

# To Fetch or Not to Fetch

## Evidence Search Part II

### Teaching the Passive Indication

by Deborah Palman

This article will present one method of teaching the passive indication of evidence based on motivational techniques such as those taught by Gottfried Dildei. This is a method which I developed myself based on his teachings, those of Sheila Booth and other motivational trainers.

I firmly believe in training the last behavior in a chain of events first. Motivational training is based on rewards. In training for evidence search, the dog is rewarded for indicating the article. If the dog learns to enjoy indicating because of the rewards associated with it, teaching him to search for the article is simply a matter of exposing him to progressively more difficult searching conditions.

Motivational training differs profoundly from the "traditional" compulsive or physical manipulation techniques because the motivational trainer manipulates the training situation and environment such that the dog wants to do the behavior and "discovers" on his own what to do to receive his reward. In contrast, traditional compulsive methods have the handler manipulate the dog and eventually the dog does the behavior to avoid corrections, or, if the techniques are mixed, possibly to avoid a correction and earn a reward. Dogs learn quickest and best by discovering how to earn their rewards without manipulation because manipulation causes them to become dependent on the prompts and cues of the manipulation process. To finish the training process, cues which accompany manipulation like the leash, correction collar, and hand and body movements have to be removed, adding confusion to the learning process. Also, dogs have a behavioral trait called the *opposition reflex*<sup>1</sup> which causes them to oppose manipulation by others. The effects of this reflex must be compensated for when the dog is physically manipulated.

The motivational method is the way dogs learn many "bad" habits in everyday life. For example, a few days ago, my back door was left closed but not latched. I have two young Shepherds in the house who are quite active and "unmannered." As I prepared to let them outside, the two of

---

<sup>1</sup> Sheila Booth, *Schutzhund Obedience - Training in Drive* (Ridgefield, CT: Podium Publications, 1992) pp. 17-18.

them rushed the door, and one happened to hit the door with her feet as she braked to a stop. This popped the door open and let them both out before I could open the door myself. After that single "learning" experience, the puppy hit the door with her feet many more times, because she learned that sometimes the door may open if she hits it. Raiding the trash, stealing food, chasing cats are all "motivationally" learned behaviors that can be hard to change.

The "traditional" trainer who is used to guiding, correcting, placing, commanding, prompting, etc. the dog into a behavior will find it hard to adjust to the idea of setting the situation up and letting the dog discover how to solve the puzzle. It takes knowledge and patience to figure out how to set situations up and wait for the dog to respond. The traditional trainer will want the dog to respond quickly and precisely, but usually a dog that is learning motivationally responds slowly and sloppily at first. This is not a problem because the dog will become quicker and more precise as he learns the way to earn his reward. Because the dog wants the reward, he will always respond as quick as he can at that stage of training, in contrast to the "correction trained" dog who will respond quickly only if the correction comes quickly. This is because the correction trained dog first seeks to avoid the correction rather than earn the reward. The motivational trainer should not over command, prompt or cue the dog beyond what is needed to teach the dog during the learning phases because this will make the dog dependant on the prompts and cues to do the behavior. If properly done, the actual command just releases the dog to do what he already really wants to do. Corrections should only become necessary in the advanced stages of teaching the indication when the dog definitely knows the indication and distractions overcome his desire to indicate. Then the dog is taught that he has to indicate. But this does not occur until the dog is reliable at indicating evidence under normal training circumstances.

A dog who has been taught by traditional methods with force hard enough to affect his relationship with his handler (in other words, the dog cannot feel "free" and relaxed around the handler) may not be able to adapt to motivational methods. Such a dog is inhibited and afraid to discover new things. He can be taught using motivational methods, but the handler may have to prompt, cue or mix some traditional work in with the motivational work.

An important point of any method of dog training is that only one small step should be taught at a time. Once the dog learns that step, you can progress to the next. A good rule to follow is to change only one variable per lesson. Some of the variables in evidence search would be the type of article, the place the search is being done, the type of ground cover, wind speed and direction, distractions, etc. All of these must be "generalized" (the dog exposed to many of these types of variables) before the dog is able to search in new places under new conditions as is needed

for street work. All the initial indication work is done with the same article until the dog is reliable in its indication, then the same article can be moved to different environments, or different articles used in the original environment, but never both factors changed at the same time. Fortunately, the dog learns very quickly after the initial teaching of the indication, so although many different training situations need to be presented to the dog, only two or three repetitions, if that, need to be done with each situation.

