

Not Using Force in Police Dog Training

by Deborah Palman, Maine Warden Service

Don Sterling asked me to write on the use of force in training police dogs. He's been interested in some of my ideas since he saw my first dog (trained compulsively) do a recall, which was taught partially with and partially without corrections, using a second motivator. Since that time, I've switched my training methods 180 degrees and now train primarily non-compulsively.

What does non-compulsive training mean? It means not using force on the dog. No corrections, no physical manipulation of the dog with hands, leash, whatever. It means showing the dog a reward or motivator and teaching the dog a behavior that results in the dog getting the reward.

I know that, for the most part, I am a voice crying in the wilderness of police dog training, which has traditionally used compulsive corrections to teach obedience. I know about compulsive training because I spent my first fifteen years training two K-9s and a number of other dogs using compulsion. I've been around long enough to have owned or tried almost every training method formulated and piece of training equipment made (except an "electric sleeve"- too expensive). So I am very familiar with training systems. I now choose to work non-compulsively because it gives me and the teams I train better results.

Advantages and Disadvantages

What are the advantages of non-compulsive training over compulsive training? First, non-compulsive training produces less stress in the dog, less stress in the handler and enhances rather than hurts the relationship

between the handler and dog. Less stress means faster learning by the dog and handler and healthier dogs because stress causes disease and injury.

Second, not using equipment and physical force (like corrections) means that the injuries caused by dogs being tangled in leads, dogs being over corrected, dogs having chronic neck problems from corrections, dogs hitting the end of a lead at high speed, and dogs missing jumps and falling off obstacles because their muscles are tight with stress are all eliminated. Working non-compulsively also helps to reduce handler injuries because it eliminates aggression towards the handler brought on by corrections.

Third, non-compulsive training creates a dog who wants to work for a reward, not because he has to work to escape a correction. This gives the dog a positive and cooperative outlook on work. The handler who uses non-compulsive methods is also taught to be positive and cooperative with his dog rather than domineering. When the handler of a compulsively trained dog becomes stressed or mad, the dog becomes stressed because the dog thinks he will be corrected. This causes the dog to show avoidance towards the handler or the situation. When the handler of a non-compulsively trained dog gets stressed or mad, usually the dog tries harder to help the handler rather than avoiding.

Fourth, training with non-compulsive methods takes no longer than training with compulsive methods, and many goals are achieved sooner. Fifth, non-compulsively trained dogs need less retraining in obedience work than compulsively trained dogs. This is because they want to do it rather than being forced to do it.

Sixth, my work with highly bred working dogs with extreme levels of drive and high pain thresholds has convinced me that many of these dogs can only be taught effectively using non compulsive methods. Trying to correct these dogs into submission when they are doing protection work often results in aggression towards the handler or a dog which puts up with the corrections and still does just what he wants when off lead. If this dog is

taught that he achieves what he wants by following the handler's directions, then both parties get what they want.

Seventh, training non-compulsively is much more fun for the dog, handler and trainer than training compulsively. How many compulsive trainers can say that they really enjoy correcting their dogs?

What are the disadvantages of non-compulsive training? First, non-compulsive training is hard to teach to people who have learned to train compulsively. It is much easier to take a total novice and teach non-compulsive training than it is to teach a compulsive trainer. This is because the actions the trainer or handler takes are almost exact opposites. In a compulsive system, when the dog does not respond correctly, you react quickly to correct the response immediately. In a non-compulsive system, you set the stage for learning and wait for the dog to figure the problem out. When you've been used to reacting and helping all the time, it is hard to sit back and wait.

Second, non-compulsive training is no magic bullet. It still takes considerable time, work, knowledge and skill to train a dog, same as with compulsive training systems.

Third, the dog being trained must be capable of being motivated. This is not a problem with working dogs as they come with working drives and an innate desire to be active and do things. The level of motivation or reward required is a level high enough to overcome the distractions of the learning or working environment. Non-compulsive methods work best on dogs that have the best working "drives" because they are the easiest to motivate. Dog with little or no ability to work cannot be motivated and therefore do not do well with non-compulsive methods, but they are also unsuitable for most working applications.

