

# **An Important Reminder Regarding The Purpose of Leashes and Collars/Harnesses**

(Not For Physically Correcting/Punishing)

**and**

## **A 'The Rule Of Three' Review**

Always keep in mind that the use of a leash when attached to an appropriate collar is not for punishing or correcting a dog. The correct purpose and use of a leash and collar falls into two categories:

- 1. Safety**
- 2. Training**

### **1. Safety**

- Providing sufficient leverage to keep a dog from being able to physically tsunami the handler with disproportionate strength, speed, and agility.
- Providing the handler sufficient leverage to maintain safe control (emergency brake) over an expected or unexpectedly aggressively friendly, or aggressively

territorial, or aggressively prey fixated dog so that he or she does no harm.

## **2. Training**

1. In the early stages of training, most dogs have either no focus on the person doing the training or insufficient attention to ensure that when you're suggesting 'No,' he or she isn't hearing, 'Go.' Just because they can hear us doesn't necessarily mean they're listening to us. Or, if it appears that they see us more often than not, it's not in the context of looking for direction. As a result, the guidance provided through tone and body language rarely makes it to its destination, and a tremendous training tool, the teacher/trainer's tone, and body language are lost.
2. A leash and collar is one step towards providing both you and your dog with a species mutual communication common denominator (tone and body language). Using a leash and collar with the intent to acquire sufficient attention with the purpose being to teach your dog your tone and body language lead to less and less need for the leash because your dog has learned to recognize,

listen to and respond to, your tone and body language.

**Note:** *The nature of your tone and body language that you are using to teach your dog should communicate, "You're Warm!, You're Cold!, as opposed to "You're Good!, You're Bad!*

3. Another purpose of the leash and collar is so that when you note that your dog is pursuing (or far better is thinking about pursuing) an undesirable direction in behavior, and you suspect that should you use tone and body language to suggest to your dog that he or she is in on the wrong track, he or she either would have insufficient focus on you to note that tone and body language - you would only then use a pop to the side on the leash (in a manner you would tug on a shirt sleeve) to interrupt him or her sufficiently so that he or she does take note of your tone and body language.

## Where Is The Line Between Negative and Positive Force?

For the purposes of this article:

**Negative Force:** Any act that causes pain and/or fear.

**Positive Force:** Typically the use of a leash and collar or harness to acquire attention so that when the tone and body language that follows, a sense of whether "You're Warm", 'You're, Cold' (as opposed to 'You're Good!', 'You're Bad', is conveyed **AND** when the 'Rule of Three' is immediately applied some level of improvement is observed.

# **What Is A Correction?**

## **Getting A Dog's Attention With A Leash And Collar Vs Physically Correcting A Dog**

### **Part I - Hearing Vs Listening, Seeing Vs Watching**

Some trainers encourage 'yank and crank' as a means of physically correcting a dog. That is not the intensity or purpose we are embracing. We simply want your dog's attention so that initially him/her/either can come to recognize our tone and body language and eventually respond to that tone and body language without a need for a leash.

The leash and collar are used in a manner akin to tugging on a shirt sleeve to interrupt sufficiently so that him/her/either directs some level of attention in the teacher's tone and body language. When you have the dog's attention, you don't need it. If the dog is slightly distracted, it is used lightly. If the dog is more distracted, somewhat more vigorously. If the dog is so distracted that we would have to cross the line into causing the dog pain, we do not use it at all. We examine our training path instead.

## **Part II - Mischaracterizations Of The Word 'Force'?**

Always keep in mind that the goal is to acquire attention, not to punish, not to instill fear or cause pain. It's true that unfortunately in some forms of training ('Might Is Right,' Alpha, Pack Leader, Dominant approach) leashes and collars are used to apply a level of force that it's a physical correction. Pain does impact behavior, but it's a tough way to learn life's lessons and not a tool that any species uses as their primary motivator.

Unfortunately, many trainers naively equate force solely with pain, punishment, abuse, etc. and insist it has no place in training. They claim 'science' supports this. There is no science to support such a non-specific attribution as to what constitutes force. Yes, levels of force that cause pain have no place as a foundation for companion dog training; however, a breeze and a category 5 hurricane both apply force. Beyond a puzzling naiveté, this indicates a serious inability to think critically, and it would be interesting to observe how without 'force' they go about changing a cranky child's diaper or control more than one dog in their training classes. In spite of being surrounded by evidence to the contrary, somehow some dog trainers have come to believe that force can only mean violence. I suspect

these same individuals are very active on social media anti-vaxxing, and 'the earth is flat' groups.

True, force can be used to extremes (abuse), but it doesn't require advanced degrees in physics to comprehend it has other far more nuanced applications than tsunami-levels, or advanced degrees in evolutionary biology, ethology, anthropology, etc. to be aware that force is a factor and is used by every higher-order species on the planet when they are raising offspring.

Initially, force-based leverage is frequently used by parents to keep their offspring safe, clean, and fed. Left to their own devices and without a parent's superior strength, speed and agility, most of us would still be running around naked, if not end up dead or in jail. In the human world, physical force is replaced by psychological/emotional force (loss of Internet, mobile phone, isolation (time-outs, grounding), etc.). Whether it is a tool to teach or a consequence for not adhering to lessons already taught, it's still force.