Motivational trainers train often but for very brief periods of time. Training for evidence search using this method could easily be done during normal patrol duties, taking only ten or fifteen minutes a day (including preparing the rewards).

This method requires the use of food as the reward to teach and maintain the behavior. If you have a problem with using food and building food drive in a dog for training purposes, then you are a little behind the times because food is being used by many agencies to train tracking and detector dogs, not to mention its widespread use by Schutzhund and AKC competitors. If you can't use food, another reward might be substituted, but food works best.

The dog being trained must also have food drive. You cannot free feed a dog and use this method unless you can find a treat that the dog really likes and will gobble up like he is starving. If the dog being trained does not have natural food drive, it can be created by not feeding the dog. A dog's physiology is such that a healthy dog can easily go for days without food, so not feeding for a day or more will not cause any harm. The food reward used must be something the dog really likes. Hot dogs, cheese, sausage or other fatty treats are highly palatable to dogs. The reward must be moist and soft and in pieces small enough for the dog to eat quickly. For example, hot dogs should be cut in half or quarters and then sliced every 1/3-1/2 inch or so to create a number of small pieces. If you have a problem with feeding your dog a high fat, high salt or preservative treat, there is an all-natural, nutritionally complete, semi-moist dog food product called "Rollover" which is manufactured and packaged like salami. Dogs really love it as a treat or bait, and you don't have to worry about whether or not the dog is getting proper nutrition. "Rollover" is marketed on the east coast by Kismet Enterprises, 2712 Estella Ave., Montoursville, PA 17754, Tel. 717-322-6559. Information on Rollover can also be obtained from Farm Meats Canada, Ltd., Tel. 403-279-8269.

The first step in training is to teach the indication, and this can be done in any quiet, distraction free environment. The handler needs a relatively large, flat, easily seen and scented article like a leather wallet or Schutzhund leather article, and a minimum of two cups of food reward (previously chopped up as described above) in a container, pocket or apron which allows the trainer to access the food easily. If this is started indoors,

a dish of food placed nearby will probably be fine, but outdoor and more advanced work will require the handler to carry the food.

This method will teach the dog to down on the article with the article between its paws. The method starts by teaching the dog to down in response to a closed hand containing food being placed on the ground between its front paws. Sheila Booth's book, *Schutzhund Obedience*<sup>2</sup>, describes this process (Note: "Champ" represents the dog):

"When first teaching the down, begin with Champ standing (not sitting) near you. Show him food in your right hand in front of his nose.

As soon as he shows interest in the food, close your hand. Lower it down and slightly back **all the way** to the ground as Champ's head follows it down.

The food arrives at the ground with Champ's head reaching back toward his elbows (Fig. 36), not forward toward his paws. If his rear is still in the air, use your left hand to stroke his spine, beginning just behind the withers.

**Stroke** his topline into the down position without using too much pressure, while allowing him to nibble the food to keep his head down. Trying to **push** the rear down only creates *opposition reflex* and resistance.

**As soon as** his entire body (elbows and hocks) reaches the ground, let him eat the food (Fig. 35). Keep feeding him **on the ground**, so his head reaches backward **behind** his front paws (Fig. 36).

While feeding, keep repeating Down. Keep him down with continuous feeding **on the ground** for several seconds.

**Before** he gets up on his own or rolls over onto one hip, clearly release him. This release is an important part of this exercise. Your dog is **not** permitted to get up when **he** wants to, only when **you** tell him Free."

During this training, the handler should praise the dog as he feeds the dog using the same words each time. This will associate the praise words with the reward of feeding, and allow the handler to substitute praise for feeding when the dog performs correctly later on and the handler cannot reward with food at the time the dog is correct.

If the dog already knows the down, this process should still be followed. The command down might be used at first to assist the dog, but it should be removed when the dog downs in response to the hand placement. Eventually the article will be the only "command" to down.

Once the dog downs reliably and smoothly with the process described above, the article is added. Secure, hold, or place the dog in a stay and place an article with a small pile of food on it in plain view within ten feet of

---

<sup>2</sup> Sheila Booth, *Schutzhund Obedience - Training in Drive* (Ridgefield, CT: Podium Publications, 1992) pp. 150-151.

the dog. You need enough food to attract the dog to the article and give you time to move in by the article to place your hand on the article before the dog finishes the food, loses interest and moves away. Some dogs will inhale the food and will need more to keep them in position over the article. While the dog eats, the handler gets ready and places his food-filled hand on the article as the dog finishes the last few pieces of food. The dog may nose the hand, but eventually it should recognize the "cue" from the teaching of the down and lay down with its nose over the article. When its position is correct or close to it, the handler releases the food onto the article. To maintain the proper position before a release command is given, the handler needs to drop more food on the article to keep the dog in the down. This should be done for several seconds until another batch of food is left on the ground and the article picked up in the same motion. Again, feed until the release command is given to stabilize the dog's position. If the dog shifts or gets up prematurely, don't correct, just stop feeding and try to do better next time. If the dog gets up before the release, the handler can use the non-feeding hand to stroke the dog or place the hand just above but not touching the dog's shoulders. If the dog starts to get up, the hand can be used to gently push the dog back into position before the dog rises up far enough so that it can oppose the push. Always reward with food after the dog resumes the correct position.

