

Connie Cleveland Workshop

Feedback from out-of-state judges consistently talk about how it's such a pleasure but so difficult to judge obedience competition here. The reason they make such comments is we are blessed in northern California to have such a wide array of highly skilled and experienced dog trainers coupled with extraordinary dogs. Even so I am consistently amazed at the thirst for improvement, to seek out new ideas and solve nagging arcane problems.

On April 6-7 The Oakland Dog Training Club and the Napa Valley Dog Training Club co-sponsored an obedience workshop featuring Connie Cleveland. Connie has had over 30 years' experience in all aspects of training dogs. Although she has fairly strong opinions about some of the newer rules. She has written articles for the Golden Retriever News, Front and Finish Magazine the AKC Gazette and many others. Connie has a significant presence on the web demonstrating her methods on YouTube.



[YouTube.com/DogTrainersWorkshop](https://www.youtube.com/DogTrainersWorkshop)

Connie Cleveland was born in Lansing, Michigan and received her B.S. in Engineering from Michigan State University. She spent 10 years as the Training Director for Dogs for the Disabled before opening the Dog Trainers Workshop. Currently, Connie teaches obedience to over 100 students each week. Additionally she offers private lessons, and conducts weekend training seminars across the country and internationally. Connie's obedience experiences include 8 Obedience Trial Champions, a UDT Maltese and a CDX Shih-tzu.

<http://www.dogtrainersworkshop.com/>

It's no exaggeration to report that the people who attended Connie's workshop came away with more than a few ideas on how to improve their training technique and in some cases Connie managed to change a frustrated handler into a confident and highly motivated team.

Here's my take away from the Workshop:

Connie is pretty much a no-nonsense trainer and doesn't suffer fools. In her words, "It's okay to try and fail, It's just not forgivable not to try." Her style and techniques are modeled after five main points:

1. dogs are problem solvers,
2. dogs learn by trial and error,
3. dogs stop behavior when it does not produce the desired reward,
4. dogs are situational, and
5. dogs perform correctly prior to learning a task

Connie stated that a successful trainer with understanding how this works can use these facts to successfully train your own dog. With this information, you can present each obedience exercise as a problem for the dog to solve, and then help the dog discover the appropriate solution. The entire Workshop centered around the practical application of those five points.

As Connie puts it As you teach your dog the steps necessary to learn the obedience exercises, he will respond correctly or incorrectly, and you must learn how to respond appropriately. When the dog makes the correct choice you should respond with some form of positive reinforcement.



To be an effective dog trainer, it is important that you understand positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is your happy and excited response to your dog's correct behavior. You should get in the habit of praising the dog with your voice (Good! Excellent! Wow!) when the behavior you desire occurs. You can (and sometimes should!) follow the praise with a toy, treat or game that the dog enjoys. Praise, treats, toys and games can all be forms of positive reinforcement.

Do NOT use praise in normal conversation ("You are such a good dog, do you want to

go outside now?). Save the exclamations your dog perceives as praise for good performance! When your dog responds incorrectly, the effective trainer tries to determine whether the dog was making an “effort error” or a “lack of effort error.”

An effort error occurs when a dog is attentive and trying to do what you have asked, but makes a mistake. This error is characterized by confusion on the dog’s part. This is an “honest error.” You have compassion for a child who is trying to learn something and simply does not understand. Treat your dog the same way.

A dog who makes an effort error needs help from his handler. It is the handler’s job to teach the dog the correct response. The handler should be gentle but firm as he shows the dog what to do. There will be times when the handler should simply put the dog in the correct position (i.e. The dog does not know how to sit, so the handler places him in a sitting position).



There will be times when the handler leads the dog in the correct direction (i.e. Pointing the dog toward a dumbbell). There are also times when the handler needs to place the dog in a location necessary to try again (i.e. The handler takes the dog back to the location of go-out to attempt the directed jumping again).



Becoming an effective dog trainer involves learning how to be creative enough to help your dog understand what you want him to do. Connie uses the term “ You are your dog’s coach”.

Becoming frustrated or angry when your dog makes an error is ineffective. You must learn how to communicate with him. These articles are designed to give

you plenty of ideas about how to do just that!

A “Lack of Effort Error” occurs when your dog is not being attentive and not trying to do what you have asked. He may be distracted or disinterested. His lack of effort is the reason he makes a mistake.

To be an effective dog trainer, it is important that you understand the term correction. A correction is an unpleasant action that happens at the moment the dog stops trying to do what you have asked.

I found much of her presentation things I already knew. There were some very good ideas that many of us should learn. One such idea is “ the dog must move away from the reward to get the reward”. WE are all experts at luring a dog into position using treat or a toy. Equally important is for the dog to understand that she must move away from the treat to get the treat. So the dog is taught early on that he will get rewarded if he moves to a platform, to other target to get the treat. She never uses food or a treat on the ring gate as a target.



I liked her ideas of using a cone. Connie teaches the dog how to circle a cone. It seems like such a simple concept but it has practical consequences. The dog transitions nicely to a crisp around finish



or an energetic but controlled broad jump. I also like Connie’s solution to that pesky problem where the dog flies to the dumbbell but kicks it all over instead of snatching it up for a quick recall. Her idea involved a step by step progression from physically placing the DB on the ground and using the leash to prevent the dog from pouncing. She doesn’t throw the

DB into a wall if barrier like most of us have been taught.

There is too much to cover in this recap, Suffice it to say everyone seemed pleased and left motivated, and with a new understanding of how it all the parts fit together. My take on it is the workshop was successful. Personally I would like to thank the NVDTC and ODTTC for allowing this seminar to go forward, and the many people who attended. I hope you got as much out of it as I did.

Vern Miller