

DEVELOPING A GOOD TRAINING ATTITUDE

I want my retrievers to feel that they are winners. I like a high rolling, hard driving retriever. I want a retriever that responds eagerly to my commands, and runs his blinds just as hard as his marks. I enjoy a retriever that wants to learn, tries and gives you everything they have.

How do we develop a good eager training attitude? Sometimes in retriever training, correction is overemphasized. So much energy is spent going into fine detail about how to correct the retriever, that praise takes a back seat. I think retriever trainers get so involved in teaching people about how to properly correct their retrievers, that the people get the impression that praise is not important in retriever training. **Well it is.** It is crucial and must be in balance with correction. This is particularly true with a sensitive retriever. Also equally important is that the retriever needs to feel that it is successful. You can't hammer the retriever every day with stressful concepts, and the dog failing most of the time, and have him develop a good attitude. You need to know when to push and when to let up. Even the order of what you do in the training day makes a difference.

Concepts need to be developed, not just thrown at the retriever. The retriever should be set up to learn and succeed, not fail, most of the time. Most importantly, you have to give the retriever a chance. Does he really know what you expect of him, and is being defiant, or is he confused. Correcting a retriever when he is confused or worried will only make things worse. Simplify, use attrition to help the retriever get the concept. For instance, in teaching doubles the retriever is to the point where it can kind of do them. The retriever comes back with the first bird and you are already lined up with the second. The retriever is not sure that there is a second one. You send the retriever; the retriever takes a few tentative steps then looks confused and comes back. Because the retriever refuses to go, he needs to be corrected, not overly harshly, but a nick. Or give an ear pinch "where's my bird". Then have the gunner give the retriever a "HEY, HEY", or if the retriever is still uncertain, have the gunner to throw another bird. Put the retriever away, and later repeat the marks if desired, for confidence. Not right away, though, run another retriever, or at least go off line. Repeating right away all the time tends to teach the retriever that it is ok to return to an old fall. If the retriever still refused to go, you need to examine why and act accordingly. Now, in a dog that knows doubles, refusing to go would be met with a much harsher correction. You have to know your dog. Drills both marking and blind (handling and lining) are another way to teach concepts in a setting where you are concentrating on a single issue or concept. This promotes a better understanding by the retriever, and a better attitude that this brings.

You can only correct a retriever for what they know. Don't nit pick the retriever to death. Don't draw such a fine line in the sand that the retriever can't understand. This goes back to letting the retriever have a chance to succeed. Instead of correcting him for looking like he is going back to an old fall half way out there be sure that is what he is doing. Do you really know that the retriever is committed to going back to the old fall, or is he being pushed by another element, and will straighten up once past it. Let the dog commit the crime, commit to the old fall, then correct. On a retired gun, if he shores early, not really bank running, but just early, do you really pick on him and correct. This depends on the retriever, and the circumstance. Think before you correct. Give a dog a chance to do the job correctly, or to commit a crime. Be fair and this will do you a lot of good in developing a great attitude with your retriever. This is where there is a tremendous difference in obedience training and field, obedience is constant nit picking.

Now back to the praise issue. Even dogs that you think don't need it, really do, and they really sparkle when you do. It is sometimes hard to see what the dog is thinking from the line. You need to learn to read the retrievers body movements. My husband made a good comment while I was training a CFC black Lab "BUDDY". Buddy is a 90 pound, macho, hard driving Lab. He is not normally an affectionate dog, only to the people he respects. He rarely shows if you have gotten to him. He runs almost as hard coming back from a mark as he does going to it. You would think that praise would not really much to this dog. Buddy was returning from a particularly hard mark we had set up, and my husband had thrown. When I started yelling "GOOD DOG" my husband made the comment that he really perked up and shined when he heard me praising him. This really made me stop and think that probably most of this dog's life (He's almost 8); he was looking for affection, but due to his approach to life most likely received little. I really have made a bigger commitment after that to really pour on the praise to all the dogs. ***It really does make a big difference.***