MYRPH'S DOG TRAINING

WHY WON'T YOUR DOG LISTEN TO YOU?

There are many reasons why dogs choose to ignore their owners, or sometimes are actually unable to listen to their owners. The reasons can vary and include dominance issues, lack of exercise, lack of socialization, poor body communication skills on the part of their owners, and over-saturation with meaningless commands from their owners. The last, over-saturation of meaningless commands, will be the topic for this article.

If your dog hears an endless stream of commands from you, the meaning of which was never taught, and the command has never been enforced, does it seem so unreasonable that he would choose to just "tune you out"?

At one point in our lives, we were all students. What if your teacher gave you an endless stream of unfamiliar assignments that he had never taught? That teacher's language skills are rather poor, and you do not know how to communicate to him that you simply have no idea what he wants. So you avoid the assignments and the uncomfortable situation. The teacher's response is to verbally continue assigning you these unfamiliar tasks. He never confronts you about why you are ignoring him, and he never sits down with you to show you or help you learn how to comply. There is never any enforcement of the assignment. Your marks never seem to go down, but over time the teacher grows more impatient and irritable with you. Before long, you would learn that the only way to deal with the situation is just to ignore this teacher altogether.

Now let us compare that scenario with the way the average pet owner tries to train her dog to sit on command. Most pet owners begin with what I refer to as the "hope method".....owner looks at dog and says "sit" (hoping that the dog will figure it out). Not being a verbal communicator in the first place, the dog looks blankly at this human with her odd kind of communication and just stands there. Owner then repeats the "sit" command, this time a little louder (as if the dog must be hard of hearing). Dog cocks head sideways, and looks a bit puzzled. Owner quickly becomes frustrated and impatient and repeats the "sit" command another three or four times. Finally, she grabs the dog by his collar and jerks on it while she shoves his butt gruffly to the floor. Owner thinks this has been a practice session for dog in learning to sit on command. Each time she repeats one of these "practice sessions" she adds more verbal repetitions of the word "sit," higher levels of frustration and impatience, and either gives up on getting the dog to sit, or ends by shoving his butt roughly to the floor. Some of the brighter, more tolerant and persistent dogs eventually learn that they are supposed to put their butt on the floor only after they have heard the word "sit" several times and after their person's voice gets loud and frustrated. Most dogs in this situation would learn that when they hear the constantly repeated word "sit," they should just ignore their crazy owners in order to cope with a most confusing and tense situation.

One of the first rules of interacting effectively with a dog “never repeat yourself” when issuing a command to a dog. Say the command one time only and then follow through by helping the dog comply. Once you have gently shown the dog what to do, lavish him with affection for getting it right. After you have patiently showed, helped and praised several times and it becomes obvious that the dog knows the meaning of your first time command, you may then move into the next phase of training which would include correction for his refusal to comply (avoidance behavior training). From this point on, always immediately enforce after the first command. It is absolutely not fair to the dog to sometimes repeat yourself several times before expecting him to comply and other times expect him to comply the first time you speak to him. The real task here is to train yourself to consistently demand a response to a first command.

Hint: Practice sessions with young or untrained dogs, in which they are required to focus and work at learning and pleasing you should never last more than one or two minutes at a time. As the dogs
become older or more trained, their attention spans will also grow and this time limit can be gradually increased.

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