Fourth, non-compulsive methods work best when used alone and should not be mixed with compulsive methods until the end stages of training. While some corrections may be used to interrupt entrenched

behaviors that cannot be fixed otherwise and to create a "brake" to stop the dog, they are limited because corrections or punishment tend to hurt the relationship between the handler and dog. This relationship is what powers non-compulsive methods, and in traditional compulsive methods, all training in the finished team.

Fifth, non-compulsive training is not traditional. It is hard for police officers to accept nontraditional methods. They tend to stick with what they were taught first.

Police Trainers Already Train Non Compulsively

Police K-9 trainers already use non-compulsive methods to teach detector dog work and tracking. Searches for persons are done motivationally with a reward or apprehension at the end to motivate the dog. Nearly all the functions we use police dogs for on the street are taught with motivation. In most training programs, only the "control" of these functions is taught compulsively at this time. Does "control" always mean corrections or compulsion? While "obedience" training implies that the handler dominates the dog, learning to sit, down, heel, etc., does not necessarily mean that the handler has to dominate the dog to teach these behaviors.

Motivational and non-compulsive training techniques are not revolutionary, but were scientifically proven to work better than punishment or negative motivators by B. F. Skinner many decades ago. Dog trainers have traditionally used compulsive methods because most of the time they accomplished what the trainers wanted, and these are the methods that have been passed down from dog trainer to dog trainer. Marine mammal and wild animal trainers have always used non-compulsive techniques because they cannot resort to compulsive techniques. Putting a leash on a grizzly bear or a dolphin is not an option the trainer can live with (literally!).

Often trainers fail to use positive methods correctly or to their best advantage because their training mindset is based on compulsion and “making” the dog do something by force or by limiting its options. Training without compulsion takes a 180-degree shift in thinking - the dog does the behavior because he wants to, not because he has to. This means that his behavioral options are not limited by what he has been taught. He chooses to do the behavior. This change in attitude creates a powerful bond between the dog and trainer, and makes the dog a partner in working situations, not a slave whose behaviors are limited by fear of corrections for certain actions. The dog thinks about what he is doing.

I know that some trainers will tell you that dogs do not think. Well, sometimes they don't seem to think if they are trained by compulsion. To achieve a quick response using force, the dog must react without thinking or considering its options. Motivational training teaches the dog to consider its options and make decisions about what he will do next. This response becomes automatic from habit and because the dog learns that choosing to comply results in a reward.

On the street with a police dog, the dog's ability to think is an invaluable asset. All of the dog's natural abilities are put to work for the handler. All the situations that are encountered in real work can never be duplicated during training. I would much prefer to have a thinking dog at my side instead of a preprogrammed machine that has learned to react because he fears punishment. A positively trained dog is a partner who can lead or react when the handler can't see, hear or smell what is out there. The better compulsively trained teams also achieve this same state, but because of the compulsion used to teach obedience, there will be a time when the dog will be unsure of what he should do. The advantage of non-compulsive training is that the dog never feels this way.

I know that the traditional trainers are now saying, “But my dog is my partner, we do all right, and I don't dominate him so much that I hurt his

working ability." This is true if you are a skillful handler and your dog well trained. But you still see dogs that drop off the bite, growl or fight harder or show other signs of stress when the handler approaches them while they are biting. Since compulsion is rarely used and even avoided in scent work, only the worst of trainers and handlers will see the effects of compulsion in these exercises. The effects of compulsion can often be seen in handler aggression, in inter-dog aggression, in stress produced by training during control exercises during bite work, and in situations where the handler is under stress like certifications, competitions, demonstrations and unfortunately, during real patrol work. The better trainers and handler have minimized the effects of compulsion and stress. But not all handlers are that good, so many problems still exist. How many handlers have said, "My dog never did that before" at a certification. Chances are that stress is causing the new behavior.

