

Negative Punishment

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Many US police K-9 programs base their training on traditional military training systems that were developed in the 50s, 60s and 70s. These training systems rely heavily on the use of choke collars and negative reinforcement. Negative reinforcement simply means applying force or discomfort, such as lifting up on a choke collar to pull the dog's head up to make him sit, and then releasing the discomfort as soon as the dog complies. In this type of training system, once a dog knows a behavior on command, the negative reinforcement turns to positive punishment when the dog is "corrected" with a verbal "no" or physical discomfort after it refuses to do the correct behavior when given a command. Although these methods have their drawbacks, they worked reasonably well on the type of dogs that were being trained in the US during that period of time, mostly donated dogs from US breeding programs. In more recent years, European imports or the progeny of imports have become the preferred dog to train because of their higher drives and superior working abilities. Unfortunately, only using negative reinforcement and positive punishment on some imports triggers the dog's fighting drive and dominance drive so that the handler ends up fighting with the dog psychologically if not physically. This psychological and physical fight creates conflict behaviors in the dog. If the dog doesn't take his conflict out on his handler, then he tends to take it out on a decoy, toy or other bite object, leading to increased inappropriate aggression or decreased compliance with commands, leading to more punishment, etc. Soon the team becomes caught in a cycle of conflict that interferes with learning and creates stress for the dog and handler.

Explanation of Terms

Behaviorists define techniques used in training in terms of their effect on the behavior that is being taught. Thus, "reinforcement" means something that causes the behavior to happen *more* often. Reinforcement in this sense does not necessarily mean "reward" or something the dog enjoys, but something that increases the likelihood that the desired behavior will occur.

In behavioral terms, "positive" means adding something or giving something to the dog. Thus, if you waited for a dog to sit and each time the dog sat you gave him a piece of hot dog, you are using "positive reinforcement" to get the dog to sit. In general, positive reinforcement can be thought of as a reward, because giving something to the dog to increase the frequency of a behavior usually means giving the dog a reward or something he likes.

“Negative” means taking something away. If you teach the dog to sit by pulling up on his collar until he sits, you are using “negative reinforcement” because the pulling up makes the dog uncomfortable so he sits. As soon as he sits, the discomfort is removed, hence the “negative” part of what you have done to create or encourage the behavior. In this case, negative reinforcement means taking away the discomfort after the dog performs the behavior. Training a “force” retrieve uses negative reinforcement because the discomfort, which might be the use of a choke or pinch collar, an electric collar or toe or ear pinch, is discontinued the instant the dog takes the retrieve object in his mouth.

Note that “positive” and “negative” have nothing to do with how the dog might feel about the procedure, only with adding or taking away something.

“Punishment” means adding something or taking something away that causes the behavior to be *less* likely to happen. So “positive punishment” means adding something that tends to stop the dog from doing the behavior, like putting a bark collar that shocks the dog when it barks on a dog that barks excessively, or using a choke collar “pop” correction when a dog fails to execute a command. In contrast, “negative punishment” means taking something away, and that taking away will decrease the likelihood that a dog will do a behavior. Taking the car keys away from a teenager when they are “grounded” due to misbehavior is negative punishment.

Dog owners and trainers will use negative punishment to teach dogs manners in every day life yet rarely use it in more formal training situations. For example, if you ask your dog to sit before you put the food bowl down so he doesn’t dive in the bowl and spill it, you probably pull the bowl away when the dog gets up before you tell him to. Pulling the food bowl away is taking something away the dog wants, so the dog will quickly learn to sit quietly until given permission to break his sit the next time the bowl is lowered. If you ask the dog to wait at the door before going out, the negative punishment occurs if you push the door shut if the dog breaks before being told he can go out. Shutting the door in the dog’s face takes away his access to the outdoors.

Unlike positive punishment, which relies on the dog knowing exactly what is expected of him and knowing when and how he is making errors to be effective, negative punishment can be intuitively clear to the dog if the reward or goal is clearly in sight and taken away when the dog fails to comply. Using negative punishment means controlling the resources available to the dog or access to things and activities the dog values. It can be subtler than hands on positive punishment, but it can help to avoid direct confrontation and fights between the dog and the handler. Using negative punishment causes the dog to do more thinking about the situation and “take responsibility” for his own actions.

