Allie: General Note: I omitted most technical terms and the Lindsay citations. Pro trainers have to learn and internalize the science and the technicalities, but clients, especially at the beginning, tend to get confused/side-tracked by a lot of technical stuff.

Later, when your client (particularly people like Nicole or Jose) is hooked on FSDT, you can teach the science.

Please bear in mind Mike’s advice to talk at a 6th grade level. BTW, Yoda Mike is just taking Einstein’s advice: “If you can't explain it to a six-year old, you don't understand it yourself.” 😊

Foundation-Style Dog Training In A Nutshell

Making your relationship with your dog rewarding for you both is Foundation Style Dog Training’s goal. Based on scientific knowledge and real-world experience, we know that the best dog-human relationships require a fair and balanced human-dog exchange. This requires cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes in both dogs and people. These changes create greater social competence, cooperation, and trust, as well as improved behavior and obedience. In other words, FSDT improves your relationship/quality of life with your dog by improving your dog’s relationship/quality of life with you.

This does not mean that Fido gets to do whatever he wants whenever he wants. Throughout FSDT, for practical and legal as well as scientific reasons, leadership is our responsibility. Leaders of a wolf pack decide when to do different things, where to do them, and how to do them. But they aren’t despots. Pack members have plenty of opportunities to do what they want, and leaders sometimes let pack members make decisions for the group. But, whenever needed, they correct members for breaking pack rules. That’s because breaking rules can endanger the pack.

Dogs are descended from wolves who co-evolved with humans. They are highly intelligent, sensitive creatures and have been designed by both mother nature and breeding to look to humans for leadership. This isn’t speculation: Archaeology, genetics, laboratory and breeding experiments all prove it. This means we owe it to Fido to be his leader. It’s our responsibility.

‘Leading’ does not mean strong-arming Fido for doing ‘wrong.’ It’s not retribution for being ‘bad.’ It means showing Fido what to do, letting him know when he’s gotten it right and correcting him – in the least aversive way possible – whenever he has not. In this regard, it bears repeating: Dogs are highly intelligent, sensitive creatures who depend on human leadership for their safety and well-being.

Properly done, ‘punishment,’ is the least amount of discomfort needed to get Fido’s attention so that you can correct him if he doesn’t correct himself. It’s not retribution for being ‘bad.’ Only In a small minority of cases, particularly with dogs who were adopted as puppies by knowledgeable owners, very little punishment is needed. But this is not the case with most dog owners. It’s unrealistic and often harmful to try to train a dog without ever using any kind of punishment.

Training Equipment In A Nutshell

For thousands of years, people have used some kind of leash and collar to teach as well as control their dogs. Generally, Foundation Style Dog Training uses leashes of various lengths, starting with 6 feet and a harness or collar to teach obedience. For the most part, harnesses are used for puppies because their bones are soft and a collar can damage the throat and trachea.

For dogs, although we sometimes start with a flat collar, in general, we use a plastic or metal prong (aka pinch) type collar in Phase 2 and an e-collar in Phase 3, especially if your goal is solid off-leash obedience. In general, we do not use Halti-style collars, for a variety of comfort and safety reasons.

Although prongs look like instruments of torture, if worn and used properly, they are much safer than a flat collar, especially for energetic, untrained, and/or reactive dogs. That’s because leash pressure is distributed evenly around a dog’s neck, not on a single point, the trachea. (Although Martingales also distribute pressure evenly, prongs are more motivational because they get your dog’s attention quickly. This greatly reduces the need to repeatedly correct.)

E-collars have a bad rep because of the misconceptions that: the stimulation feels like a shock from an electrical outlet; it can burn a dog’s neck; and the unfortunate fact that most trainers introduce and use them improperly. The facts: (a) stim from a good e-collar is like what people feel from muscle-related electrotherapy; (b) a good e -collar has over 100 or more stim levels and most of the time only low levels are needed; (c) stim from a good e-collar is very brief and very consistent; (c) what looks like a burn from an e-collar is caused by chafing from collars that are too loose and/or kept on for too long in one place; (d) if introduced, taught and employed according to the FSDT protocols, e-collar stim is, overwhelmingly, no more aversive than finger pumps. In effect, e-stim is the just like long-distance finger-pumps. It’s the safest, least-aversive way to teach safe, long-distance, off-leash obedience.

Unfortunately, e-collars are banned in some jurisdictions, so unless you choose to conceal them, thereby evading the law, what alternatives are there for safe-off leash obedience? Unfortunately, for most dogs in most cases, the alternatives – devices like throw chains or bbs – are both dangerous and cruel. I do not recommend them, in short.

IMO, the best alternative is to rely on a long-line for a long, long time, perhaps forever, or at least until you are 100% certain that Fido obeys you 99% of the time. Even then, you need to make sure Fido’s recall (‘Fido. Come!) is 100% reliable and remember to always carry a leash and/or longline to preempt any possibly dangerous situation. Depending on breed, temperament and many other factors, including proximity of people, dogs, and other critters, your dog might become very reliable off-leash without e-collar training. But that varies on a case-by-case basis and probably will take a longer time, with less certain results than e-collar training.

(In Phase 1, leash and collar are used mainly for safety purposes. The only exceptions -- where very light corrections are used, if needed -- are Loose Leash Walking.)