I know the traditional handlers are saying, "But I do reward my dog during obedience. I pet him and praise him for doing well." If petting and praise were enough reward for most dogs, it would be easy to train dogs. My experience has shown me that petting and praise may work for some Golden Retrievers, but they aren't a true reward for most working dogs. If they were reward enough, than compulsion trainers wouldn't have to put a leash on the dog to train. If you are training compulsively, then petting and praise may be rewarding for the dog because they tell the dog that he won't be corrected again. In this context, they become a "reward" only because they signal to the dog that no more discomfort will follow.

A Motivational Primer

I can't even begin to teach all the aspects of motivational training. There are plenty of references and books being produced by experts who provide instruction. I'll review a few of the ones I have had experience with

at the end of this article, and will readily admit that there are many, many more out there which I don't know about. But first I'd like to give a basic outline of how motivational training affects the dog.

Knowing about "conditioned reinforcers" is an essential part of any training using rewards. A conditioned reinforcer (CR for short) is simply a signal to the dog that the behavior it just did will earn it a reward. Dogs read their own CRs all the time. For example, the drug dog handler who silently reaches for his tug or ball reward when the dog is looking at him is inadvertently creating the CR of reaching for the ball. The reaching precedes the reward, so the dog learns the reaching means a reward will be produced. So the dog eventually thinks that looking at the handler after finding the drugs means the reach (CR) happens, so looking at the handler after finding the drugs is what makes the reward happen. Soon the dog is smelling drug scent and looking at the handler rather than indicating properly at the scent source. To fix the problem, you teach a CR you can control. **Before** the handler reaches for the reward, **while** the dog is scratching, sniffing, whatever the handler wants for an indication at that stage of training, the handler **says "Good Dog"** and **then** reaches for the reward. "Good Dog" is now the CR that marks the behavior the handler wants, not the reaching for the ball. If the dog is already making the mistake of looking at the handler for his indication, then the handler should not react, not reach, not help, not say "Good Dog," but wait for the dog to try something else, like scratch or look at the scent source. Then the "Good Dog" signal is used with the reward following.

The conditioned reinforcer eliminates most of the problems in dog training that are caused by the use of rewards and their timing. I never really understood what the function of a conditioned reinforcer was until I was introduced to the "Click and Treat" training methods now available through a series of videos, seminars, books and other information, including a web site. The clicker is a simple device made of a piece of spring steel in a

plastic holder that clicks when you depress it. When I was a kid (eons ago), they appeared as toys with metal holders shaped like bugs. The "Click and Treat" method championed by Karen Pryor and Gary Wilkes is a unique training system that works because it trains dogs and also addresses the problem of training the trainer.

I tried using words as CRs at first, but found that I could not train myself to use them properly because I had been using them incorrectly for so long (as a signal that no more corrections are coming!). Conscious thought is needed to use the clicker as a CR, forcing me to learn how to use it properly. The clicker has other advantages over words because it is a unique and special sound that the dog recognizes as its own special communication. We babble on all the time with words, most of which don't have meaning to the dog.

The clicker noise is also very short in duration, marking a split second of time instead of the longer period of time verbal praise might. In motivational training, timing is everything, just like compulsive training. If you want the dog to jump higher, you need praise or a signal to mark the height of the jump, not the take off or landing. By the time you say "Good Dog," the dog has taken off, landed and taken two more steps. A single short word, or the skillful use of the clicker, allows you to pin point the exact moment in time (the height of the jump, for example) that you want to address.

A disadvantage of the clicker is that it is another piece of equipment you need to carry around in your hands and not something that can be used in competition. Most Clicker trainers learn how to train with the clicker, but substitute other signals, verbal or otherwise, as new CRs before they go into the competition ring or real work.