Hands On vs. Hands Off

Police officers and soldiers tend to be “hands on” and action oriented. If a situation does not suit them, they usually jump in and take action to change the situation. Making a dog complete an action through physical manipulation comes more naturally to this type of person than being patient and letting the dog figure out how to achieve a goal. Yet it is through “hands off” type training that true leaders accomplish much of their work in the canine and the human world.

The alpha wolf leads the pack more by presence, controlling resources, establishing alliances and making decisions for the pack than by physically fighting with every member. Wolf packs and pack leaders would not last long if a pack leader had to create compliance in pack members by physically making each member do his wishes. In return for the submission of the other members, the pack leader takes responsibility for the decisions of where the pack goes, when the pack hunts and leads the fight in the defense of the pack. Pack members reject leaders who prove to be poor providers and don’t take responsibility because the health and welfare of the pack depends on good decisions. Similar situations exist in police organizations – good supervisors are those that support and guide their men so that those under them respect and appreciate them and work hard to please the supervisor. Poor supervisors have to rule with the threat of punishment and use a stick instead of a carrot.

Responsibility for Actions – Dog vs. Handler

When a dog handler acquires a working dog, the handler needs to make himself (or herself) the pack leader. The handler will be feeding and caring for the dog’s every need, but in exchange the handler needs the dog’s cooperation in performing the tasks the team is formed to accomplish. Traditional K-9 training programs teach and maintain these tasks with a combination of negative reinforcement (collar and/or physical manipulation of the dog), positive reinforcement (ball or food reward, handler praise or chance to hunt or fight) and positive punishment (collar or other correction for misbehavior). These are very hands on activities that appeal to people who like to act and manipulate the dog to make things go their way. The timing of rewards and collar corrections is crucial in this type of system, hence the rules of correcting immediately after a misbehavior and rewarding immediately when the dog is doing the correct behavior. Negative punishment, taking away something the dog wants or anticipates, is rarely used in most training programs.

The problem with physical manipulation and physical punishment being used on high drive, hard and dominant dogs is that, once the dog’s fighting drive button has been pushed, the dog often ends up in a physical or psychological fight with the handler rather than respecting the handler as a pack leader and following the handler’s commands. Often this leads trainers to use increasing amounts of force and pain to try to force

compliance, leading to more serious fights and/or stress, fear and panic in the dog, injured dogs and handlers and a breakdown in communication and training.

Another problem with corrections and negative reinforcement is that corrections don't impress a hard dog and, if they don't create a fight, come to serve only as a "reminder" to the dog to comply. Watching the apprehension phase of two different PDI trials this year, I watched handler after handler let their dog drag them to the start line. Then the handler would command the dog to sit, and if they did not sit, pull up on the collar until the dog did sit. During this time the dog stared downfield at the decoy and never looked at the handler and hardly acknowledged the handler's presence beside him. While this may be a good strategy with a soft dog that needs encouragement to bite well, it is not a good strategy to encourage handler control over a hard dog that needs to listen to and comply with the handler's commands.

If a handler stops the dog at the line, pulls up on the collar and makes the dog sit, the dog never takes responsibility for his actions and is not complying with the command or acknowledging the handler's leadership. The handler is physically making the dog sit, not having the dog sit on command. Handlers who have hard dogs need to make the dog take responsibility for executing the commands and stop "helping" the dog with collar corrections if the dog is supposed to know the commands. If you can watch a handler/dog team that has control problems in bite work as they train in obedience, count how many times the handler "helps" the dogs with second commands, hand signals, negative reinforcement or "reminder" corrections that never truly gain compliance and you will see what I mean. In this case the handler keeps helping the dog and the dog doesn't take responsibility for compliance. A leader who doesn't follow up and make sure that his followers take their responsibilities seriously soon loses his ability to lead, so this is why the handler who keeps "helping" his dog ends up with a dog that doesn't take the handler's commands seriously in other contexts.

Using Negative Punishment

Negative punishment is one way to gain compliance without using physical corrections, and it is extremely effective on hard and high drive dogs that enjoy engaging in the activities we value them for: hunting, retrieving, tugging, and fighting. Such dogs usually also have high food drive and food is also an effective reward. Negative punishment or taking a reward or access to a reward away only works if the dog anticipates the reward, so the reward system has to be in place before it can be taken away.

