



The handler wasn't any longer going to try to show him who was boss. This was the first certified dog I had returned to me in replacement for a green dog in 20 years. After I got him back, he came up the line on me a few times, but we eventually developed a relationship where I could do anything to him, without resistance directed toward me. To achieve this I never "put him in his place," or "showed him who is boss" by physically punishing his dominance. I did however put him in his place with behavioral sleight of hand. I had to rebuild trust. Initially I couldn't use physical pressure or correction because that was a trigger for handler aggression that was trained into him by the poor choices of method at the training academy. Instead I provided rewards and withheld rewards. It was a long process to undo what had been done, but eventually I was able to rebuild trust and mutual respect with this powerful dog, and eventually I was able to work with him on a pinch collar again and an e-collar, and use thoughtful, proper applications of correction without resistance, and of course good training to set up success so he could get rewarded, a lot. I had Freddy for 5 more years until he passed away, and he never bit me. I trained him and titled him in PSA to a PDC and used him often in police K9 seminars to train decoys. I used my brain and technique to show him who was boss.

The other category of Police K9 class washouts is when we have dogs returned because the dog is too handler soft for the training method. A young dog that is very drivey and has good environmental nerve might also be a little handler soft. This is often a corollary of age and general immaturity. After all, we are accepting dogs into training earlier and earlier because of the worldwide demand for dogs. Dogs can be precocious in drive and nerve, but socially (pack order wise) they will be a little underdeveloped to deal with a strong personality like that of a cop. This dog needs to be built up in social dominance, the exact opposite of the dominant dog. Instead, however, what normally happens is that if the training method is one that is compulsive in nature, which is centered on a lot of punishment (e.g. correction), the pressure is too much for the more handler soft dog. Handler soft dogs want to be in line, and when we apply punishment too quickly in the teaching of new concepts, the softer dog just wants to be correct and avoid conflict with the handler. This often results in what we call safety seeking behavior or taken too far, a complete shutdown. This is often interpreted as the dog being weak, but that isn't always the case. Nothing makes me angrier than an ignorant trainer, who does not understand the interplay between a dog's nerves and his drives, tell me that it's the dog's fault for "shutting down" when in reality the cookie-cutter training shut him down. The trainer who just repeats what he was taught 20 years ago without learning anything new will never see that this dog needs more motivation to get him through his adolescence and less compulsion. If he is given that confidence building, the dog will probably be as tough as the 18 month old dog next to him in class when he gets to 18 months old. If we just ignore the behavioral realities, we throw the baby out with the bath water and a good dog is lost to the agency. Well, not lost, because when they come back, we alter the training and the dog generally ends up on the street after some remediation, confidence building, and a change in training method.

Trainers in general need to expand their understanding of working younger dogs, as the future is in younger dogs. The successful trainers of the future will not be the ones who can test and reject 40 dogs at the vendor's kennel because they are looking for perfection, but those that have the talent to recognize how to mold something remarkable out of the more raw materials of younger adolescent dogs. This is what happened in Europe before the 18 month old used to come over. We never saw the confidence building of the young adolescent dog because





it happened before he came to America. But the days of every dog going into class being titled or a minimum of 18 - 24 months old are past. Demand draws out more and more 10 month old dogs who are high drive and environmentally comfortable. Trainers can never forget that these dogs are not adults, and how they react to their handlers is more or less the way a puppy will react. You may be able to pressure them in bite work like crazy when they are in drive, but their handler can hurt their feelings easily.

During the early weeks of a K9 school, when using a relatively compulsive obedience regimen, the dog will likely react in the extreme of his present social state (dominant or relatively submissive) as you work him. What I mean by this, is that if the dog tends dominant, compulsive obedience will draw out more of that behavior as the dog reacts to the force. Conversely, in a softer dog, the dog will tend to seek safety and show extreme deference as he is punished. Most schools I know of (except my own) start training a green police dog candidate with obedience in their classes to establish "pack order" and to establish behavioral control over the green dogs. This is a left over habit from when in the early 1980s most of the dogs coming over were 18 months to 2 years old, often titled dogs, which were mentally mature. The compulsive methods are left overs as well from that time. If the method is generally compulsive, the relationship with the handler is defined by the handler trying to impose his will (dominance) on the dog. I suggest that if you do drive work first in the weeks when you are bonding (hunting, tracking, bite building without compulsion) the dog and you will have an even better relationship. Leave obedience for later when you have a defined relationship with the dog and his confidence has come up. Let him associate you with expressing his drives. This will help build the softer dogs, as their activities lead to more and more wins and thus confidence and independence, and it will help you relate better and establish a bond with the stronger more dominant dog without getting into a battle of wills before you know one another. Obedience by its nature sets up that conflict when done compulsively. See my article," The Power of Reward: Obedience," Police K9 Magazine, March/April 2009 for an alternative approach.

I think it is important that in choosing an academy where the trainers will train the dogs along with the handler, and the potential is there for a dog to washout (costing the department and vendor time and money to have to start from scratch with a new dog) that the agency understand the methodology of the trainers and if that methodology hasn't evolved with the realities of training younger dogs, and using proper motivation and thoughtfully applied compulsion, perhaps it will serve the agency to save time and money by finding another academy to attend that understands these issues addressed in this article. In the next article we will discuss how to deal with a dominant dog, and understand the behavioral methods used in training these dogs in order to avoid conflict, and the resultant handler aggression which can cause down time for the team, workman compensation claims, and worse the loss of confidence in deploying the handler-reactive dog in a serious high-risk scenario, which could cause the handler and dog to be compromised.

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Tarheel Canine Training Inc. is a nationally renowned training facility for police service dogs, and has placed trained police dogs at federal, state and local law enforcement agencies nationally and internationally since 1993. Jerry is often a featured speaker at national police K9 conferences, and travels extensively giving seminars to police departments, the US Military, and sport trainers across the United States. Jerry has written a book, Controlled Aggression, which is rapidly becoming the standard text for understanding the fundamentals of canine aggression training for police service, personal protection, and competitive dog sports. Jerry also maintains a free blog at www.tarheelcanine.com.

Many of the training concepts mentioned in this article are covered in depth in published articles available on the Tarheel Canine website at www.tarheelcanine.com/media-area/training-articles/

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