

WHY CLICKER TRAINING?

In the course of my 30 years' experience working with dogs and their humans, I have met thousands of kind, conscientious, and intelligent people. They want the best for their canine friends: they want them to become well-behaved, obedient (at least reasonably obedient!), contributing members of the family "pack." They don't want a dog that's a nuisance to the neighbors, or a pest with visitors. They are responsible dog owners who want a companion animal.

As a beginning trainer, I first used the Jerk and Pull (a correction) based method then for obvious reasons (not wanting to hurt my dog) about 20yrs ago I learned to use lure and reward dog-training methods. After using a lure to teach the dog what I wanted, I would then use the traditional choke collar method to "proof" the exercises. However, 17yrs ago I found that the method I now use (clicker training) was both more efficient (dogs learned faster and more happily) and more comfortable for many, many dog owners.

These people didn't want to have to "teach" their dog to heel by jerking its leash as hard as they could whenever the dog got out of position. They really weren't interested in forcing their dog to sit or lie down by wrestling with it. The clicker method is based on the concept that animals (just like people) will tend to repeat an action that has pleasant consequences. We teach the dog to do the right thing, and reinforce it when that happens. Result: a dog who thinks training is a "blast, a really good time," and who obeys his cues (commands) much more happily.

Many people have questions about clicker training. They may not have seen it in action, or they may wonder if it can really produce a reliable animal. It really can. Think of the highly trained animals you see in the movies. (Yes, they probably can redo the "takes," if something isn't quite right; but think about it. If you're a director, you don't want to waste time with an animal that doesn't work reliably. That costs money and irritates you.) Positive reinforcement methods work. They are being used to teach police dogs, obedience dogs, show dogs, assistance and therapy dogs, tracking, water, and gun dogs, and they are also being used with lots of other animals. In fact, positive methods can be used (as one well-known trainer, Marian Bailey, puts it) to train "anything with a semblance of a nervous system". You may feel no need to train your goldfish, but there are people who have -- and those goldfish can do dolphin leaps on cue!

The beginning trainer/pet owner needs information, and needs to learn how to train, in order to be able to get the results he or she wants. The Dee Ganley Dog Training Service can teach you the hands-on aspect of clicker training!

Clicker training is a lot of fun. Once you start thinking creatively, and noticing your dog's behavior, you'll probably think of all sorts of things to teach your dog. One busy trainer taught the family dog (a high-energy type who desperately needed a "job" to do) to run around the house picking up dirty clothing, and put it in the hamper down in the laundry

room. This elegant solution solved the problem of a dog who was going crazy with boredom, in a house where keeping up with the kids' tendency to drop things all over was driving their mother crazy with frustration!

CLICKER TRAINING - A REAL LIFE APPLICATION

Sue Houston brought her English setter pup Lizzy to me for clicker training. After watching me work with Lizzy, and then trying it herself at home, Sue was so impressed with what a positive and effective training tool it is, that she wrote the following letter. I'm reprinting it here in the hopes that others will find it helpful and perhaps will use this gentle, humane and very effective method in training their own dogs.

"When I first heard about "click and treat" training I was quite skeptical. It sounded like some sort of a gimmick. Perhaps you needed some awkward device to assist in training, or needed to be really an expert to use this method.

After watching Dee use the clicker for just a few minutes with my own pup, I became intrigued. Lizzy, our 10-month-old English setter, had her full attention focused on Dee after just a couple of click and treat sequences. The pup quickly understood the click meant a tasty reward was coming. She was soon trying to figure out what to do to get Dee to make the click. This puppy was instantly an eager student of the agility course. Dee urged Lizzy to jump through a tire, go through a tunnel, or climb an obstacle, and made the click noise at the exact moment the pup performed the behavior that Dee was looking for, always followed by a treat. Because the click came at the moment of the part of the behavior, Lizzy knew what behavior was being rewarded, and in that first lesson she was running happily from obstacle to obstacle, tail wagging. This was fun!

Clearly this method of training was working, but best of all, the dog obviously enjoyed learning this way. It is all positive, no leash jerking, no scolding, just a happy dog trying to figure out what to do right. At home I began using the click/treat method for all sorts of situations. When the pup was being too boisterous around the kittens, I got out the clicker and instantly the pup became attentive. "What do you want?" she seemed to ask in her puppy body language. She tried sitting and got a click/treat, then she tried lying down and received another reward. Soon she was lying quietly while a kitten batted at her softly wagging tail. This is training a dog what TO do. Instead of a lot of energy being wasted telling the pup to stop her rambunctious behavior, I was simply teaching her what I wanted from her, what the proper behavior was. This is so much more understandable from the dog's viewpoint, and much more pleasant for all.

A few days later Lizzy needed some ointment in her eye. She didn't want anyone to touch her eye, much less restrain her and apply medicine. Out came the clicker and those yummy bits of hot dog. She got a click at the exact instant I put my hand on her face, followed by a treat, again at the moment I touched her eyelid, then when she allowed me to gently open her eye. Soon she gets the positive association, and in about 5 minutes she was holding perfectly still, without any restraining hands, while I put ointment in her eye. It was almost like magic.

People ask me "Don't you have to keep that clicker in your pocket all the time?" Actually I just get the clicker out for a few minutes whenever a good learning opportunity comes up. Dee says you can and should pair a word with the clicker, like "YESS". This way you can communicate what is right about something your dog is doing at the exact moment "it" happens. Maybe it's to reinforce the pup sitting quietly when guests arrive. Or perhaps just for a few minutes practicing basic commands like come, sit, stay, and down. My pup loves the training sessions. I'm also finding that during the rest of the day she is more tuned in to me, and the things she has learned during clicker training stick with her.

So if you want to train your dog in a positive, rather than punitive. way and you want her to learn faster than ever, and you would like both of you to have a great time in the process, you might consider trying the click and treat method. It's not very difficult to do, and the results can be quite amazing!"

Thanks Sue for your insights. One day we will all use the positive rather than punitive. Remember "violence begets violence". Think positive! Happy training.....Dee, Dazzle Tucker & Abby