

Less is More

When discussing training a dog, that phrase, “*Less is More*” is not heard very often and I doubt it would make the top 20 of dog training tips, let alone the top 10. But, as I have grown in my dog training I have come to believe that in many cases “*Less is More*”!

Back in my early days of training, I was lucky to have as a mentor, a gal with years of experience and a dog who loved to train. I wanted my dog to be just like hers and so I trained and trained and trained. I would say how many times do I have to do this till my dog learns. I wanted a plan that was precise and I wanted to practice, practice, practice. When we met to train together, she would work her dog for 10 minutes, and then help me the rest of the time. I always thought she was just being nice and taking pity on me with my Novice A dog.

Over the years my own experience has shown that she really was on to something. By accident and because of “life getting in the way”, I found that I did not have the time I wanted to train my new dog. Five minutes here and two minutes there, running down to the agility field, or a quick 5 minutes to work on fronts and finishes while cooking dinner was all the time I had. Surprisingly, the dog still learned! I found I did not have to drill, repeat over and over, nor spend a half hour to an hour on every training session.

Another surprising revelation came after some frankly, difficult training sessions. My dog simply wasn't getting it. I would try and try and frustration set in for both of us. Not a fun way to end training. But, the next time I went to train, I would return to that difficult area and SURPRISE, the dog had it!! It literally took me aback. It must have sunk in somehow, somewhere!!! I started keeping track of these frustrating training sessions; and, most importantly, I stopped getting frustrated. I calmly stopped training, but took the time to play tug or catch or whatever before we left the training area. Some welcome side effects of stopping when the going got rough was the dog was happier and more confident and more than willing to train the next time. I feel that was because I didn't wear the dog down, or bore him, or give him opportunities to invent additional incorrect ways to perform an exercise.

Of course, when you have less time you must train smarter – you must think through what you'd like to accomplish in your short period of time. You must have a plan but you must also be willing to adapt – what you want to train today, may not be what your dog needs training in that day! They'll let you know!

Other benefits of this type of training are that it is always easier to fit in 5 to 10 minutes of training in a day than a whole hour or so. Plus, our dogs need quality time with us and this fills the bill. Both dog and human benefit from this interaction - we feel a sense of accomplishment and our dog receives much needed and wanted attention.

Try - “*Less is More*” – and you'll see what I mean.

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