Bottom line: FSDT e-collar training is overwhelmingly the least aversive way to teach reliable off leash behavior.

Bottom Line: Every type of training equipment is a tool. Every kind of tool can be misused and abused. It’s not the equipment, per se, it’s how it’s introduced and used.

Foundation-Style Training Phases In A Nutshell

Foundation Style Dog Training is done in three distinct phases, each having a specific purpose, and each building on the previous one. In other words, you need to understand the whys and wherefores of FSDT Phase 1 in order to understand Phases 2 and 3.

Think of **Phase 1** as kindergarten or nursery school. You come in with your dog and a set of goals for you and your dog to accomplish. Whatever prior training experience you might have had, FSDT starts from scratch, with no assumptions made about what you and your dog know or don’t know. That means, in a no-distraction/low-distraction environment we teach you and your dog (‘Fido’) a simple communication system, a language. Then we use Luring, Praise, Petting, Treats, Play, and a few other techniques to teach Fido that learning basic obedience -- Sit, Down, Walking on a Loose Leash, Off, Place, etc – from you is a lot of fun and very rewarding.

We show you some basic training skills, like how to lure a desired behavior, when to Praise and Treat, how and when not to Treat, how long training sessions should be, how to handle the leash when on a walk, along with some additional skills.

Most importantly, if Fido doesn’t do what we want, we assume that he doesn’t yet understand what we want and/or is distracted because he can’t control his feelings. We do not assume he is ‘being bad.’ At this stage we are teaching Fido how to learn. We do so by getting Fido to do some simple behaviors for a little while in a non-distracting environment. When he does the behavior, he gets sincere praise, treats, and affection. If not, we don’t get angry. It’s not his fault. But he doesn’t get treats and praise. We just try again until he gets it. When he does, we introduce the verbal cue – like ‘Fido. Climb.’ -- associated with that specific behavior. The only time the leash and collar are used for anything but safety or to help Fido is basic loose-leash walking. In other words, *in Phase 1, the only ‘punishment’ is withholding treats, praise, and affection until Fido repeats the exercise and gets it right.* For each and every command, we don’t move on to Phase 2 until we’re sure Fido learned its meaning in Phase 1.

The overriding goal of **Phase 2** is to teach Fido what punishment is, how to quickly escape it and, after he knows how to escape it, how to completely avoid punishment. To do this, we want Fido to ‘mess up,’ so that he can learn from his mistakes. To help him ‘mess up,’ we utilize low-level distractions. And when he ‘messes up,’ we punish him.

‘Punishment’ is a loaded word, I know. We are conditioned to associate ‘punishment’ with physical and emotional cruelty. But Foundation-Style Dog Training ‘punishment’ is like someone tapping on your shoulder to get your attention and then telling you what you need to do next. It’s the least amount of physical discomfort required to tell Fido he’s not done what you told him to do. Ninety-nine percent of the time, it’s no more than light finger pumps on your leash. And then, just after finger pumping, you help Fido by repeating the command and maybe guide him with the leash, or even a little luring. For example, if Fido doesn’t obey a command that he learned Phase 1 – like ‘Fido. Down.’ -- you will finger-pump and repeat the command until he obeys. Then, as soon as he does, you enthusiastically praise, treat, pet, and free him. This is what Phase 2 - Escape is about.

Once we are sure Fido’s knows how to escape punishment, we teach him how to avoid it completely. We do so by saying ‘No.’ as soon as he begins to disobey and very quickly finger-pumping while repeating the command until he obeys. As always, as soon as he obeys, you praise, treat, and free him. In a little while, Fido will learn to obey as soon as he hears ‘No.’ because he’ll get praise, treats, and affection. Now Fido knows how to avoid punishment, even with some minor distractions.

**Phase 3** is where we teach Fido to obey off-leash, in real-world conditions. It generally involves the use of an e-collar to punish Fido when he’s disobeyed and telling him what to do instead. The first step is to pair e-stim with finger pumps so that Fido learns to associate the e-stim with finger pumps. When he does, finger pumps become less and less necessary and you can teach Fido how to escape and then avoid the e-stim. Once this happens, leash or longline are not needed any more. If Fido’s learned his lessons well in Phase 2, Phase 3 training is pretty easy, as long as we don’t introduce too much distraction too soon.

What does ‘Management’ Mean?

When you begin owning and training an untrained or poorly trained dog, many problem behaviors have to be managed by separating the dog from whatever causes the problem behavior.

For example, if it’s counter-surfing, you need to physically separate the dog from counters. If it’s running to the door whenever the doorbell rings, you might have to put the dog in another room before you answer the bell. Etc. Etc. Etc. Then, when you are ready, you can introduce anonymous/environmental aversives of various kinds, to discourage the unwanted behavior.

If it’s reactivity/aggression/excessive skittishness, you might have to carefully structure your walks until you have taught your dog how to avoid whatever it is that triggers him.

The ideal goal, the dream of all dog owners who care about their dog, is continuous deep communication between owner and dog, communication that’s so strong, leash and collar are always unnecessary except for legal reasons.

The reality is that this goal seldom is fully realized, and even if it is, it’s almost always a good idea, from a safety as well as a legal perspective, to have Fido wear some kind of device to ensure obedience in potentially dangerous situations.

Art Lopatin

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