In human terms, 'force' can and will be used to change a cranky child's diaper, keep them from running into the road, moving about freely in a vehicle. In canine terms, a mother's force can be used to dissuade a puppy from nursing or playing too roughly, wandering too far, etc.

However, (assuming stability in the parent - which is the norm and not the exception), whether canine or human, the levels used are in keeping with the maturity and experience of the youngster and are intended to contribute to their development as opposed to stunt that development or ruin their self-esteem as some trainers ingenuously suggest.

One of the most amazing aspects and an intended evolutionary byproduct of use of force entirely missed by the 'All Positive/Purely Positive/Force-Free/Never Say No/R+...', treat, treat, treat companion dog training community (and the reason they require treats) is that in these early stages of life, whenever any level of force, typically interruptive, is applied it is always accompanied by tone and body language. As comprehension and responsiveness to the 'You're Warm,' 'You're Cold' intent behind tone and body language increases, the use of nuanced force dissipates.

Without force, considering all the novel, interesting and sometimes dangerous distractions that youngsters encounter on a day to day basis, that compete for their parent's attention, not only would we be hard-pressed to learn and respond to tone and body language very few of any species would achieve adulthood.

## **Reminder - What Is The Rule Of Three?**

The rule of three is used to help a dog recognize a pattern. Essentially, it means that rather than use a leash and collar or harness to get a dog's attention following with use tone and body language only the once, the unwanted behavior is immediately purposefully triggered and identically responded to an additional two times. All told three repetitions. In other words, provide a recognizable pattern.

A pattern is something that repeats predictably. Our brains (and our dog's brains) are wired for pattern recognition. This ability was crucial not only in our development as species but as we mature into adulthood. When a pattern reveals itself, it might help us avoid negative experiences or alternatively pursue positive experiences. In other words, it is an important element in learning.

The purpose behind the 'Rule of Three' is to give a dog enough information to connect the dots (understand) correctly. Simply reacting to a dog's behavior, something which leaves far too much open to interpretation. We don't want a dog to wonder what's got into us or that the dog is for some unknown reason suddenly bad rather

than what aspect of the dog's behavior might be desirable or undesirable.

## **Finding The Level That Acquires Attention And No More**

First, it would be difficult to become too forceful if the following considerations are always kept in mind:

1. Is there anything unreasonably influencing the dog's behavior that makes focusing more complicated than it needs to be? Has to go to the bathroom, hasn't had reasonable physical activity (recess)?
2. Is the environment selected to introduce and reinforce the behavior in keeping with the dog's experience or is it so distracting that excess might be resorted to in order to acquire attention on your tone and body language?
3. Has the dog proven that he or she understands what 'Stay,' 'Come,' and "Heel' means without the complexities of unreasonable distractions? Usually, this means about three days in a row requiring no 'Rule of Three.'

Far more likely than using a leash too vigorously is the opposite, using it so mildly or as a restraint and either not getting the dog's attention or frustrating and agitating the dog (and ultimately the trainer).

Outside of the reasons listed above, if the 'Rule of Three' isn't leading to pattern recognition the most common reason is that the trainer simply doesn't have their dog's attention and the dog is still tuned out rather than tuned in. Rather than a teacher getting a student's attention so they can teach they've peripherally become a frustrating obstacle to the dog and the dog's behavior quickly deteriorates rather than improves.

This is very common and a good thing in a way. Better to start at too low a level than hurt a dog physically or emotionally. However, different dogs, different levels of maturity, different levels of training, different histories, etc. require some adaptation when acquiring attention. Too little can make things worse, and too much can make things worse as well but in different ways. Always check the list above and look for some improvement when using the 'Rule of Three' and finding the correct levels for your dog will come.

## **When To Ask For Help?**

You can contact me at any time, but in particular, if any of the following apply:

- The 'Rule of Three' isn't working.
- The behavior is getting worse.
- The dog is getting frustrated or seems confused.
- The trainer/handler is unnecessarily raising their voice.
- The trainer/handler is getting frustrated.

Quite often in the early stages of training, particularly with an older dog that has been off track for quite some time and used to doing things his or her way as one might expect the effort required to acquire attention is more significant than it would be had training begun earlier in the dog's life. Much the same as if one were trying to teach life skills and civilized behavior to a teenager that had grown up without the benefit of real parenting.

## **Remember:**

1. Use the leash ONLY to acquire attention AND ONLY if you need it, so there's some focus on tone and/or body language to follow.
2. Use tone and body language to indicate/mark what you were unhappy with and happy with (even it's only a tiny improvement). It has to be both. (You're warm, You're cold.)
3. Use the 'Rule of Three' every time, as this ensures a leash and collar are being used as a means to get attention and no more and that your dog has an opportunity to look for and recognize a pattern of events for not just the lesson that is occurring but in future lessons.

## **Highly Recommended**

If you want to be sure you're getting this critical part of training correct I highly recommend sending some sample videos of:

### **THE EXERCISES**

1. Keeping the leash loose when you're watching television.
2. Staying on a mat when food or drink is being prepared/consumed/cleaned up.
3. Staying on a mat when going out with you and coming back in.
4. Staying at the bottom/top of the stairs and waiting for the word 'Come'.
5. Waiting for permission to get in or out of the car and/or up on the couch.
6. Walking on a loose leash in the home or the yard or a church parking lot or somewhere where there aren't extra distractions.