



## **TEACHING YOUR DOG TO RELIABLY COME WHEN CALLED – and more importantly to want to come when called.**

*By Lynne Stephens*

Despite the plethora of information currently available, the popular myth still abounds that dogs understand exactly what we want of them and are being actively disobedient if they do not do what we ask immediately when we ask it of them! **THIS, HOWEVER, IS ABSOLUTELY NOT TRUE.** In order to reverse the series of events outlined in the previous article, it is absolutely essential that we begin to understand a little about animal behavior and then learn to act on what we know. In fact, I am sure that most of us do understand to a certain extent, but for some reason we are reluctant to apply what we know when training our canine friends.

Imagine for a moment that you are looking after a small child and have to go out and leave him for a short while in a room with a bowl of his favorite ice cream sitting before him on a low table. What do you think would be the chances of the toddler leaving the ice cream if left for more than a couple of minutes? If he did succumb and eat the chocolate, would you think he was being deliberately willful, trying to annoy you or just being human and giving in to temptation? Would you beat him or forgive him? Would you leave him alone with the ice cream again or better manage the situation next time?

Maybe you or someone you know has been on a diet, desperately trying to lose a few pounds before an upcoming special event. Left alone in the house at night, with a fridge full of donuts, knowing what those donuts would do to the weight loss and self-esteem, do you think that reason would always win over instant gratification?

Indeed, it is our human / animal instincts for instant gratification that so often lead us into the most trouble in life. A fact, I fear our credit companies know only too well!

In each of the above scenarios would you blame anyone for being deliberately disobedient? Would you punish anyone for succumbing in the face of massive temptation? I suspect that for most readers, the answer would be a re-sounding NO.

Why, therefore, when we ask our dog to come away from his highly rewarding sniffing or squirrel chasing activities, in a language he doesn't understand, and then promptly punish him for responding a little more slowly than we would like, do we condemn him for being deliberately disobedient and continue down the age-old road of blaming him for trying to annoy us and turn to methods requiring domination and "showing him who is boss?"



Remember – animals (dogs and humans included) do what they find rewarding in life. It is our job, therefore, as their caretakers and guardians, to show them that we are the providers of great rewards and that these rewards are easily won with demonstration of the desired behavior. The trick really is to get your dog to want to do what you want him to do!

**Rule number one**, therefore, in teaching your dog to want to come to you, is to make sure that each time he does, it is a highly rewarding experience for him. This is most easily done when, as a very young puppy, (even before he is ever allowed to leave your back yard) his natural fascination with you and need for reassurance in the wider world, will keep him wanting to be by your side. When he is near you or comes to you voluntarily make sure this does not go unnoticed and treat him well. Play recall games and lavish praise, food treats and play rewards on him **EACH** time he comes. Remember food is the primary motivator for most dogs – so use tasty treats often when your dog comes to you. Some dogs also enjoy toys and these can also be great rewards. They help to keep the training fun.

As your puppy gets a little older and braver, you will probably wish to take him out into the wider world. Indeed this is an essential part of his upbringing if you are to raise a well-socialized and adjusted companion.

**STOP!** Remember the child surrounded by ice-cream, the refrigerator full of donuts and your over-burdened credit cards before taking your puppy into a world full of irresistible temptations without putting the proper management tools into place first.

**Rule number two** then is to attach a long training line to your puppy's collar for this first and many, many subsequent outings. Yes, I do recommend that a long training line is attached to your puppy's collar **EVERY** time he goes out of your yard. In fact, I would also use a long line inside the back yard for your youngster when supervised. (Note: I believe that all puppies should be supervised at all times – would you ever leave your two year old in a back yard full of mischief and danger without supervision?) If supervision is not possible then management is essential with the use of a crate or safe, puppy-proof enclosure of some kind.

While on the line your puppy remains under your complete control. When he looks interested in you and what you are doing (which will be often if you have good treats or toys to play with), call him and reward him well for responding. If, on the other hand, you need to go home, put your puppy in his crate and leave for work shortly, then walk up to him on his long line, collect him and take him home. **DO NOT EVER CALL YOUR PUPPY, STOP HIS FUN AND PUT HIM AWAY FOR THE DAY!**



This is probably the most common mistake that we make when trying to train our puppies to come. To do so, is to build up a negative association in your puppy's mind, for coming to you. This would also be true if you continually call him to have his nails trimmed, take a bath or anything else he is less than keen on. If you do so, he will become more and more reluctant to come to you each time you call. You will effectively be training him to avoid coming when called at all costs!!

Eventually, when you have practiced this a lot and you are pretty sure (i.e. willing to bet money!) that he will come, you might try calling him away from a distraction. Keep this mild at first – maybe something like sniffing on the ground quite nearby. Then reward him heavily for responding to your call and, (since he is safely on a long line), you can immediately release him to go back to what he was enjoying – thus giving him a double bonus for coming when called.

Chase games are great fun for you and your puppy, so play them **with the strict rule that puppy chases you and is rewarded well for catching you**. Do not try chasing your puppy. He will have loads of fun and quickly learn to keep away from you. I have never met the owner yet who can run fast enough to catch their own dog!

This is also another handy use of the long line. It prevents your puppy from playing those fun (for him!) keep away games because you can simply step on the long line and retrieve him without having to chase after him.

**Finally, rule number three** is management. Remember that when you cannot be in complete control of the situation, use your management tools. Teaching your puppy to be happy to stay in a crate or safe enclosure for part of the day is essential to both yours and your puppy's sanity. This is not a substitute for good training and lots of positive interaction with your puppy, but no-one can be on duty for 24 hours per day. Even your toddlers go to bed sometimes!

#### REMEMBER –

- **WHEN TRAINING THE RECALL, CALL ONLY WHEN YOU ARE SURE OF THE CORRECT RESPONSE AND REWARD WELL.**
- **COLLECT YOUR DOG AND DO NOT CALL WHEN YOU NEED TO PUT HIM AWAY FOR ANY REASON.**
- **ALWAYS USE A LONG LINE WHEN TRAINING THE RECALL.**
- **IF YOUR PUPPY ONCE LEARNS THAT IT IS VERY REWARDING TO RUN AWAY FROM YOU, HE WILL CERTAINLY WANT TO TRY THIS AGAIN.**



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*In this article, I have strongly recommended the use of a long line (not a flexi-leash) for helping to train your puppy to come when called and to help you to safely manage him before he is trained. Many people worry that this is an unkind restriction of their young pup's activities. Though it may seem that you are restricting your puppy's activities quite a lot in the beginning, it means that he will earn his right to complete freedom for many years to come. In time and with consistent use, this management tool will eventually become unnecessary. By teaching your dog that it is highly rewarding to do what you want him to do, it will save you many years of worry and heart-ache if he discovers the opposite for himself by being allowed too much freedom at an early age.*

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