might not do what you asked. Too many people attribute their dog's inability to listen to the dog being stubborn, when in reality many other reasons are much more likely. So, if your *perfect dog* suddenly forgets how to sit, jumps on people, doesn't come when you call him, or forgets his own name, this article will help you (and your dog) fix your problem.

#### **SOLUTION 1: DOG DOESN'T REALLY KNOW THE BEHAVIOR**

**You took your dog to obedience class. You didn't miss even one night. And still your dog doesn't listen.**

**Just taking your dog to class isn't enough.** You need to really make sure your dog knows what you're asking. Think your dog's got it? Try these tests to get a more accurate picture of what your dog *really* knows. Give your dog the cue while you:

- Wear sunglasses.
- Sit on the floor.
- Whisper the word.
- Shout the word.
- Stand sideways.
- Bounce a ball.
- Say the word in a "character voice."
- Exchange your normal cue for a word that sounds similar. (Say Pit instead of Sit).

**If your dog can't get the behavior right, guess what. He doesn't really know the behavior!** Go back to basics and start teaching the behavior again, from the beginning, working those variables in the list above into your training.

#### **SOLUTION 2: DOG WASN'T TAUGHT IN THAT LOCATION**

**So your dog will go to his bed and settle when you work on it in the kitchen, but when you move the bed to the living room, he looks at you as if you're speaking a foreign language.** Dogs are *contextual learners*. If you teach them in the kitchen, they know the behavior in the kitchen. But they don't necessarily transfer that knowledge to the living room.

**Introduced early and systematically, distractions won't derail your dog.**

**Teach your dog to do behaviors *everywhere* you need him to do those behaviors.** This isn't as daunting as it sounds. Move around your house when you train, don't always train in the same place. Train next to the front door. Train while you're in the bathroom. Train while you're unloading the dishwasher. The more places you teach your dog, the more places your dog will be able to comply with your requests.

#### **SOLUTION 3: DOG DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH DISTRACTIONS**

**A dog who sits beautifully at the door is nice. A dog who sits beautifully at the door after the doorbell rings is a gem!** Distractions are anything the dog notices. Distractions can be visual (the dog across the street), auditory (the doorbell ringing), olfactory (another dog's scent), or any combination of the above.

For a dog to comply with your requests, he needs a fair and thorough teacher. We make kids turn off the tv while they do homework, don't we? Why? Because it's simply too distracting to do schoolwork while the tv is on. That makes perfect sense to us, but when our dog can't sit at the door because the doorbell just rang, we think they're stubborn.

**To teach your dog to work around distractions, make a plan to introduce distractions into your training early.** Introduced early and systematically, distractions won't derail your dog. Your dog will be able to work despite ringing doorbells, jogging neighbors, or barking dogs.

The key to working with distractions is to introduce them at a level that the dog can *perceive*, but that isn't overwhelming for the dog. For instance, if I were



Laurie Luck, KPA CTP  
Box 1111  
Mount Airy, MD 21771  
(240) 848-3468  
laurie@smartdoguniversity.com



introducing the doorbell into my sit training, I might have a neighbor ring the doorbell at 30-second intervals while I'm upstairs with my dog in the bathroom.

I'm far enough away from the distraction (the ringing doorbell) that hopefully the dog can work through it and will be able to sit. Once my dog has mastered sitting at a distance from the distracting doorbell, I'll move him closer to the distraction; maybe into the hallway upstairs. Systematically, I'll be able to move closer and closer to the ringing doorbell, and my dog will be able to sit despite the distraction.

#### SOLUTION 4: BEHAVIOR DOESN'T PAY OFF

**Dogs know what works. They do what works. They know what doesn't work. They don't do what doesn't work.** Your job is to make sure that doing what you want the dog to do *works for your dog*. What this means is that **you need to look at every situation from the dog's perspective.**

For instance: the dog is outside guarding the yard against the neighborhood squirrels. He's got them all treed and is now on sentry duty, making sure none of those squirrels touch the ground.

You need to run some errands so you call your dog inside to put him in his crate.

What's the dog's perspective? He sees the car keys in your hand, he knows that means you're leaving. His choices are: (1) come inside and get put into the crate for who-knows-how-long or (2) remain on sentry duty and patrol the yard.

Which choice wins, in your dog's mind? It doesn't take a genius to figure that one out! So what's an owner to do? **Make it worthwhile for your dog to come indoors, of course!** When he comes inside, give him some prime treats – leftover chicken from last night's dinner maybe. Play his favorite game for two minutes. Give him a fantastic stuffed food toy in his crate as you leave. Those three things far outweigh squirrel sentry duty in most dog's minds.

**This means that you're always recognizing what your dog is giving up in order to comply with your requests and you're compensating him for that sacrifice. Good**

trainers recognize the value of the behavior their dog is giving them and compensate their dog accordingly.

#### SOLUTION 5: OVERWHELMED SYNDROME

**Too many dogs are labeled stubborn when in reality they are shut down.** The situation or the circumstances overwhelm the dog and they cannot think. They cannot comply. What exactly does "shut down" look like? The dog doesn't respond to your requests. He may not even respond to his name.

Sometimes shut down dogs pant. You might be able to see the whites of his eyes. He may look shy or stand-offish. He may hide behind you or a piece of furniture. His tail may be droopy or tucked between his legs. His head may droop.

**Want to see if your dog is overwhelmed? Completely remove him from the situation.** Give him a few minutes to adjust and then give a simple request. Can he do it? If so, he was most likely overwhelmed in the situation you just removed him from. What this means is your dog needs more practice and less pressure in situations like that one. Next time, either let him observe the situation from farther away or don't expect anything from him if you must place him in that overwhelming situation.

Hopefully November and December's articles have given you some insight into how to help your dog be more successful at carrying out your requests. Happy training and happy holidays!

Laurie Luck, KPA CTP  
Faculty, Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training & Behavior  
[Smart Dog University, LLC](#), Box 1111, Mount Airy, MD 21771, (240) 848-3468, [Follow SDU on Twitter!](#)  
© 2009 Smart Dog University, LLC. All rights reserved.

