Our Journey

Life Journey

I was 20 when I got my first dog. Today I don't really remember a "training process". Rather it grew out of our close bond. I was a college student, so much of my time was spent studying and, during summer breaks at home, when not working my summer jobs. I lacked much knowledge of even basic canine health, let alone training,.

Jesse was the product of a black and tan Coonhound and a Shepherd mix. He was bright and friendly. As soon as he was weened I took him home from my friend's "All American" dam. We were together for 13.75 years. It is true that "the younger kids benefit from what parents learn with the first one". If we're not learning in life, we're wasting it. Jesse taught me more than I taught him, but I gave him unlimited love. He would "come", "sit" and walk with me. I taught him, only with praise, to bark on command at people who walked by or to my house (it wasn't the best area of Bloomington). The rest of his life if I said, "Stranger" he would give a protective bark.

Learning Journey

How many of us rush through grade school, then through high school in order to get to the "reward"? Only a few people who are highly gifted fly through school, and those who do *are working on their own learning curve which is much steeper than the average*. When we begin training we have much to learn, and each dog we are blessed with comes with its own, individual learning curve.

We become better trainers as we put more time, effort and analysis into it. All three elements are necessary but I have come to see that analysis is the most important. One can work for hours and wear himself out and acquire little if he doesn't analyze:

1. *what* he's doing
2. *why* he's doing it and
3. *how the dog is responding*

and then come up with a theory as to why it's working or not working. His theory gives him a clue as to what to try next. Without thorough analysis the leader is not living up to his duty, which is to give Clear instructions and Communication for mistakes and success. The leader can't lead if he doesn't know where he is, even if he knows where he wants to go.

Besides wearing himself out with no reward he is doing his dog a disservice and causing his dog to feel *less* confident and successful. Always remember, our reasoning is influenced by our emotions but dogs emotions supersede their reasoning. Making your dog feel successful builds confidence and that makes both of you feel better. It's extremely important to train with the purpose of enjoyment for both you and your dog. There will be days when you don't train because you're having a bad day. That's life. But you make up for it every time you do train with enjoyment and purpose. On bad days, just play with your dog and enjoy her.

BRING PLAY INTO YOUR TRAINING
MAKE TRAINING PART OF YOUR LIFE
When you accomplish these two objectives you will be in a whole new level of training. Why? If you don't know, ask me and I'll tell you.

Training is a personal evolution that never ends (for me at least). If EOC is your first training experience then you are fortunate and I say that not because I'm an EOC member and I teach occasionally. I say it because I started with a "professional" trainer who used only praise and correction and considered all other tools as not just unnecessary but wrong. It's true that eventually Praise is all that is necessary during work because we teach our dogs "delayed gratification". While they're working, their reward is our Praise. That is when your dog is fully trained to work.

But to start training a novice dog in the same way that one would work a trained dog is not just Foolish and Stupid, but totally Wrong and Unfair to the dog.

The Learning Curve

Every creature has its own learning curve. As you train, you are learning to train and your dog is learning to work. Your learning curves are not the same. By the time I got to EOC in 2002 my training and thinking was somewhat screwed up. I knew there were things I didn't like about the training I had been taught. It didn't take me long to see that EOC offered a better training method but it did take time and effort for me to relearn my behaviors and my *expectations*.

I was foolish enough to expect my dogs to learn as fast as I could. I knew I had to explain it differently but I thought I made my explanation clear when I hadn't. Gradually I learned to analyze my dog's reaction to the way I was training. I began to study my dog. I watched for body language and began to anticipate my dog's behavior. By knowing what my dog was going to do I could react much sooner and thereby prevent mistakes or effectively correct my dog.

Training is very dependent on timing. Both praise and correction has a time window and *it's based on our dog's perceptions not ours*. We have 3 options when performing an exercise. We can praise and reward with a successful performance, we can correct and then praise with a mistake, or we can fail our dog and choose a different option.

Failing to correct behavior is doing our dog a disservice by not providing proper leadership. Imagine a student whose teacher doesn't tell her when she's doing the lesson wrong. **"But our dogs are not children and we love our dogs."** (Or worse, we think our dogs are our children.) I love my dogs as I would love my children but I don't treat them as I would treat my children because they would not understand. That would be poor leadership.