If the dog downs too far or too close to the article, use food to "steer" the dog into the proper position, or simply place the closed hand with food on the article and keep it closed until the dog readjusts. As soon as the dog is correct, it must be fed.

The handler must be generous with the food while the dog is down. I feel that it is the large reward the dog receives while in the down which makes it take the next learning step and go down without the hand being placed on the article.

The down indication with the hand on the article is practiced until the dog executes the motion smoothly, calmly and maintains the down for at least several seconds. The next step is to reduce the amount of food initially placed on the article to one or two pieces. A large amount of food seems to distract the dog when it is learning to down on its own without help.

The next step requires the dog to "discover" on its own that going down on the article will earn the reward. The article is put in plain sight with one or two pieces of food, and the handler should be close to the article. The dog is released with an accompanying search command (whatever you want to use, but something different from drug search, tracking, etc. commands), and the handler will be close to the dog as it eats the food on the article. At this point the handler should wait and observe closely. If the dog starts to leave, the handler should put his hand on the article and reward when the dog responds properly as described above. If the dog does not leave but stands over the article, the handler should remain motionless.

If nothing happens for a few seconds, the handler may want to start to place his hand (and food) on the article, but do it slowly or only reach halfway to the article. If the dog is ready for the next step, it will figure the situation out and go down on its own, although the down may be slow. When the dog goes down, it must be rewarded immediately and generously. If it does not go down, the previous step should be repeated, and the "hesitation" by the handler tried again until the dog goes down on its own.

Each training session should be short with no more than three or four repetitions. Any more work may bore the dog and produce unwanted behaviors. The dog should always be eager to work.

Once the dog "discovers" how to indicate, learning usually proceeds rapidly. The same article should be worked in plain view until the dog is very reliable with the handler close by, then the same situation is set up with the handler staying farther away or on a different side of the dog. When the dog indicates with the handler at a distance, then the other variables such as location, type of article, difficulty of the search, etc. can be changed. The article should have one or two pieces of food on it whenever a change is introduced, and at times the only change should be that the article has no food on it. The dog is always rewarded with food for a proper indication, and if it does not indicate or indicates out of position, the handler must place his hand with the food on the article to get the dog to indicate properly. At the advanced stages, be sure to have other people hide articles the handler has not touched to be sure the dog will indicate on human scent other than the handler's.

Throughout the dog's service, maintenance training should be done regularly with one or two pieces of food on the article to maintain the dog's positioning on the article. Eating the food places the dog's nose over the article and causes it to indicate with the article between its front legs. Placing the food in or under the article will make the dog nose or mouth the article to look for the food.

An alternative prey or toy reward can be used effectively once the dog has learned proper positioning and is stable. When the dog indicates properly, the handler should approach the dog and present the toy (a tug, hose or stick is best) to the dog while it is in the down, and the dog must be trained to take the toy on command while still in the down. Allowing the dog to break position to grab the toy can lead to undesirable changes in the dog's indication.

Officers who have a special need for certain types of evidence, such as spent rifle cartridges, firearms, etc., should spend extra time practicing with those items. Spent cartridges and burnt gunpowder have scents which seem to be easy for the dog to find, and dogs which train on them quickly become proficient. Training should also progress so that it occurs for long duration in the environments the dog will be searching. The dog also has to be introduced to articles hidden off the ground, a situation which is often

confusing to the dog at first and requires the handler to learn to read the dog.

One advantage of the motivational method is that mistakes by the handler do not create a lasting problem because the mistake has to be repeated several times before the dog learns the behavior permanently. If the dog does not respond correctly to the training situation, the handler then knows that he has made a mistake in setting up the training and can change it to achieve the correct response. With compulsive methods, a single strong correction given at the wrong time can have permanent results.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of motivational training is that it is truly fun to do. The handler is always inspired to create new and better ways to teach an exercise. To me, that is the real challenge and fun in dog training.