

## **NEVER SAY NEVER AND NEVER SAY ALWAYS**

This statement is as important in life as it is in dog training. Because so often when we say this it turns around and bites us. It is something for you to think about and carry with you through your life.

In dogs, and particularly Tollers I have heard “I’ll never send my dog to a pro”, or “I’ll never use a collar” (e-collar). Then a few years go by and guess what, the dog was sent to a pro, and the dog is now on a collar, and they are enthusiastic about it. Or “I’ll never force fetch my dogs, it will ruin their temperament”. They learn to do it correctly, and now they believe in force fetching. What I am saying is that we should not make anything an absolute.

In training, be it obedience or field, there are numerous theories and methods on how to best train your dog. This is particularly true in obedience because every dog can and should be obedience trained. There is so much variety in temperament within the various breeds of dogs and in their owner’s temperaments that there are many different training methods. In retriever training you are training a specific group of dogs and there are quite a bit of similarities between them. Within a particular breed there are even more. Let’s go back to my basic premise that all retrievers can be trained with basically the same program but the catch is the program has to be tailored for the individual dog. All dogs are individuals.

Food as a motivational tool has been around for as long as I can remember. In obedience I do not recall any top dogs that food was used as a motivator. I wonder how many OTCH dogs have been trained with food. These top dogs are on the top because they are motivated, by the desire to please their owner, had a good attitude and the trainer was also motivated and a talented trainer. The only outside motivation I saw, was that many trainers (including myself) used tennis balls or the like to keep the dog alert and eager, or to bring the dog “up”. The dogs were not taught with the tennis ball but as an additional tool to motivate said dog. At the same time leash corrections, or using the leash to guide the dog, were also used to correct the dog and teach the dog what was expected. For someone with fewer expectations food could be used, or in a dog that is not high on the trainability factor. Hey if it works what the heck. However, it has been my experience that food does not work. You go into the ring and there is no food and the dog does not perform. In obedience I have tried to improve my dogs’ performance in both competitions, high in trial type dogs, and ones that I just want a decent passing score. This has been with several breeds. Food has not worked for any of them, but again it might work for some people. What I find interesting is that sometimes we fail to really praise our dogs enough. You want to use clickers and food, when what you really need is to get down on the ground and give the dog a good rough housing and lots of love.

When I am training, particularly when teaching something new, or when doing something particularly stressful; a long technical blind, force fetch, praise is even more

important. When the dog picks up his bumper or bird, I yell and really let the dog know that I am pleased (sometimes I am 300 to 400 yards away from the dog, so yelling is required). Obviously if the dog is close I pour on the praise but in this instance of course yelling would not be necessary. When I am teaching the hand signals for example, when the dog starts to run to the correct bumper, I let them know they are doing it right. Dogs really perk up when you do this, and it improves their training attitude, and they want to work. Starting out with a wild young Lab, for instance, praise would be soothing, and quiet. Think about the dog you are dealing with and adjust your voice accordingly. I like my field dogs to be wired, so I don't mind the wildness to a degree. Remember, you can always take it out, but to put that eagerness back in is very hard if not impossible. So as in life and in dog training never say never and never say always, you might just eat those words.