Yes, that's correct, and that's *why you must correct* your dog and there is only one proper way to correct (in most circumstances). Going back to the classroom analogy, you don't let a student make the same mistake over and over before you tell the student they're doing it wrong. You don't fail to tell the student he's wrong and let him fail endlessly. Instead the teacher tells the student immediately, and as gently as possible to be effective, that he's done it wrong. Then the teacher leads him into finding the correct answer.

Dogs are like people when it comes to personality: they are all different. Some are meek and mild and require a mild correction. Some are rambunctious, don't know fear and have the heart of a lion. They require a strong correction.

Here are the "Rules". We hate rules because "they don't make sense", "I can do it my way", "my dog wont' like me", etc. Regardless, the rules are the **Rules** because they

are what is best for you and your dog. They weren't created on a whim by clowns. They were created by experts who love their dogs and understand them.

1. Give **One** *Command*
2. If you dog does not respond, **Correct** you dog's behavior. Once your dog gives the correct behavior, **Praise** your dog.
3. If your dog performs the behavior, **Praise** and **Reward** with *enthusiasm*.

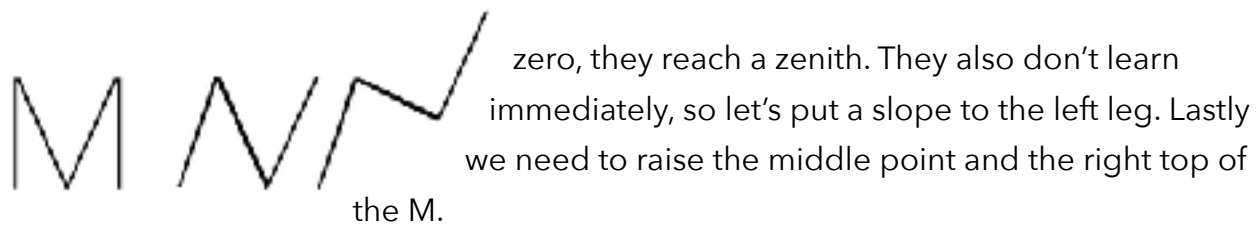This is a training *Tool* by which we *Mold* or **Model Behavior**.

Mood is important. In training we have to have a mood that is helpful to our dogs. Attitude should be **Calm** and **Confident**. At first you may have to force yourself into this mindset, but once you see the results over a period of time (not instantly) it will come to you naturally. Learn to believe that your dog will perform correctly. You'll be amazed how much your confidence will affect your dog's performance.

We respond to successful behavior with **Enthusiasm** and to mistakes with **Calm**, even tone. What is calm depends on the dog and will also evolve through your training. What doesn't change is that response to mistake is never angry, unfair or belligerent. It is instruction, not punishment.

We adopt these Rules and Moods because they are excellent Tools to help us Lead our dogs into Correct Behavior. And for me, they took away my worry about my dog's mistakes and took the anxiety out of training. When I learned to see Mistakes as, not only inevitable but as Good, as a chance to teach Correct behavior, it was life changing for me. And my dogs benefited. There is little in life that is more fulfilling than to learn how to make our lives better for us and our dogs. When I reached that point I was at a new, sharper arc in my learning curve.

The Canine Learning Curve

The learning curve, which I believe is similar but different from other mammals, has been described as an M. The concept is correct but the diagram is not accurate. Let's start with an M and modify it. Take off the right leg, because dogs don't go back to

zero, they reach a zenith. They also don't learn immediately, so let's put a slope to the left leg. Lastly we need to raise the middle point and the right top of the M.

