



I N T R O D U C T I O N

After training police dogs for several years, I noticed that obedience was the foundation for every facet of the dog's behavior. Without the sound foundation of obedience, the handler and trainer had nothing to work with. The dog did not respect the handler, and the trainer could not solve any problems without this respect. The trainer could not depend on the necessary master/handler relationship to establish the control needed for successful police work.

The police departments I worked with did not purchase dogs but depended on donations and rescue groups to receive dogs. They were getting dogs that the owners could not handle or that no one wanted. These dogs were completely out of control, and police work was the last chance for some of these dogs. If they failed, they would be euthanized. Because I had to work with these types of dogs, I was forced to re-evaluate traditional obedience training methods.

Praise after the correction (if the dog obeyed after the correction) made the dog accept the correction only for the praise. Making the dog and handler depend on the correction wasn't working well because the dog thought the correction and the praise were part of the same thing. The dog became confused because it couldn't tell the difference between a correction and praise. As a result, obedience training became very stressful for the dog, so I had to re-think the praise after correction method.

Because there are times when the handler has to be silent so as not to reveal his position to the bad guy and put himself in danger, the dog needs to be able to read the handler's body language. So I began training using only body language. Having to remain silent while controlling the police dog taught me that the dog learned faster and retained the obedience training longer when I used only nonverbal commands (hand and body signals). It came to me that that's the way dogs communicate with each other — body language.

I started training handlers not to say anything to the dog, but just carry out the obedience training by allowing their body language to speak to the dog. Not only did the dog learn faster, it now was looking at the handler for direction and not being distracted by anything else. It had no choice but to look at the handler for communication. If it looked anywhere else, it would not know what the handler wanted and might receive a correction. This also allowed the dog to think it taught itself, increasing its confidence and long-term memory. It made the dog self-reliant and proud because it responded to the same kind of communication from the handler that it responded to from dogs. Only after the dog learned to respond to the handler's body language, did the handler begin giving verbal commands.

After 20 years of training police dogs, I started training dogs for the general public. Mike Devlin, a high school friend working for Meridian Township Parks and Recreation, approached me about teaching obedience classes. I started my first obedience class and was

amazed how fast the dogs were learning. All of those years training the police dogs paid off. I had learned how to handle very serious problems while training police dogs, so the much less severe problems private owners had with their dogs became fairly easy to solve.

In my obedience classes, in addition to the owners bringing their dogs to prevent future problems or for some basic training, I welcome all dogs that no one else wants to train or that other obedience classes have rejected. I began getting so many dogs from other classes that I started asking what methods the other trainers were teaching. About 80 percent of the “untrainable” dogs I was getting came from classes where food was used as a form of continuous reward. The other 20 percent came from classes that used the wrong training method on the dog without allowing for its particular temperament and needs. The percentages may vary by as much as ten percent either way, but the two main causes for dogs flunking out of other training classes remain the same.

The dogs taught by these other methods thought they knew the obedience game and protested more when they came to my class. Some dogs became more aggressive because the change in who was leader finally became evident to them, and they did not want the change to happen. The dogs’ previous obedience training only reinforced that they were still in control. I knew from the beginning of obedience training that not all dogs can be trained the same way, but I had still seen other trainers requiring the same collar and same method for all the dogs. For this to work, the trainers either hand picked the dogs that were going to be in class, referred dogs that did not fit their training method to another trainer or trained the dog using the wrong method. I believe that trainers should know more than one way of training and should not turn down any dog. When faced with a “difficult” dog, they should take that opportunity to learn from the owner and the dog either how the dog got that way or how it should be trained.

After applying my training method to all breeds and finding out which dogs required other training methods, I had to start learning about the people who owned them. Training police dogs requires the handlers to interact with their dogs like a working partner without a lot of emotions. Once the dog learned its job, it became independent. The handler still loved the dog, but understood it was doing a job, not being a pet. If the handler gave out too much emotion, the dog would mistake that for weakness and would begin to challenge the handler for leadership.

When teaching private owners, I started to see problems with dogs I had never seen before. I asked myself, what did the owner contribute to the problem? I figured out that, in most cases, the owner was responsible for how the dog behaved. Understanding that and knowing how the dog had gotten that way helped me prevent new problems from occurring during the dog’s training. I taught myself, reading and studying about human body language and human psychology. I focused on understanding all the emotions humans have and then transferred what I learned to the problems I faced with the dogs and their owners. Ironically, I found that the most challenging part of dog training is not the dogs. It’s you, the owner. And that’s why I wrote this book.