Many working dog training programs incorporate some sort of ball or toy play as part of the training or a break from training. Most detector dog training programs are based on some sort of play or food reward for correct behavior, so developing a reward

for obedience training should be familiar to most handlers. Handlers also need to be aware of what everyday activities involve resources the dog values: food, water, access to explore outside, to scent mark, to socialize with other people and dogs, to be petted and groomed, etc. Simple observation will reveal what is important to each individual dog. If a handler has a truly dominant dog or a dog that he is having trouble controlling in parts of training, he should control access to “every day” resources to gain compliance from the dog that will carry over to patrol and detector work. This type of dog should be required to do some behavior on command before being allowed access to a valued resource. If the dog does not comply correctly on the first command, access to the resource is delayed or denied. This is often called the “No Free Lunch” program by behaviorists who coach people with pets with behavior problems, and it should be applied to police K-9s who don’t respect their handler’s authority.

In gaining compliance using these resources, the handler should not “help” the dog with corrections or physical manipulations, but present a clear choice: compliance with the first command or the resource is denied, at least for awhile. For example, if a handler is feeding the dog, he can take the dish from the counter and command “sit.” If the dog does not sit, the handler puts the dish back on the counter (assuming the dog is trained not to jump on the counter to get it) and the handler ignores the dog for one to five minutes. No second commands are allowed, no corrections, no luring by moving the food bowl up, etc. It usually only takes one or two of these actions for the dog to get the idea that he is responsible for dinner coming or going away, and the dog quickly learns to sit on command in this context.

Effective Communication

Crucial to the learning process are cues or words that communicate to the dog what actions the handler finds desirable and what actions the handler doesn’t want. In watching police handlers and trainers train, I see few who communicate well verbally with their dogs. Ivan Balabanov has an excellent system to teach handlers to communicate. He uses a simple system of saying “good” to encourage correct behaviors when no actual reward will be given immediately, “no” when the dog chooses the incorrect behavior and “okay” or another release word that tells the dog he is free to enjoy his reward. The use of these simple words tells the dog exactly what behaviors earned him his reward or what behavior caused him to lose his chance at the reward or earn a physical punishment. Using these words also marks the moment in time when the dog was right or wrong, so the handler doesn’t have to struggle to immediately deliver rewards or corrections the instant the dog performs the behavior. Without a set word that means, “What you just did was what you are being rewarded for,” the dog is left to guess what behavior he is being rewarded for. For example, if a detector dog handler wants to

reward for a scratch by the dog and does not say “good” or “OK” the instant the dog scratches, the dog may think that the reward cue is the handler reaching for the toy, the handler pulling the toy out, the moment the toy hits the ground, etc. and give all sorts of behaviors after scratching before those events take place. A common problem occurs when the dog looks back for the reward just as the handler throws the toy, leading to a dog that gives a scratch and then looks back, thinking that the two actions are those required for a reward. Just as “good” or “OK” marks a desired behavior and allows for the reward to come a little later, “no” or “wrong” needs to mark the wrong behaviors that lead either to some punishment or to a repeat of the exercise to get it correct. If a dog is working a distance from the handler, often, by the time the handler has reached the dog to physically correct him, the dog’s behavior has already changed and the situation becomes confusing for the dog if he doesn’t understand which behavior led to the correction. Simply saying “no” often communicates enough to the dog so that he changes his behavior to the correct behavior.

The use of “no” will make it clear to the dog what he is being corrected for and help to avoid the dog thinking he is being corrected unfairly. Many dogs will accept physical corrections if they understand what they are being corrected for, but will fight when corrections are unfair, or when they are confused by the corrections. In many of the training sessions I have watched, dogs misbehave not because of disobedience but because it is not clear to them what the handler wants.

Some Training Examples

Negative punishment can only be used when the dog anticipates a reward. If training is totally based on negative reinforcement or positive punishment, there will be no opportunity for negative punishment. However, all effective apprehension work and scent work (and willing and happy obedience work) base their training methods on rewards (bite, play, praise or food reward). A dog that does not enjoy fighting and biting will not make an effective patrol dog, and, generally the harder the dog, the more he enjoys the fight and the opportunity to do apprehension work. Using a toy or food to teach obedience and scent work also relies on the dog’s anticipation of earning a reward for proper behavior. So anticipation of a reward is the foundation of these types of training and can be taken advantage of by using negative punishment. If basic obedience training is accomplished with the use of a reward such as a bite on a tug that turns into a tug play match with the handler, then adding obedience to bite work simple involves the substitution of a bite on the decoy for bite play with the handler because the dog already understands the concept of earning rewards for complying with obedience commands. Basic obedience training that only incorporates negative reinforcement and positive punishment misses out on the opportunity to teach the dog the concept of a reward for

proper behavior and makes it much harder for the dog to transition from obedience during obedience training to obedience during apprehension training. A hard dog with good drive for bite work will only follow the handler's commands when his desire to bite is tempered with an understanding that those bites will only occur when his handler permits them.

