

## The Training Trifecta

### Part 2: Recall

Our last column dealt with Training Trifecta Part 1 – Getting – and Keeping! – Attention. This issue our subject is Recalls. Teaching a Recall is imperative when you have a dog of any breed, but especially so in a breed that is fast-moving with prey drive. Your dog's failure to come when called can be disastrous.

The first thing you need to do is pick a word for your Recall – one that you can think of quickly in a time of emergency. It doesn't matter what the word is, but it needs to be a word you use ONLY for a recall and it means, "Get your fanny over here NOW!!" The other thing you MUST do is ENFORCE it – if you call your dog to you using this word you MUST back it up and make the dog come to you. If you let your dog off the hook even once, you are sunk.

Always remember that you MUST praise your dog well when he comes to you – you definitely want your dog to have a good association with your recall word. So even if you don't have a treat on you, you can do some good petting and verbal praise. Don't miss out on this opportunity to reward your dog for doing something so important. NEVER PUNISH OR YELL AT YOUR DOG WHEN HE COMES TO YOU.

I use "Come" for my Recall word, so that is what I will use in this article. You need to do this training on leash. Put your dog on a 6' leash and go for a walk. When he is not paying any attention to you, say Name, Come!! in a happy high-pitched voice and take a couple of steps backward. Make sure your dog comes to you, using the leash if needed, and make sure you reward him well for it! To start with, do this training on a walk every few minutes. If he needs more encouragement, show him you have a treat in both hands and hold your hands in front of you as you back up. You also don't want to repeat the word over and over – you want him to come to you the FIRST time you say your Recall word. DO NOT YANK ON THE LEASH HARD OR DRAG HIM TO YOU AND DON'T CALL HIM IN AN ANGRY TONE. He doesn't know the command yet and you do not want a negative association with the word. Even though our breed does not like a lot of repetition, spreading the command training out on a walk will help keep it fun. Always be happy when you call your dog and ecstatic when he comes to you!

Part of this exercise is also to touch your dog's collar – do not quickly thrust your hand towards your dog, as you don't want to startle him, but just reach out and take his collar in the hand that doesn't have the leash in it. More on this later.

As your dog becomes more reliable on the Recall, you can increase the length of the lead and let your dog get farther away before you call him; work up to a 30' or 40' leash. You still want your dog to come to you immediately, so don't advance your training until your dog's recall is speedy and direct at least 99 % of the time before you move it up. When he will come to you reliably on a 30' or 40' leash, try it in a small fenced area with him off leash. If you get the same results, you are ready to move up to distractions!

Start out with mild distractions – people in the distance or a noise that is steadily going on. Back on a 6' leash, do some Recalls and see how he does with a mild distraction. Then start increasing the distraction level, while still on a 6' leash – the distractions should gradually get more and more difficult for your dog to ignore. As you are approaching this level, you may need to use even better treats, so keep that in mind. You can also use your Focus word and do some Focus work before you work on Recalls to get your dog into Work mode. As he gets better working around distractions, you can start working up to longer and longer leashes, like you did in the beginning.

Remember that when you are working with your dog, if you have a time when you can see that he is not quickly responding to your command, back up to the previous step and work that a few times until he gets his head back in the game. And don't worry if you have setbacks – it is very common and not that big a deal. Just back up a step and work at the previous level for a week or so.

It is common for us to move too fast in our training, to move ahead of where our dog really is in training – in other words, if your dog is a bit slow to Recall on a 6' leash, do not advance to a longer leash and then try to get him to come to you faster. It is far easier to not let a bad habit develop than it is to fix it later. WITH A RECALL, YOU NEED TO MAKE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN YOUR DOG IS ROCK STEADY AND RELIABLE IN HIS RESPONSE TO THIS COMMAND. So it is far better to move ahead slowly on this than to rush it, only to have your dog fail to respond at a critical time.

So what if he is coming to you, but he is taking his time, strolling along, looking for a better invitation? The very first time this happens, fix it! You can work this with a Sit/Stay or when you are out walking. Name, Come! and back up quickly so he will come to you. If he doesn't, use your leash to remind him what you want. Most of the time, you just backing up quickly and calling him will get him to come to you faster. If you need to crank it up a notch, instead of backing up quickly, turn around and RUN from him.

Another thing you want to work on is getting him to come in close to you. When you are backing up quickly, calling him excitedly, when he speeds up to get to you, you can stop quickly – and that will bring him in closer to you. REMEMBER TO BE EXCITED WHEN YOU CALL HIM!! You want him to think this is fun!

Remember the part about touching the collar? The reason for that is twofold – one is to make sure the dog is close enough to you for you to touch him (a requirement in the Obedience ring), and the other is piggybacked on this – close enough to you for you to put a leash on him. Teaching the dog part of the command is touching his collar is so your dog will not come to you, then run away, come to you, then run away. Very annoying and doesn't do you any good at all. Training him to expect that touch on the collar will allow you to attach a leash to him and go about your day.

Along this line, do keep in mind you don't want your dog to think every time the leash goes on, Fun Time is over. So when you have your dog on an off leash adventure, make it a habit to every now and then call him to you, attach the leash and walk him on leash for a few minutes, then let him off again. This stops the dog from resenting or dreading the Recall and the attachment of the leash to him when you are out and about off leash.

Recalls are tough, but extremely important. It is truly a command that can save your dog's life, so it is worth taking the time to do it right and get it firmly fixed in your dog that when her hears Come! he automatically drops what he is doing and runs right up to you – close enough to touch or leash up. Seeing your dog running towards a street with a truck coming towards you is enough to stop your heart – so WORK THIS COMMAND so your dog can avoid a disaster.

Next issue, I will cover Puling on the Leash. Here's hoping all of you and your dogs have a wonderful summer!

Don't complain, train!

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