Many people who use rewards without a CR to train find that the giving of the reward tends to make the dog change its behavior in an undesirable way. For example, in teaching heeling, a handler may pull a toy

out of his right pocket to reward the dog when he is in position at the handler's left side. After a few of these presentations, the dog begins to anticipate the reward and draw towards it, wrapping around the handler towards the right pocket. Actually, what is happening is that the dog is marking the point in time when he physically touches or sees the toy as the behavior he is getting the toy for, not the correct position. Using a reward without a conditioned reinforcer to mark the correct behavior often causes the dog to move its position towards the reward. Soon the dog is heeling out of position. It is unclear to the dog exactly what he is doing to get the reward. When adding a CR, the dog is given the CR when he is in position, then the exercise stops and the reward is given. There is no confusion in the dog's mind when he was doing the right behavior. The dog knows he has earned the reward by doing the behavior that resulted in the CR. It is also a good idea to move the reward to the left side while heeling so that it helps to keep the dog in position rather than pull the dog away.

I have known some dogs that were so intent on the reward the handler was carrying that they never heard any of the verbal commands the handler was trying to associate with the exercise. When the reward and accompanying hand and body movements were removed or just taken from the dog's sight, the dog had no idea what he was supposed to be doing. Using a CR eliminates these problems and refines the timing and communication. Using a CR can allow the fine-tuning of behaviors and mark the exact behavior the handler wants. If your dog is heeling well but you want him to hold his head higher, the CR is given when the dog moves his head higher. If you didn't "mark" the correct head position with the CR, by the time you pulled a ball out of your pocket, the dog's head position would have changed. Often successful trainers use CR's unintentionally, by always using the same praise word before giving a reward, or the same body motions that precede the reward.

Teaching with Motivation

So how do you teach using only positive motivation and a CR? You break the exercise down into very small parts or approximations of what you want to end up with. You teach these small parts and combine them for the finished product. This is called behavior shaping. The dog is an active participant in this. If you have set up your training environment and situation properly, the dog will try different behaviors to get the reward. When the dog does the behavior you want, you give the CR and reward. There is no one way to teach an exercise, and instead of perfecting the whole behavior at once, you have to let some parts slide while teaching other components. Because you are not using compulsion, the dog will not become "stuck" in the behavior that you do not want. For example, I taught the dumbbell retrieve using a food reward. The exercise has to be broken into very small parts, which has the advantage of teaching the dog to respond even when all the cues of the finished exercise are not present, similar to the force retrieve process many people use. Thus the dog will pick up a dumbbell he has not seen thrown or move (no chase stimulus).

A training sequence may start with having the dog just look at the dumbbell for the (CR and) reward. Remember that the dog wants the reward and is trying to figure out how to get it. After being rewarded a few times for looking at the dumbbell held in the handler's hand, the handler waits for the dog to touch the dumbbell before a reward is given. The dog seems to reason like this -- "Hey, I got a treat for looking at it, and now I'm not getting a treat for that. Maybe I have to be more obvious -- I'll go over and touch it." Then the dog gets a reward for touching. The dog will experiment with behaviors to see what produces the reward. If the dog doesn't do what the handler wants, no reward.

The next training step (going to the next step is called "raising criteria") is touching with teeth, mouthing, then holding, etc. building the

exercise piece by piece until the dog is picking the dumbbell off the ground and returning to the handler. Of course, all these behaviors don't just appear out of the air or dog's mind. The handler sets the training situation up to help the dog choose the right behavior. For example, a little food may be rubbed on the center of the dumbbell to attract the dog and help him target. When the dog is picking up the dumbbell, the handler may move back a little to help the dog move towards the handler.

