

Dogs Training Dogs: Training by Example

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One of my best training aides is letting future performance prospects watch me training my experienced dogs do obedience, agility, etc. The older ones not only train the youngsters that "hey, this is ok and not going to kill me as it doesn't kill my respected elder" but that it's fun and definitely THE Thing To Do! They not only learn what to do by example, they learn motivation and have more drive from watching.

Sit and down stays are easy to train. Just plop them all in a line. Young ones watch the elders, "hey, they're staying, so should I." Plop them all in a line for teaching fetch and hold the dumbbell. Have the elders take and hold several times for goodies, and you'll see the youngster reaching for the dumbbell..

I've heard many a story about one dog being trained to heel while another wasn't trained but was watching. Then one day the untrained one got loose and voila! Heeled. Without any direct training from the handler. No, I can't say mine have ever done anything quite that well.

I can't believe how much less work I've had to do, they just look at elders taking the dumbbell, and say ooh, they do that, get food for that, so should we! Before I did example training it took a looong time to teach such concepts. After, they'd watch a couple times, and would simply reach for the dumbbell without all that messy forcing the mouth open, etc stuff.

This also applies to everyday household manners. None of mine will bother an unattended steak on a plate that I put on the ground, smack in the middle of 6 dogs. Most dogs would simply dive in and grab the steak, likely (knowing Pembrokes) resulting in a huge dogfight. But, my first dog respected "my" food. And all following dogs watched the previous pack as I got them, one by one, and learned. When I first scale teeth on a pup, I lay the elders on their sides and go at it. Youngsters watch the reactions (or rather lack of!) the elders, decide it's no big deal, and happily lay there quietly during their turn

The hardest part is training the first dog as they have no examples to follow. One has to start someplace. And remember, the 2nd dog is also learning all the bad habits that the first dog is also teaching them. Uhhhhooh!