

## The Santa Caligen Irish Setter Club, Inc.

### RANDOM THOUGHTS ON TRAINING

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We know from the research conducted at the Animal Behavior Laboratory in Mount Desert Island, Maine that all puppies start using their brain at twenty one days, and at six weeks of age, the brain will be as matured as it will ever be. All the brain lacks is experience. Basically, a dog relying on himself learns from trial and error. For example: Take a puppy that discovers the wonderful, big, world outside of the whelping box. He places his front paws on the side of the box trying to look over the edge. In his eagerness to see more, he straightens his hind legs to make himself taller. The hind legs are straightened more vigorously and he is jumping with his hind legs. Jumping carries him high enough to lock his front paws over the edge of the wall and he can chin himself. His hind legs try to find a foot hold on the wall of the box and finally a sharp toe nail catches the edge and he throws himself over the wall and lands outside. What has the puppy learned?

He has learned that he can get out of the whelping box by getting his front paws on the wall of the box and jumping. The next time it wishes out of the box, it will run, with puppy enthusiasm, toward the wall of the box, leap upward while too far away and hit midway. Through trial and error, the puppy will learn there is an ideal distance to be from the wall before jumping. You can think of many like examples.

We know that a dog is a creature of habit. Through repetition, a dog will do the same thing under the same circumstances. Example: The dog is accustomed to going out of the house to the back yard through a door that opens on the right. Move to another house with a door that opens on the left and you will find the dog on the right side of the door for a long time and not on the correct side. We have some idea what a dog goes through learning by trial and error, so let us analyze what happens when we teach him to heel.

Teaching a dog to heel is done by placing him on the left, walking forward and by jerking the leash you keep him from lagging too far behind or walking too far ahead, while you keep saying the word "Heel". Here are the factors we have involved in teaching Heel. Habit through repetition of the exercise. We have imposed upon a drive of a dog's nature. He walks correctly beside you because he wishes to please. Drive can be psychological: for pleasure, like the puppy wanting out of the whelping box; for protest, by chewing up a pillow while being left alone; instinctive, as in pointing a bird; and physical, as in hunger. Stimulus to start the dog heeling by saying, "Heel". Enforcement of the command by jerking on the leash, which Pavlov called "Reinforcement". Reinforcement can be positive, like praise and petting; negative, like scolding and whipping.

Repetition: Born trainers know instinctively that you cannot train a dog for too long a period. First, the dog will lose interest, be bored and lose the zest for the exercise. Second, a training session that is too prolonged will enable a dog to make an increasing number of mistakes which will be difficult to avoid in the future. Frequent short sessions is the correct way, that is, twice a day for ten to twenty minutes.

Drive: Psychological, which gives pleasure of seeing the other side of the hill; instinctive, as in pointing birds or to reproduce; and physical, such as satisfying hunger or avoiding pain of punishment.

Stimulus: Saying the word "Heel". The sharper the word the better. There are many stimuli; snapping the fingers, whistles, hand signals, silent whistles, etc. Anything that a dog can hear, see, smell, feel or sense.

Reinforcement: Positive - food, petting, pleased voice, etc. Negative - pan of water thrown in face, displeased voice, electric shock, whipping, etc. Jim Barnes has always remarked about the skilled training demonstrated by dogs on T V. The hunger drive method is the most frequently used. This is the latest way of using this method. Instead of feeding the dog every twenty-four hours, they let the dog go for another eight to twelve hours. When the dog does an exercise correctly, the command or action is reinforced by a piece of food. Zest of performance is increased later by not always giving food after each exercise, but maybe on every third or fifth time. Anticipation is then being used as a "reinforcement" to gain zest.

Negative reinforcement has been used for years to train dogs. It is very obvious when a dog is on point and flinches every time the flushing whip strikes the grass. Negative reinforcement is best used after a dog has learned to do an exercise and then disobeys. One authority feels that one of the best negative reinforcements is to grab the dog on each side of the neck and shake the very devil out of him. Bird dog trainers use a very similar method by taking the dog by the collar and base of the tail to shake and set them up.

Another form of reinforcement we call psychological. Usually, it is in the form of surprise or startling the dog. I remember when my first Irish Setter was a puppy and came flying into the bedroom and put her cold nose on me while I was asleep. Before I thought, I yelled at her and as she ran out of the room, I threw the pillow. Now the voice did not hurt her and the pillow never touched her, but it did startle her. She never touched me after that when I was asleep, although she might have her nose within an inch of my face and smiling like crazy.

There is a new reinforcement that we are hearing about these days. It consists of a chain made out of a special metal alloy with a tuning fork attached. The tuning fork is pitched in such a way that its tone seems to be able to interrupt the dog's thoughts and causes him to execute the command. Later, habit will make him execute the command of the voice without the reinforcement of the tuning fork. How much better to gain the dog's attention in this manner rather than using a club to get his attention as the story goes about the mule trainer.

There is one very important factor about training a dog that must always be kept in mind. You cannot teach a dog to do anything until first he does it on his own. You have all heard that success in training a dog is to be able to convey the idea of what you wish him to do. This is not as simple as it sounds. You can place a dog in a box, take his right paw and press it on a lever which will open a door and release food into the box. You can do this ten times a day with the dog for thirty consecutive days, and the thirty-first day you can place him in the box and he will not know how to press on the lever to release food into the box. He must be placed in the box and permitted to find out by chance on his own that pressing on the lever will release food. Professional trainers like Stan Head with Ch. Shandy or Jim Barnes with Runner Up Beanie cannot teach a dog to point. All they can do is to provide the opportunity for the dog to point. Once the dog has pointed, then they can perfect its staunchness, style, etc.

When is the best time to train a dog? Play train a puppy from six weeks to twelve weeks old. Train seriously from then on until the puppy is six months old and the dog will always be able to learn for the rest of its life. This is the period that a dog learns to learn. For Heaven's Sake - do not teach a dog to sit before he goes to the trainer.

When is the best time to place an Irish Setter with a professional bird dog trainer? This will depend upon what you wish out of your dog. If you are like me and first wish a pet and then a hunting and field trial dog, then do not place it with a trainer until it is about a year old. A dog has to learn to be a pet just like it has to learn to be a bird dog. It is pretty miserable to me, when a dog is two or three years old and wants to play with you, but does not know how to play. If field trialing is most important, then place the dog with a trainer four weeks after it has had all of its permanent shots.

When is the best time to place a dog in training in this country? January is the best time. Vegetation is dead and moisture will not heighten its odor like it does in the fall. Trainers are not so swamped with dogs now as in the fall. Do not forget that it takes the dog and trainer about one month to get to know each other, so do not expect anything out of a dog with a trainer in less than three months. Very little then. I am sure that Ch. County Clare's Shandy has been with Stan Head for three to four years and I know that Runner Up Beanie has been with Jim Barnes two and one-half years. You do not polish a dog into a Red Setter Champion in less time.

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