The finished competition retrieve is a very complex exercise with many requirements. These requirements can only be taught one at a time using positive reinforcement, but fortunately the dog will keep repeating the ones he has been rewarded for and learned previously. Like many dogs, my dog tended to not hold the dumbbell firmly when she returned because she thought she got her reward for giving it up, not for holding it. At one point in the teaching of the exercise, she tried throwing the dumbbell to me, thinking that the faster I got it, the faster she got her treat. Sorry, no reward for that, so that behavior disappeared quickly. Then the problem was that she would try to insist that I take the dumbbell by moving forward and jamming it forcefully into my hands and rolling it in her mouth while doing this. I needed to isolate her holding the dumbbell, so I put her on a table and gave her the dumbbell. The table edge caused her to stop moving forward to push the dumbbell up against me, so she had to hold the dumbbell until I approached her and took it. If she dropped it, we just started over. She learned very quickly that I would not take it and reward her until she held it calmly.

Another part of the exercise I had to teach was having her sit closely in front, so for a time I ignored the loose grip while she learned to sit close in front. Once I got the close sit completed, I raised my criteria to include no chewing. All I did was to not take the dumbbell until she held it calmly.

There are many more topics that the non-compulsive trainer needs to learn before training successfully, like progressing to variable reinforcement

and behavior chaining. This article is not meant to be a comprehensive teaching guide, just an introduction that gives some observations on the methods and their effects.

Some Fundamental Differences

The training examples given above should help to point out a fundamental difference between training with and without compulsion. Training with compulsion limits the dog's options and subsequent behaviors. Training without compulsion allows the dog to experiment with behaviors to find out what works. Therefore, once a dog learns an exercise through compulsion, his ability to adapt or change that behavior is limited. This is why compulsive trainers have to try to get every part of the exercise right the first time. A behavior will not be easy to change later on if taught with compulsion. After all, compulsion teaches the dog to react to the command, not to think about what he is doing. The non-compulsive trainer can usually change the behaviors wanted just by changing criteria and showing the dog what is needed. Dogs trained with compulsion tend to be set in their learned behaviors and experience stress when asked to change them, an example of the saying "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." Dogs trained without compulsion do not experience stress of this kind. They may become frustrated because they don't understand what the trainer wants, and offer behaviors the trainer doesn't want (like avoidance, barking, sniffing, etc.), but this just tells the trainer that the dog is being asked to do too much and the exercise must be broken into smaller parts or taught a different way. It may also be because the exercise has been repeated too many times and the dog is bored.

This fundamental difference between motivational training and compulsive training is why behaviors taught by non-compulsive techniques generalize to other environments and situations better than those which are

taught compulsively. When you teach a dog to heel using a leash, the dog's very first reaction to being put on leash is to try to get away. When he finds his options are limited, he learns to stick around, at least while the leash is on. Then he is taught by negative stimulation where he cannot go after the heel command is given. This initial training may be done in one training area. When the dog team moves to a new area, the dog will try again to escape the negative situation because he is at a new place, and he doesn't know that he can't get away at this new location. The compulsively trained dog will test his options in different places and situations until he has had enough training to decide that it is useless to try to escape. Such a dog's successful "escape" from an exercise has serious consequences.

While motivational trainers may limit some of a dog's options (like initially training in a ring or room instead of outside where the dog is free to seek out all sorts of rewards from the general environment), ultimately the dog decides he wants to do the behavior because of the available rewards, not because all of his options are limited. Thus the dog is much more likely to perform the behavior in different environments without additional training, given that the handler's reward is more motivating than other things in the environment. This is where non-compulsive training has a big advantage over compulsive training. You don't have to train over and over in new places. The dog wants to work and tries his best to respond in spite of the distractions although the distractions may cause him to err because he can't focus on the exercise. In the advanced levels of training, the dog may consider an attractive distraction a potential reward, and work harder, convinced that the trainer will provide the temptation as a reward for a correct performance. Smart trainers eventually do this. Dogs working in advanced levels of protection work "earn" bites for doing obedience exercises. They do their best to respond to obedience commands when a tempting decoy or agitator is on the field. One motivational trainer, Dawn Jecs, notes that dogs need to learn the skill of "fighting" their way past

distractions and learning to focus on the handler and reward (See Dawn Jecs' book, Choose to Heel, available from Dawn Jecs at 15004 66th Ave. E., Puyallup, WA 98373.) Learning to do this is also a part of the maturing process, because young dogs are naturally preoccupied with exploring and learning about their environment.

