

## **Pointing Dog Journal 20122 November/December Issue**

### **Lay the Foundation**

**by George Hickox**

**A professional horse trainer once related to a group of seminar attendees that if the horse was not behaving correctly on the trail the culprit could usually be found in the earlier foundational training. I believe the same truth applies to our hunting dogs also. If the dog is not exhibiting the desired behaviors in the hunting arena the solution is more often than not to revisit the foundational training in the classroom.**

**For many owners the necessary foundational training that should initially take place in yard training has not been completed. It is more fun to go to the field and shoot birds than to perform the numbers of consistent repetitions it takes to lay a proper foundation in the classroom that can be built upon in the field. Revisiting the obedience commands in yard training pays mega rewards for the more advanced dog also. Consistent repetitions followed by positive reinforcements strengthen behaviors. Lack of positive reinforcements for the desired behavior and lack of negative reinforcements for unwanted behaviors result in a dog that that is not reliable.**

**Besides being downright unfair to the dog, ill-timed corrections lead to an unwilling canine student that does not perceive learning as fun. If a child is constantly afraid of being beaten up and having his lunch money taken by bullies**

**it will be difficult to concentrate on the teacher's lesson at hand. As the adage goes, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink," and the same is true when it comes to dog training. You can drag a dog into the classroom but you can't make it learn if the dog is apprehensive about new situations and new learning.**

**The classroom should be a fun place for the dog to go and he should look forward to learning new tasks. If he is constantly thrashed and corrected in yard training the dog will look for escape hatches (flight, fight, freeze, or fakery) to not have to do. The bible rule in dog training is "Never correct a dog if he does not understand why he is being corrected." The dog must first be taught what the command means before being corrected for not complying to the command. New commands should not be taught with corrections. Corrections are a tool to cement excellence of response in a timely fashion to a *learned* command. Commands should be taught with positive reinforcements first before raising the bar and expecting the dog to respond with excellence immediately upon receiving the command/cue.**

**If the dog is corrected because the trainer knows why he corrected the dog but the dog does not perceive what behavior resulted in the punishment the dog has no solution on how to avoid the hammer falling from the sky the next time. The dog must have a solution to avoid the negative consequences. If the dog understands what behavior gets him good and what the one-eighty behavior is that gets him bad Fido will pick the desired behavior because that**

**behavior gets him a reward and avoids a correction. This works for the dog and the dog is highly motivated to do what works best for him in his eyes.**

**Trainers should first be a mentor and show the dog what is expected of him and reward the desired behavior. Be a mentor and a teacher before being a disciplinarian. Once the dog fully understands what is expected of him there must be a negative consequence to the behavior of not giving an effort to respond in a timely fashion to a *learned* command/cue. We reward the dog for giving an effort to respond in a timely fashion to a learned command/cue and we correct for not giving an effort. The optimum word here is learned. If the command/cue is not learned it is not realistic to expect that the dog will comply. Teach what the command means with positive reinforcements and correct only when the dog fully understands what is expected and gives the proverbial finger.**

**In laying the foundation in the classroom by making the classroom a good place where learning is fun from the gitgo the dog will have a much more open mind and the training will progress much more effectively. But corrections will have to be a tool that is used in order to teach the dog there are no options to obeying learned commands/cues. These corrections should take place in yard training initially before correcting the dog in the field. A sage benchmark is to never say the command in the field if the dog does not respond in a timely fashion to the command the first time the command is given in the classroom. Once the foundation has been**

**cemented in the classroom that is the time to generalize the command in the field.**

**A good trainer is a fair trainer. Sort of like a benign dictator. A good trainer shows the dog what is expected, what the rules are, and is consistent. When the trainer thinks the dog understands the teacher shows the canine pupil some more. The desired behavior is rewarded every time in the early stages of learning. Once the dog is reliable in the classroom corrections are implemented to obtain excellence. Once the dog gets an A + in the classroom the process of generalization begins where the dog is taught he must respond in a timely fashion to the learned command in each and every place and circumstance. The rules in the bar on New Year's Eve are the same as in church. The dog must give an effort to comply in a timely fashion to learned commands wherever and whenever the commands are given.**

**Control often breaks down in the adrenaline rush that occurs during the hunt. If hunting in range, bird manners, or responding to commands start going south of the border go back to the classroom and revisit the foundation. If the foundation was not completed go back to the classroom until the dog can graduate Magnum Cum Laude.**