

Outline for Gun Dog Clicker Training

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Benefits of Clicker Training

- With the clicker we can teach pups the day we bring them home (or earlier).
 - There is no stress
 - They think they are training us
 - Dogs want to train and learn new behaviors
- Because we can start dogs out sooo young, we can exercise the mental muscle, or develop the dog's ability to learn as well as condition the dog to obey, from day one.
- Dogs pay much better attention to the handler
 - Why shouldn't they, they're training us and we've got the treats
 - This focus pays off dividends much later when we want the dog to cue off of us for many things in the field.
- Dogs generally like us and like to be with us because we minimize negative stimulus and are generally fun and beneficial to be around.
- The clicker is a fun, positive, and pain free way for the dog to learn behaviors that benefit both the dog and owner.

Primer on teaching/learning

- In all dog training, behaviors are taught/learned, then reinforced.
 - In teaching/learning, the dog learns that the behavior is beneficial or productive.
 - In conditioning, the behavior becomes automatic through repetition and success. The response becomes automatic and occurs without decision.
 - "Ron Roman – A dog will repeat a successful behavior" –
 - The goal in all efficient training is to make the desired behavior successful.
 - The most successful and efficient trainer finds the fastest and easiest way to make the desired behavior successful.
- Several methods are commonly used to teach and condition new behaviors in dogs
 - Positive reinforcement (has been the most common method of teaching new behaviors).
 - Consists of rewarding desirable behaviors with a desired reward.
 - One of the very best methods that can be used with very young puppies.
 - The most versatile and adaptable methods overall
 - Clicker training is positive reinforcement
 - Negative reinforcement

- Rewarding undesired behavior simultaneously with an undesired stimulus. Ending the undesired stimulus once the undesired behavior ends.
- Difficult to teaching desired behaviors when you focus only on undesired behaviors.
- Very effective for some behaviors (jumping, barking, etc...)
- May be more effective for conditioning than learning.
- Punishment
 - Causing pain or discomfort after the display of an undesired behavior.
 - Not recommended for young puppies
 - Dogs often associate the punishment with something other than the undesired behavior, and therefore difficult to use for providing consistent behaviors..

Clicker Training for teaching/Learning

- The Clicker is used as a communication tool. It is not much different in use than a “good dog”...
 - However, it occupies only a fraction of the time it takes to say praise.
 - It marks precisely the behavior that is being reinforced.
 - The clicker’s sound is constant and never changes; voices reflect emotion, and can be very different between different people.
- The clicker is also much like money in the bank. When you get a bank statement or paycheck you know you have money. All you really have is paper... and the confidence to know you can buy stuff that you want or need. You don’t have the stuff yet, however you still feel good because you know that you have the ability to obtain it.
 - With the clicker, the dog hears the click and knows that a treat will be following. (Common misconception – we don’t train the dog to work for the sound of the clicker only, it’s the treat they really want). This knowledge is conditioned to the point that the dog is reinforced just by hearing the click; however the treat must follow to maintain this conditioning.
 - *What would you do if your paychecks began to bounce? Would you keep going to work?*
- The clicker can be used to shape new behaviors. Behaviors that slightly resemble the desired behaviors are rewarded. As the response becomes stronger behaviors more closely resembling the desired behavior rewarded. These gradual steps lead to the desired behavior.
 - Shaping
 - Click a behavior that is closer to the one you are looking for
 - Gradually raise the bar and require behaviors that are closer to the desired behavior.
 - Continue until desired behavior is achieved.

- Clicker Training - The Steps:
 - Reward the desired behavior with clicks and treats.
 - Shape or “lead” to obtain the desired behavior
 - This prompts the dog to repeat the desired behavior
 - It also conditions the dog to expect a treat after the clicker, and to work for the click.
 - Repeat a few sessions until the dog is providing the desired behavior in an unsolicited manner repeatedly for 2 to 5 sessions.
 - Place the behavior on cue
 - Intermittently command the dog to perform the desired behavior.
 - Reward the behavior when performed in response to the command
 - Do not reward the unsolicited behavior
 - This will take several sessions, but eventually the unsolicited behaviors will extinguish and the desired behaviors will continue because they are being reinforced.
 - Often takes longer with some of the first trained behaviors, but goes quicker after the dog learns more behaviors.
 - Condition the behavior
 - Move to a variable reinforcement schedule for best conditioning
- Example – Training Sit Command
 - Click and reward “sit”
 - Continue until “solid”
 - Command SIT – reward for sit
 - Do not reward unsolicited sits
 - Move to variable reinforcement

Conditioning

- In Conditioning, the same reinforcement methods are often used:
 - Positive Reinforcement
 - Negative Reinforcement
 - Avoidance Conditioning
 - Punishment
- Positive reinforcement is not necessarily the method used most.
 - Most classic clicker trainers believe in positive conditioning only.
 - Positive only, or “Tree hugger/World Peace clicker people”.
 - The common positive reinforcement method used for conditioning is variable reinforcement.
 - Reinforcing desired behavior on a random schedule
Has been proven to be the most effective conditioning schedule.
 - Most gun dog trainers throw the clicker away in favor of the collar.
 - They generally agree that conditioning is achieved quicker with avoidance conditioning than positive reinforcement techniques.

- They don't want a dog that tells them to shove it, when distractions and temptations of the field become too tempting.
- Revelation – What's better, the carrot or the stick?
 - Answer...BOTH the carrot AND the stick (*trick question*).
 - Why not use both?
 - Do you work harder to be rewarded with things you like, to avoid things you hate, or do both at the same time.
 - Rewarded for being to work early and punished for being late.
 - Do you learn faster when you are jolted for making wrong turns, rewarded for making right turns, or both?
- Let's talk about using the clicker in conjunction with collar conditioning.
 - What happens when a dog stresses out under the collar?
 - Brain Fog
 - Stops learning
 - Gets scared
 - Refuses to work, because all options seem to end in getting shocked, jerked, or whacked (all options suck).
 - What are the benefits of the clicker in this situation?
 - Communicates to the dog the desired behavior
 - Provides the dog with the opportunity to be successful & gain confidence
 - Lifts the dogs spirits and lowers stress
 - Brings into play the association with all of the positive and fun work that has been accomplished with the clicker.
 - Remember, we are trying to help the dog to be successful in repeating the desired behavior. They learned the behavior with the clicker, it's only a natural to carry that behavior through collar training.
- I believe that dogs learn faster when using both the collar and the clicker. I am now setting out to prove this theory. I ask you to help. I urge you to give it a try and let me know what you think.
 - I have found it valuable to get me through difficult training situations:
 - Freeze up
 - Plateau
 - I have found it to be faster than the collar alone
 - I have found it beneficial in preventing stress problems.
- Conclusion – Don't shoot the clicker (credit to Karen Pryor, pioneer in clicker training). Gun dog trainers are often too inclined to toss the clicker at 6 months of age and switch to electric collar training. Keep the clicker and use it in conjunction with the collar. I think you will be very surprised with the success you will have when you use both together.