Compulsively trained dogs have to go through an "equipment weaning" process where the handler starts with long lines and correction collars, goes to shorter lines, tabs, light lines, electric collars, etc., trying to convince the dog that even if the line or collar is not there, they can catch and correct the dog. I've worked with many handlers whose dogs were smart enough to know (or taught by poor handling) that being off lead meant it was time to escape. I now find this situation somewhat amusing and totally unnecessary, because the motivationally trained dog wants to stick around the handler all the time, equipment or no equipment. Why should the dog leave when all the fun is with the handler?

The dog's wanting to do the behavior makes the training transferable to new applications. For example, even though a compulsively trained police K-9 dog may be taught obedience before he learns bite work, invariably, when obedience work is added to the bite work, the dog, now highly motivated to get the bite, has to be reminded with corrections that he cannot escape the control of the handler. Having to teach the obedience commands over again with compulsion during bite work creates conflict between the handler and dog and hectic behavior in the dog. Some of the stronger dogs never submit to this and fight with the handler, decoy or training situation for their entire careers. In contrast, the non-compulsive trainer uses the added motivation of bite work to help shape the dog's behavior. Instead of correcting, the handler just waits with the dog on lead, keeping the dog from the bite and waiting for the dog to figure the situation out. The ability to figure the situation out is something the dog has already

learned to do during obedience training. The bite is a new reward. The CR still marks what the dog did right.

After years of correcting dogs into compliance during bite work, I was amazed when I added obedience to bite work with my motivationally taught dog. Instead of being released right away for the bite, I just held onto the lead (attached to the dead ring of the fur saver) and said "Fuss," meaning, "Look at me and sit down in heel position." No corrections, no yelling, just wait for the dog to figure it out. My dog barked and pulled for a short time, and then, realizing she was not being sent (rewarded) for this behavior, stopped and looked up. I said "Fuss" again. The light came on in her eyes ("I know that, that's easy!") and she sat in heel position and looked at me. I immediately sent her for the bite. No struggle, no corrections, just wait for the dog to figure out you have raised the criteria. She remains calm and thinking when I give obedience commands during bite work, and goes right into drive without hesitation when given a bite work command. No conflict between me and her, no confusion, except when I ask her to do too much. When that happens, she fails to comply correctly, and I know that I have not set up the training situation correctly. Occasionally I have to limit her options by stopping her before she gets a bite for the wrong behavior, but even if that happens, it is not a problem because then I just change the training so it doesn't happen again. She hasn't "disobeyed" and learned that she can get away with something by "breaking" the psychological reins created by compulsive training. Under non-compulsive rules, she was just rewarded for the wrong behavior, and all I do is rework the training so she gets more rewards for the correct behavior.

Steve White, a police K-9 trainer for Seattle, Washington, has used "Click and Treat" and positive methods to train police K-9s. He uses what he calls "aversives" in some limited circumstances, but feels that his need to resort to compulsion or "conditioned negatives" comes from his limitations as a trainer, an opinion he gave in a post to the "Clicker List," a subscription

list on the Internet. At the time, he was responding to a question of how Click and Treat works for real life (that is, police K-9 training). If you want to subscribe to the list, follow the directions given at Karen Pryor's web site at www.karenpryor.com/. Karen Pryor's web site can also be consulted for other resources relating to motivational training.