It is also to the handler's advantage in many training sessions to "prime" the dog with a little play or by showing the dog what reward is available to increase the dog's desire to work. I like to call it the "show him the money" technique. This is the best way to overcome distractions during scent work that might tempt the dog during the training exercise, because physical corrections for misbehavior or being distracted don't always help if they shut the dog down or confuse him rather than make him work harder. When using negative punishment, it is also very effective to show the dog the reward he missed before he is put back in the vehicle, tied out or in some other "time out" mode to think about how he missed his chance to earn the reward.

Negative punishment, like positive punishment, is most effective when the dog is clearly disobedient and understands that what he just did was not what the handler wanted. Negative punishment is most effective with dogs that already understand the exercise and choose not to perform, often because previous incorrect training has convinced that they will be given the reward in the end anyway, after their handler helps them with corrections, additional commands, cues or lures. Negative punishment combined with a showing of the reward or what the dog missed earning can really help in cases where the dog is just not focusing on the task at hand due to distractions, or just not trying hard enough to do the right thing. When the dog really tries to comply, even if he is not totally correct because he still doesn't understand exactly what to do, a reward should be given for the effort.

Handlers using only rewards to train are usually guilty of helping their dogs too much by giving extra commands, prompts, luring them with the reward, etc. when the dog does not comply after having learned a behavior, or accepting a half-hearted attempt from the dog when the dog can do much better. Smart, independent dogs will quickly learn to manipulate their handlers by acting "dumb" and cause the handlers to help the dog more and more, and or the dog will start waiting for the extra help or cues to complete the behavior. This is another situation where simply telling the dog the command once and then showing the dog what he missed and putting him away with no more opportunity to earn the reward can suddenly reveal to the handler what the dog really knows, and often in these cases the dog reveals that he knows exactly how to do the behavior but has been playing the handler for a fool for some time.

I have one of those smart dogs. As an example of how negative punishment can be used in detector work, I will use a cadaver detection training seminar I went to this spring. My dog is really at the advanced or intermediate level of cadaver training, but the seminar was geared more for beginner dogs with advanced work on the side. The

practical work started with basic imprinting and indication work on samples placed in cinder blocks. Since I was helping as a training assistant, I didn't get my dog out very much during the day. He is a high-energy dog and doesn't take well to long periods of inactivity. When I did get him out to do a beginner line up with the cinder blocks, he was excited, pulling me around, flirting with the girl dogs and making eyes at the other males, and generally having a great time not paying attention to what I wanted him to do. Doing the blocks, he did a good job on the first set and received a food reward. I did the blocks again from a different direction and he did well again. After a few more minutes of hanging out near the other dogs, I repeated the same blocks. This time he walked right by the samples as if they didn't exist. Apparently the challenge of finding them was gone or he didn't want to make the find and be put back in the vehicle again. Whatever the reason, I gave him another chance and he walked by them again, making eyes at a cute female dog in the parking lot.

At this point I smartened up and told him "no." I had another person hold him on lead and he watched while I fed another dog the chicken he missed earning, and I made a big fuss over the other dog. I then took him across the parking lot and tied him to a car well away from the action. I left him there by himself and ignored him for about 20 minutes while I worked with the other teams. Then I put him back in the truck. A short time later I took him out and worked the blocks about 8 times in a row. He indicated perfectly every time and didn't make any obvious mistakes for the rest of the seminar.

Negative Punishment and Apprehension Work

Negative punishment is extremely effective when used during apprehension work, where hard dogs really want to fight the decoy and the hardness and drive levels of the dog make physical corrections ineffective or create a fight between the dog and the handler as well as between the dog and the decoy. Hard dogs are usually highly motivated to bite, so the anticipation of the bite becomes a powerful tool for training.

Once a dog bites on command, the command to bite and following bite can be used as a reward. Simply going to the area where the dog habitually does apprehension can be used as a reward if the dog loads with anticipation of an apprehension session. Getting the dog out of the vehicle, the handler should always require the dog to come to heel before going anywhere. I often use "sit" as well as heel as a preparatory command for exercises since it is one often ignored by dogs. My dog has to come to heel or sit before we go anywhere near where apprehension training is going to take place.

