Training 101

Dogs learn from the immediate consequences of their actions. This gives the trainer four ways to influence a dog's behavior, summarized in the following chart:

	GIVE	REMOVE
SOMETHING PLEASANT	*REWARD* (increases probability of behavior)	*"TIME OUT"* (decreases probability of behavior)
SOMETHING PAINFUL OR SCARY	*PUNISHMENT* (decreases probability of behavior)	*ESCAPE/AVOIDANCE* (increases probability of behavior)

What this chart means is that there are 1) good things and 2) bad things and that both these can 1) start and 2) end. Dogs, like all animals, are constantly trying to start and keep the good stuff (attention, walks, food, dogs, play) and avoid starting or terminate the bad stuff (pain and fear). If you take control of these things and make them contingent ("if you do this first, then you can have that") on good behavior, you will control the dog.

Method Choices

Older-school dog training relied heavily on the "bad stuff," such as jerking the dog's neck using a metal collar, to motivate the dog. Dog-friendly methods have since developed that make greater and more sophisticated use of reward and reward-removal as principle motivation. The control is as good as that achieved with traditional methods and avoids the side-effects of the use of pain and fear.

Your Leverage: Reward and Reward Removal

Most dogs will work for: food, play, walks and (if they like dogs) access to other dogs. They'll also work for attention after they've been alone. Timing is everything. Because it's necessary to reward the desired behavior so precisely and it's not always possible to get a treat or game to the dog fast enough, a key word or sound that means "you win!" – called a Reward Marker - is a useful tool. Another valuable aid is a signal that means "you just lost!" and is called a "No Reward Marker (NRM). NRM's require split-second timing just as reward-markers do and are always followed by reward removal.

When training new behavior, a reward is given for every correct response. To maintain "fluent" behavior, rewards are given intermittently. The craftiest use of intermittent reward is to reward the *best examples* of the behavior.

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