Training Resources

Gottfried Dildei and his comprehensive sets of video tapes produced by Canine Training Systems (7550 W. Radcliff Ave., Littleton, CO 80123, 303-973-2107 or www.ctsproductions.com), are excellent for understanding how motivational training can be used for obedience, tracking, and protection work. The Dildei method for obedience is also carefully explained in Sheila Booth's book, "Schutzhund Obedience, Training in Drive" (available from Podium Publications, P.O. Box 171, Ridgefield, CT 06877). She has also written a more current book, "Purely Positive Training" which is more comprehensive and addresses every day training problems as well as obedience. The Dildei method as shown on the tapes teaches Schutzhund exercises motivationally, but fails to make proper use of conditioned reinforcers, which, as I see it, eliminate many of the problems trainers encounter when trying to use the Dildei method. The tapes also fail to stress the need to continually progress and change the dog's training exercises during the learning phases so he does not become bored by repetition. The Dildei tapes (the method ultimately exists in Herr Dildei's head and evolves with time, so I know it has improved since the tapes) do not always utilize the advanced learning theory taught by the "Click and Treat" method. The tapes and Sheila Booth's book do give excellent examples of, and training methods for, the behavioral criteria working dog trainers should be looking for. For people who have trouble reading a book and understanding the results of training methods, the tapes are excellent.

The learning progression in bite work is particularly interesting, as it eliminates most of the problems created by traditional police methods.

I suggest that working dog trainers wanting to learn about using non compulsive methods for police work first read Karen Pryor's book, "Don't Shoot the Dog" (in spite of the title, the book is about learning theory, not dog training), learn about conditioned reinforcers by learning the "Click and Treat" method and then combine CRs with the ideas for teaching exercises given by Dildei and Booth. Many other printed manuals, books, and articles exist which utilize motivational methods and CRs for teaching AKC obedience exercises, agility and other dog sports. These manuals give step-by-step instructions for teaching behaviors. However, since there are many ways to shape behavior using positive motivation, each one is a little different. "Click and Treat" materials and other resources are available from Direct Book Service, P.O. Box 2778, Wentatchee, WA 98807-2778, Tel. 1-800-776-2665. I also recommend the Power of Positive Training tapes and videos with Ted Turner, Patty Ruzzo, Sheila Booth and Leslie Nelson, available through Direct Book Service. All handlers should get the tape, "Positively Ready" before they get a dog, as well as read "Culture Clash" by Jean Donaldson. "Culture Clash" is very entertaining and informative, a great book for dog owners and trainers of all levels. An excellent book for "advanced" non compulsive trainers that explains the psychology of dog training using non compulsive and compulsive methods was written by Pamela J. Reid, Ph.D., titled "Excel-erated Learning." This book explains the theory of learning with dog training examples thrown in.

Taking the Challenge

Non-compulsive training is not easy. Its use requires a great deal of preplanning and imagination. The handler is constantly challenged by the need to be more interesting to the dog than the environment and its

distractions. When the dogs are actually working to learn an exercise, they are intensely interested in training. However, as soon as a dog learns a behavior, it cannot be repeated over and over again without making the dog bored. When the dog is bored, he loses motivation. Thus, each time an exercise is repeated more than twice in one session, the trainer should change it slightly to challenge and motivate the dog, or come up with new and more interesting rewards. This means that the dog can progress quickly, but the trainer has to be right on top of the training all the time. Trying to train without a plan or doing rote exercises doesn't work. To aggravate things, the plan may have to change according to the reaction of the dog to the training, just like the work of a good decoy doing protection work.

Using positive training methods requires a change in thinking. Trainers learn to focus on what the dog is doing right instead of what he is doing wrong. The conflict between handler and dog is eliminated, and the two become partners in learning instead of adversaries. The positive trainer learns to be patient and not be unduly worried by problems that arise, because he or she knows that they will be eliminated with time and more training. It is nearly stress free training, and the dog and handler find themselves much happier with training and life in general. Dogs suffer fewer injuries and sickness, and handlers feel better about not having to hurt their dogs to train them. Switching to non compulsive methods might even take a sort of personality change to escape the old power trip and "obedience" to the handler mentality created by compulsive training. I know that, for me, and certainly for my dogs, this change has been for the better.

*Authors' note: Parts of this article were taken from The Quiet Revolution, an article first published in **Dogs Sports** magazine by the author.*