

# **Training Efficiently: Introduction**

## **by**

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*This article is meant to get you to think about your training, and is not a how-to or fix-it article, but one meant to get you to think about what you would do to make more out of your training time. I will expand the article in the near future to cover the remedies for these problems outlined below.*

Recently at a police K9 decoy seminar I spoke to the decoys about how to organize their in-service training time more efficiently. I asked them how they set up their building search training, and as usual, during an in-service day a building search scenario is set up and the dog is sent into the building and it is "one and done."

I asked them to think about how a building search is broken down: (1) Taking the Start (2) Searching and Locating the Subject and (3) Indicating that Location. Then I asked them how many times they ever, in training after their academy, separated out the 3 components and trained each one of them with sufficient repetitions to allow the dog to actually improve in either one of the areas.

When approached in this way, you can actually set up training to make progress, but only if you work repeatedly on the same concept, instead of always training the whole. One exercise which incorporates one repetition of all three components does little to help improve any one of the individual skills.

Suppose your dog takes the start poorly, perhaps goes in the building after you release him with little enthusiasm, or in fact gets confused and shows a behavior like searching for narcotics, or he looks to the handler to help him out. The typical remedy is to show him the decoy, and then send him in, but this creates a dependency on what we call "hot" starts, where the dog associates the behavior with the visual or auditory stimulation of the decoy. This is necessary initially in developing the behavior, but must be faded out of the cue for the start before we can say we have a finished exercise. Once the decoy appears the dog may search with enthusiasm and locate and indicate well. But this is moot if the start doesn't go well. The answer is that you must train his start, to be sure that each time you deploy, he is in the right frame of mind. You need exercises to improve how he takes the start, because if he can't take a cold start (by cold I mean without any stimulation, as he would for a hidden subject) it doesn't matter how well he searches or locates or indicates. This training requires repetitions, and needs to be separated out of the rest of the building search and trained with sufficient repetition to develop a solid and reliable behavior.

The same can be said about tracking. I have seen a number of dogs that, once on the track, track well, and locate their subject easily, however, they have a hard time actually casting and locating the track. This, taking a cold start on a track, or taking a cold start on a building search for that matter, is a skill unto itself that needs to be developed.

Now, expand how you think about your building search training to include the other two areas: Searching and Indication. Many dogs I see usually have one part of the whole that is weaker than the others. This is normal for any K9 team. If this is the case you need to get multiple repetitions on the weak link in order to develop the entire skill. When you think about your training, try to think about how you can break each exercise he does down into simpler components, and then the challenge is to figure out how to set up training to improve the component your dog is weakest in, while simplifying the other components, so that the training efficiently addresses the problem area, and keeps the other pieces simple for the dog so they don't add complication that is unnecessary for the goal you are presently working on.