Since I have had control problems during apprehension work, I never let my dog pull me on the field. Keeping a dog at heel or never allowing it to move ahead of the handler helps to establish the handler as pack leader, because the pack leader walks ahead and determines the direction of travel. I use an "easy" command that means he is to walk

beside me on my left side and go where I go, but he is not required to keep constant attention on me like when he is supposed to with a formal heel. Walking beside the handler or heeling can be taught or reinforced whenever the dog really wants to go in a particular direction towards a goal the dog knows is there, whether it is walking towards an anticipated apprehension training session, towards a detection session in an area the dog has done detection before, or towards the dog's food bowl or toy. In teaching the walk beside or even the heel behavior, if the dog forges out ahead of the handler to get closer to the goal he wants, the handler says "no," stops and takes two to three steps backwards, dragging the dog back into position at the left side of the handler. No corrections are given besides the fact that the dog is being pulled further from his goal. This is repeated as necessary. The first few sessions mean that the handler goes backwards more than forwards. Whenever the dog stays in position, the team goes forward towards the goal the dog anticipates. When the dog forges ahead of the handler, the handler backs up and the dog is dragged further from his goal. Some dogs will respond to the handler just stopping forward progress, but I have found that hard dogs require the "penalty" or negative punishment of moving away from the goal. When the dog starts to get the idea and hangs back in position and gives at least some attention to the handler by not forging in front, the handler should give a release command and let the dog pull on to the goal. This release reward should come at a distance from the goal at first, then the handler should require more control closer to the goal until the dog is able to remain in position right up to the goal. It takes half a dozen or more sessions to work, but when the dog gets the idea, the handler should add left and right turns to the drill and require the dog to follow no matter where the handler walks. This is also an exercise that a team can do while it is waiting for its turn on the apprehension field and doesn't require anyone extra help except perhaps for a trainer's coaching for the first few sessions.

This simple exercise of requiring the dog to heel or walk at the handler's side up to a very distracting goal establishes the handler's control before the session starts and teaches the dog to control himself in preparation for work. It can be practiced with a toy or food dish out in plain sight on the ground. Many dogs are so excited by working that they show up at a session hectic and out of control and are unable to focus on the task at hand or on the handler's commands. Bringing the dog to the training in a controlled fashion will prevent this.

This type of "easy" or heeling work is done without physical corrections. Correcting a hard dog in these contexts often just leads to the dog ignoring the corrections or fighting with the handler, adding to the hectic mood of the dog. The handler just restrains the dog so he can't gain his goal, and pulls the dog back so that the only way the dog can get closer to his goal is to comply with the commands. In fact, it is important not to correct with painful corrections because these will prevent the dog from thinking and figuring out the puzzle of how to get closer to his goal.

Using negative punishment means being very patient and realizing that sometimes the best way to accomplish something is to do nothing or delay access to a training exercise rather than to act on the dog. It requires trainers and training situations that don't rush the handler and dog and provide the time needed to accomplish the goal of control and attention to the handler instead of focusing on whose "turn" it is to work and rushing them through the exercises so the next team can be brought in. Too often handlers resort to corrections or physically placing their dogs in position to try to accomplish an exercise because they feel pressured to move along. A handler that knows he needs time to work on bringing his dog under control can start that process one or two dogs before his turn, and then "park" the dog in a down near the training area to wait his turn.

How many times have you seen the following bite work sequence: Dog drags handler on to the field where the decoy stands at a distance from the team. The dog remains standing, eyes locked on the decoy. The handler, knowing this is supposed to be a bite exercise, tells the dog to heel or sit. The dog remains standing. The handler pops the dog with a collar correction and/or pulls up on the collar and pushes down on the dog's rear to get the dog sitting. All this time the dog has not taken its eyes off the decoy. The decoy runs and the dog is sent. The dog does a great hit and bite. The handler runs up and yells "stand still" and "out." The dog doesn't out. The handler yells out again and the dog may loosen, but does not out. The handler grabs the lead, yells out again and pops the dog. The dog lets go and the handler pops it again back towards the handler to bring it to heel. The dog comes to heel and locks on the decoy again in anticipation of the next bite.

Who is doing all the work here? Besides the running and biting by the dog, the handler is doing all the work. The dog has not taken responsibility for coming to heel, for paying attention to the handler or for letting go. He simply waits for the handler to physically remind him with corrections or manipulations to do the behaviors, and the handler complies every time. Even if the handler uses some painful corrections, the dog really doesn't care, because, after the corrections are over, he will still get to bite, and that is all the dog cares about at this point. He will endure all sorts of pain and manipulation as long as he still gets to bite at some point during the session.

