**TALK TO THE PAW – IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WITH OUR DOGS**

**Clear Communication**

Suppression of excitement / doing dog things – how would you like it if every time you got excited about something, you were told to knock it off – no excitement allowed! No dancing, no going to parties, no laughing out loud, no jumping for joy, no running to see someone you love!

Need a balanced life – need excitement and need calmness – where do you want excitement and where do you want calmness. So if you don’t want excitement and bouncing up and down and on and off furniture – don’t allow play and excitement in the house sometimes and other times get upset with your dog or tell them no when they begin to show that excitement and jump on the couch with you.

When the dog is going to get a reward – the **marker** – a word or sound (“yes” or clicker) – must precede when the reward comes (classical conditioning)

One of the benefits of making sure our dogs understand that the **marker** brings the reward is we can get the food out of sight faster

Dogs learn through this form of communication that their behavior has an effect on their environment and we as their handlers are an important part of that environment. Their behavior can make things happen for them – good and bad. When they figure out what brings the reward, it makes the behavior that much stronger.

**Jackpotting Rewards**

Jackpotting is when we give multiple rewards (anything more than 1) to a dog (and what is important to your dog), one at a time in fast succession. When we provide the jackpot can send a lot of information to a dog, especially one that is just learning new behaviors.

Many people will jackpot only when the dog does something extra special, like sit really fast or recall immediately and not give any reward, or only one piece, if the dog sits slowly or considers whether to recall. But what can be happening is we are telling the dog what they did was not worth a reward.

Generally, dogs don’t fully understand that a slower sit is a bad thing – they sat, right? We have to ask ourselves, what state of, mind is our dog in when this happened? This is generally related to motivation and communication.

If your dog does a different behavior (sitting on his/her hip as opposed to sitting up straight / square) that is an incorrect sit and therefore a reward can be withheld – provided of course you have taught the correct position for a sit. Then when your dog does sit correctly, jackpotting the correct sit will speak volumes to your dog as to what is correct and what get rewarded!

Behavior of a dog I directly related to the previous reinforcement history. Remember we initially learned how important rate of reinforcement is? That is communicating to the dog, the more you focus on me, the faster the rewards come!

So, if you jackpot your dog for doing the correct behavior (even if a little slow) your dog’s motivation goes up higher and the behavior will begin to occur faster and faster.

**Non-Reinforcing Markers**

A non-reinforcing marker, or a negative marker, is a word that lets the dog know he/she made a mistake. The most common non-reinforcing marker words are “no”, “nope”, “try again” but you can choose any word that is only used for the purpose of letting your dog know a mistake was made.

Part of communication is letting the dog know when a mistake is made.

We then will ask the dog to do the desired behavior again, use our reinforcing marker (yes or a clicker) and then reward when they do it correctly.

There are a couple of important things to remember about non-reinforcing marker.

First, keep emotion out of the equation! When we become angry or exhibit negative emotion into the “no”, the dog’s energy, drive, motivation decrease and fear (or aggression) and/or avoidance will occur.

Second is timing. Just as the timing of your reinforcing marker is important, so is the timing of your non-reinforcing marker. The moment the dog makes a mistake, give your non-reinforcing marker firmly but not in an angry tone, and ask for the behavior you want again. You may need to say “no” a couple of time if your dog offers a behavior you don’t want until the desired behavior is achieved.

If you have charged your maker word/sound and you have built engagement, desire and motivation to play/train with you, your dog will continue to stay motivated and keep trying until he/she gets it right.