

Shutdown and Curing the Problem

By David Molyneaux

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There aren't many things that can concern an owner or even a professional trainer more than observing an exuberant, talented youngster change to being a 'boot licker'. That same pup is now heeling constantly under foot, and losing complete interest in birds or even being afield. The common reaction is disbelief and we push the pup harder to work our way through the situation. As result, this likely will inflate the issue in the pup's mind by magnifying the issue. The correct reaction for the handler is to stop the training right there, put the dog away, take a walk, calm down and assess what led up to this problem. In the following paragraphs we will be covering some of the most common mistakes and how to work through them to restore your dogs confidence.

It is said that dogs have the mind of a three year old. Each and every dog has a different personality. There are basically three groups of dogs in a trainers mind. There are the bull-headed, hard driving dogs that enjoy blowing off the handler. Then there are the ones that everyone wants to train and enjoy. They love the job, are willing to listen to our commands, compromise, and try to please. The third group are the ones that make very fine hunting dogs, but how we handle these pups will determine if we will make or break their spirit.

Often we hear of these dogs referred to as thin-skinned dogs. They are sensitive on the outside as well as their mental state. Certain breeds are more prone to this discipline than others, as well as some bloodlines in other breeds. This is not a fault, but being aware of how you are going about training this individual is of the utmost importance. Keeping the pup energized with plenty of self-esteem is more important than making progress every day you are out training. A major mishap on your part will result in a setback that will cost you more than one night of sleep, regretfully.

Let us be blunt and frank with each other right from the start. Most problems arise when we feel the dog isn't giving its best, or simply isn't listening. This could be a day when we have something on our mind, and has nothing to do with the dog. Actually, we grabbed the dog to get our mind off the issue at hand. In short, we are having a 'bad hair day'.

Unknowingly, several things are going to happen. When upset we throw an aura about ourselves. Our movement is faster, we expect instant results, our timing is off, and the damn dog should be remembering what we did a couple of days ago. Rule of thumb...don't train if you aren't relaxed, period.

Many dogs are like people. Some dogs absorb information slower than others. Confusion can be caused by the handler not being confident and consistent in the training process. Often times we try something a little different in an attempt to get a point across to the dog. Then trying something else a buddy suggested. The trainer not taking a consistent route in his training will lead to confusion and a pup that will lose its confidence.

Having a time line you have to meet is another primary cause of a calamity in your training. Especially in softer dogs, you have got to take your time, however long it takes. As stated earlier, which stands repeating, it is far better to end with a pup that is enjoying the training, than having the mind set you have to make progress each and every day.

Putting all these things together, it is easily seen how overly aggressive reprimanding can become an issue as well. This depending on the dog's temperament can simply be rough handling or improper use of the e-collar, by accident or other wise.

No matter what has happened or the cause, the pup has lost trust in the person handling him. Now here is where we are going to reconstruct the pup's confidence in itself and you.

The training location has got to be a different place than has been used previously. The last thing anybody wants is any flash back experiences. It is usually advised to return to the property used for your basic training. We also want to go back to lessons the pup is familiar with and rehearse them. Spend a while in a comfort zone if for no other reason than to reassure yourself that the pup truly understands its yard work. This will also do you good so you can regroup and relax while working the dog.

The process of the pup regaining self-esteem often requires a lot of hands on comfort, stroking, being the pup's backbone in a sense. This requires two people handling and training until this situation is resolved. Your voice inflection at this time is very important as well. In the field as a rule we control our speech and only give commands. When in the process of going back to basics use a lot of high pitched speech, attaboys, clapping your hands, and go to the extreme to express pleasure. Remember, we are only out to do one thing first and foremost, rebuild the pup's outlook on this training concept.

Read the dog's body language and attitude looking for happiness and drive. Do not be in a hurry to push for time to regain your lost ground. How long it takes actually depends on how much the pup dwelled on what started and occurred that created the problem in the first place.

Use only the rope and flank hitch in your training for a while. Again, we want to stay in a comfort zone but still begin make a forward progress in our training. Use of the e-collar is not a wise idea at this point in time. Remember, we are rebuilding our pup's attitude toward lessons, birds, and the trainers process in progressive training. The good thing is, lost ground can be regained and we can end up with a pup worth bragging about. Through taking our time and following a constructive process all can be regained ending up with the brag dog worth keeping.