Training with Markers – Getting Started

To Train your dog effectively, you must have engagement and generalization.

Engagement

Engagement is the term we use to describe a dog wanting to be with you and focused on something you have (food, praise, and attention). Without engagement, your dog will not pay attention therefore making it extremely difficult to train and motivate your dog for to do desired behaviors.

If your dog is not engaged, you have to use force to get desired behaviors. No Leash Needed does not believe in using force or compulsion to train desired behaviors. We prefer reward based methods to build a foundation so that your dog is engaged and motivated to work for you!

Generalization

Generalization describes your dog being able to sit at home in your kitchen or out at a park. If your dog doesn't perform the command in different settings, he has not generalized the command.

Marker training provides a way for humans to communicate with dogs immediately after our dogs do something we like. It provides a non-punishment method of saying "No" (that's not what we want) and "Yes" (we like what you are doing). The "yes" is followed by a reward, something that motivates your dog to continue these behaviors. Marker training is non-confrontational, which is why it works so well all types of dogs. It is the same thing as clicker training except that we use our voices as the mark.

What Is Marker Training?

Let's go back to Psych 101- In technical terms marker training is operant conditioning. Operant conditioning forms an association between a behavior and a consequence.

When your dog exhibits a behavior you like, the consequence should be a high value reward. In marker training that reward is either a high value food treat or a high value toy that the dog really loves. If a dog does not perform a behavior the consequence is "No Reward." This is an example of negative punishment. We are withholding the food reward because the dog continues behaviors we dislike. To decrease these behaviors, we remove the food.

In the marker training system there are only two consequences to a behavior that we are trying to train. They are a reward or no-reward.   The key to operant conditioning is to teach a dog that when he performs a behavior that we like he gets a reward that makes him feel good - the reward gives him a level of comfort.

For dogs to associate a behavior with a reward or punishment, it must come immediately after the behavior (within 1 second). If the reward comes 3 seconds after a behavior, your dog does not understand why he is being rewarded.   Likewise, if you come home to find your dog has had an accident in the house and rub your dog's nose in it, your dog has no idea why you are punishing him…He just knows he is being punished.   If your dog had an accident while you were there and you could associate a "No" within 1 second, your dog would understand.

1 second is a very short time, and it is not always possible to reward within that time frame. To bridge this gap, we use "Yes" or in clicker training, the click.

We also use a negative Marker -"NO" or "Wrong" **The negative marker is not a correction. It is simply a way of communicating to the animal that he just made a mistake and if he expects to get that high value reward he needs to redo the behavior correctly.**

Your dog will learn through repetition, and each time he hears the positive marker, "Yes", a reward will be given. Every time he hears the negative marker, "No", no reward is given and he has to repeat the behavior.

Dogs that are trained with markers learn to think. They have that when one behavior doesn't work they need to try until they get the reward. This is very different from traditional dog training where dogs are corrected for doing something wrong without knowing what was expected of them. Giving a dog a correction without teaching them what is expected is unfair and a terrible way to train. It creates dogs that are afraid to try new things out of anticipation of a correction.

For more information on marker training, videos and articles, we recommend the following:

http://leerburg.com/articles-obedmarker.htm

http://leerburg.com/4013.htm