But these performance changes are rarely sharp changes in direction but rather are curved. So a more correct representation of the learning curve would be a combination of linear and log curves which has a slight resemblance to an M.
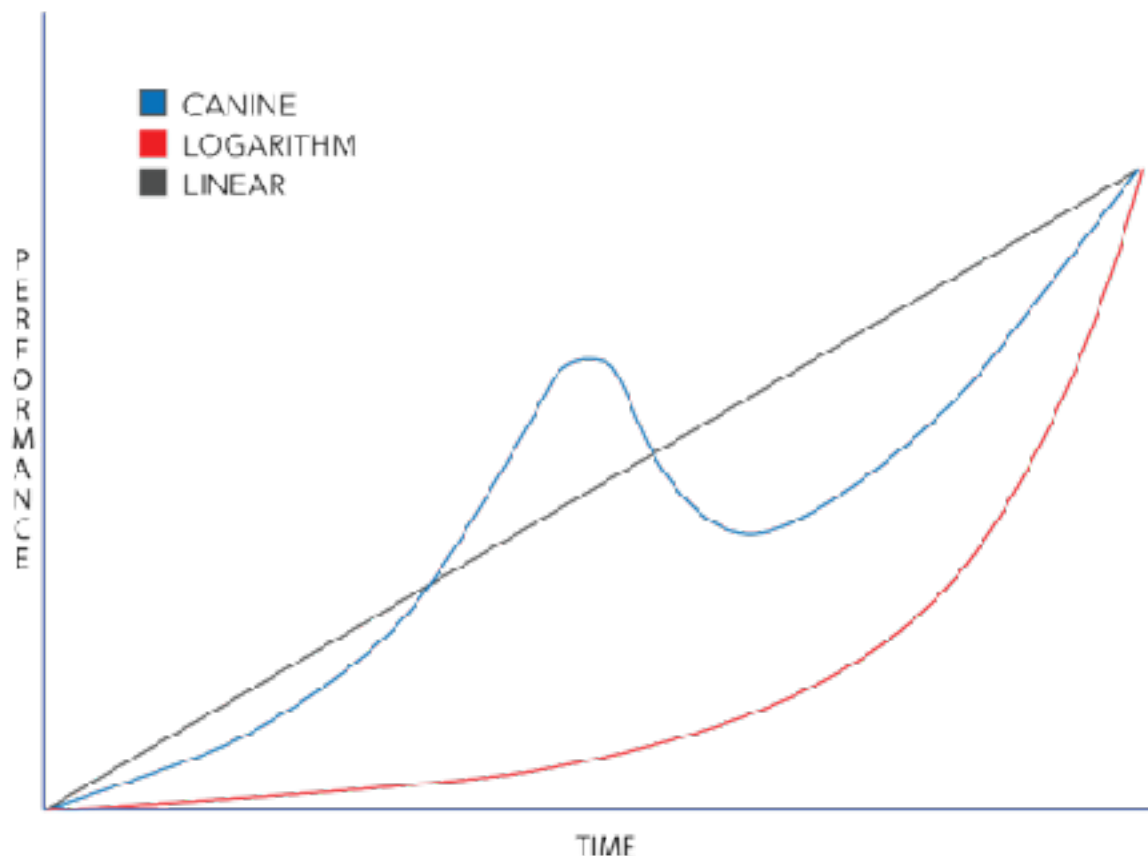
Why do we need to know this? Because in our training experience we all have an experience that leads us to say, "I don't understand, he did this last week." While it's true that the situation and other factors affect performance, it is *normal* for a dog to regress in behavior and then progress further above what they performed before the regression. Once they have completely learned a behavior, dogs don't forget. That is, because we have *thoroughly modeled* the behavior and left no doubt in our dog.

Undoubtedly someone could present this information more succinctly and more clearly. Why do I go into so much detail regarding learning?

Because:
I trained without knowing *WHY*. Understanding *why* makes everything so much clearer and easier. Like many I was *in a Rush* to train my dog. With time, experience and understanding how dogs learn, I came to understand that rushing the training process not only didn't help but was detrimental. It placed unnecessary stress on me, and, more importantly, on my dog.

My job is to teach you and I'm always compelled to do my job to the best I can achieve. Sometimes we learn only by experience but, if my words and interaction with you can spare you and your dog the frustration and stress that my dogs and I had then I will be elated!

We're working with a learning curve. Like many roads our lives are full of curves and we should take them at the correct speed. We take curves slower than the straight road if we're good drivers. We train at our individual dog's learning curve if we're good trainers. We don't try to drive them faster than they are prepared to go.