

# The Importance of a 'Right Relationship'

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The Macquarie Dictionary defines 'relationship' as "the way things or people are connected". The way you connect to your dog will play a large role in how effective you will be in training and motivating your dog to work with you.

When training a dog you need to provide two things –

- *what* you want the dog to do
- and *why* he should do it

What most people think of as 'training' – teaching, sit, stand, down etc. focuses on *what* we want the dog to do. It connects a behaviour such as 'sit' with our signal to perform the exercise. This provides understanding to the dog of *what* we want.

However dogs are not robots, they will not necessarily perform a behaviour just because they understand what it means. You must also provide motivation for performing the behaviour – the *why?* Food, toys and praise are tools we can use to provide motivation and reinforce desired behaviour however ultimately it is a right relationship that will provide enduring motivation and ensure reliable compliance to your requests.

A classic example was my dog Jack who competed in the highest levels of obedience yet if my son's friends asked him to 'sit' – he'd just stand and stare as if to say " your nobody special .. why should I do it for *you* ?" This is a large part of 'who dogs are' and is reflected in the old cowboy saying: "if a cowboy gets too big for his boots, let him try working someone else's dog". The implication is that a dog will only work well for the person with whom he has a 'right' relationship.

## Developing a 'right' relationship with your dog.

### Step 1: Trust in me

Your dog must have confidence that you will provide for him the things he needs to have a good quality of life. This includes:

- The essentials - food, water, shelter.
- Health care both preventative and emergency.
- Security – both on and off property. This includes being aware of and keeping your dog safe from things that may cause it to react. For example, stepping in if a dog plays too rough at the dog park *before* your dog feels a need to protect itself OR supervising play with excitable children.
- Exercise – both for physical and mental stimulation.
- Socialisation – to people.
- Socialisation – to other dogs and animals.
- Companionship – at least 4 hours a day of close contact with you.
- Education – dogs are perfect at being dogs. To live in a modern, human dominated world they need to learn human etiquette in a positive and nurturing way. Humans expect dogs not to pee in the house, not to pull on a lead, to leave good smells and come running when called, not to jump on visitors, not to dig holes even when bored, not to chase the neighbour's cat, not to bark at invited guests but *to* bark at strangers at the door – and lots of other confusing stuff! Dogs aren't born with this knowledge – they are born with the knowledge of how to be a DOG.

*Dogs are rarely disobedient they are frequently however, untrained.*

### Step 2: 'Good things come from me!'

You may already be providing many of these things to your dog but does he know that? Frustrated owners who love their dogs often tell me "I buy the best quality dog food, he has a fantastic futon to sleep on, he wears a designer collar and goes to the dog park every day – why won't he be good?"



It would be great if I could say to the dog "hey mate, this is a great home don't be stupid and throw it away!" – but of course dog's don't think like that. Dogs only understand 'This' for 'That'. A better way to go is to make a list of all the things your dog wants and a list of all the things you want. For example:

| You Desire:  | Your dog desires:   |
|--|---|
| Sit x 100<br>(the doggy equivalent of saying 'please') | Food x 100<br>(mostly a proportion of the dog's dinner<br>NOT lots of special 'treats') |
| Attention  | Go for walk (lead on)   |
| Come   | Your attention  |
| Settle   | Play tug  |
| Down   | Run free (lead off)   |
| Fetch  | Chase ball  |
| Quiet  | Come inside   |
| Walk nicely  | Walk toward park  |
| Shake hands  | Cuddle on couch   |

Now, it's a simple matter of continually swapping one of your desires for one of your dog's - 'this' for 'that'. Assuming you have properly trained part A - *what* you want your dog to do – distributing rewards contingent upon the behaviour you want should ensure Part B - *why* he should do it for you. You are using rewards that you already provide to your dog anyway, to build a framework for life that says – You will ALWAYS be better off doing as I suggest.

### Step 3 – Making It Work

#### Understanding comes first.

'This for that' assumes you have properly trained part A - *what* you want your dog to do. This means pairing a cue such as a hand signal and/or the word 'sit' with the behaviour you want (bottom on the ground) followed by a reward many, many times until your dog understands the connection between the cue and the behaviour. This is the 'education' part of your responsibility and in most cases will be made much easier for you and the dog if you are able to attend a good reward based training school.

#### Have a plan.

Many people complain about their dog's behaviour but when I ask what they would like their dog to do they simply say "be good!" Well, no one can train 'good'. Be specific, plan exactly what you would like your dog to do in every routine situation. For example when visitors arrive I would like my dog to run to his mat and lie down. Now you have chosen a specific behaviour you can begin to train it. What you want is clear in your mind and can be transferred into a positive action to teach your dog rather than simply shouting at him for jumping up when visitors arrive. This is thoughtful, proactive training and reinforces the idea that you are quietly 'in control' of the household and can be depended upon to teach your dog what is expected of him in every day situations.

#### Take away rewards

'This' for 'that' will only work if there is no choice of 'or the other'. For example, you may offer your dog a treat for coming in the park but if he can choose to play with another dog instead, he has chosen 'the other' reward – that the environment has provided. Again proactive training is required. Attaching a long line on your dog before he is allowed to 'go play' gives you the opportunity to remove the reward of playing with other dogs when you desire. Your dog will learn that if I don't respond to 'come' – play ends (your bring the dog in on the long line) and I don't get a treat. If I do come however, I get a treat, a pat *and* I get to go play again. It is vital that you ensure your game is always the best game in town.



## Don't get mad – just get even.

Dogs are really impressed by people who are cool, calm and in control. Imagine this scenario and see which owner you would be more likely to accept direction from:

You are a dog out in the yard barking because the kids next door are spraying the hose at each other and screaming.

Owner A: opens the door, steps outside waving his arms around and shouts something very loudly – almost as loud as the kids. You stop and stare briefly then continue barking.

Owner B: Quietly steps out of the house with lead in hand. He attaches the lead asks you to 'sit' and gives you a small treat. You are led into the house and asked to settle on your mat for a while.

Owner A has probably achieved nothing. From the dog's perspective, he joined in the noise making for a while then went inside. If Owner A has ever caught and punished the dog, it is unlikely he would even be able to quickly attach the lead as the dog would have learned to avoid him when he 'looks and sounds like that!'

Owner B's dog knew he was under no physical or emotional threat because his training has been based on rewards and positive, instructive interactions. The dog was therefore easily caught and brought inside. Never get mad, just get even by applying sensible management techniques to make it easy for your dog to learn what you want.

## Enduring Motivation

A 'right relationship' is built not through fear or intimidation but through trust and mutual respect. By applying the 'this' for 'that' principle consistently throughout your dog's life, you are providing access to everything he wants through co-operation with you – a win-win situation for all.