Using the same scenario, lets add negative punishment to the situation. First of all, the dog is taught not to pull the handler on the field. Note that negative punishment doesn't require that correction collars be used, only something to restrain the dog, so eventually in training the e-collars, pinch collars and extra equipment can be removed and the dog's normal working equipment (or no equipment when the handler's psychological control is good enough) is all that is left on the dog.

The dog arrives at the start line without pulling but does not sit. The handler says "no" and pulls the dog back off the line, repeating the heel or easy command and gets the dog back under control, making right and left turns and stops away from the line and not

facing the decoy. Eventually they make their way back to the starting point and the dog sits in the proper place. If it doesn't then more obedience work is repeated until the dog does it right. The team ends up at the start in the proper position. The decoy runs and the dog breaks before he is sent. The decoy stops moving and the dog is stopped by the leash that is held by the handler. The handler pulls the dog back and moves back three or four steps to set up again further from the decoy, who has already moved further away after running the first time. This is repeated until the dog waits until it is sent.

The dog runs downfield and makes the bite. The decoy fights. The handler commands "out." The dog doesn't let go and the decoy stops fighting. The handler says "no" after the dog does not out and approaches the dog. In the case of an "out" problem once the dog knows the out, usually some sort of positive punishment must be used, in connection with negative punishment. The teaching of the out, however, must be done with positive reinforcement or reward for outing so the dog understands that outing does not mean that he gives up all his chances to bite, but that another bite will be often be given as a reward for a correct out. This example assumes that the dog knows the out, can out cleanly and expects a reward bite for proper conduct but has refused to let go on the first command.

In this example, when the dog does not out, the handler says "no" and gives a collar correction into the sleeve (pushes the lead and collar towards the decoy in a correction rather than trying to pop or pull the dog away from the decoy). The dog lets go, but then jumps up and grabs the sleeve again without a command from the handler. Note that the handler does not pull the dog away from the decoy with the leash, nor does he give a heel command that brings the dog away. The dog is allowed to remain close to the decoy and decide for himself if "out" means let go and re-bite or "out" means let go and don't bite again. "Out" should mean let go and don't grab again, even if the sleeve is still an inch from the dog's nose.

In this example the dog has grabbed the sleeve again after outing. The handler says "no" again and gives another correction into the decoy. This time the dog lets go and stands near the decoy, not biting again, having made his choice not to grab the sleeve after letting go. After a short pause, the decoy moves into the dog and gives him another bite as a reward for the out, with a short fight. The handler commands "out" again, the dog complies and is given another reward bite. The handler commands "out" again and the dog lets go. The handler then commands "heel" and the dog, instead of coming directly to heel, tags the sleeve and then starts back. As soon as he sees the dog tag the sleeve, the handler says "no," repeats the command "out" and corrects the dog into the sleeve. He would then put the dog in a sit right in front of the decoy and repeat the "heel" command. When the dog does the heel correctly, handler commands the decoy to approach and the decoy walks up to the team so he is directly in front of the dog and about five feet away. After a pause to insure that the dog is steady, the handler commands the dog to bite for a reward. The sequence can end with the decoy slipping

the sleeve for the dog to carry, or if the program doesn't do this, with the decoy fighting for a time and then giving up the fight and the dog outing with sincere praise from the handler.

I see some programs that teach bite work by line agitation or agitation on a pole or with the handler holding the dog. This is fine, but as soon as the dog is biting a sleeve effectively, some sort of control work needs to be added so that the dog is required to do some controlled behavior before the bite is given as a reward. This means that the dog should have some idea of what the obedience commands are before it is allowed to continue for long periods of bite work training without having to follow the handler's commands. When the dog comes to expect a bite for compliance with commands during bite work, the withholding of the reward or removal from the training situation without a bite become powerful training tools.

Lets assume that the dog knows how to do a recall off an apprehension, but this day decides that he is not going to do it. He runs out and bites the decoy. In many training programs, the handler would run out and correct the dog and drag him back to repeat the exercise. The dog may or may not comply the second time, but eventually he does the recall and gets a reward bite. The dog has won the round because he still got the bites all the wanted (even if they cost him a few physical corrections) and he still got to do bite work, an activity he really enjoys, at least until he gets tired.

Using negative punishment, after the dog didn't recall, he would be dragged off the field while the decoy taunted him and put back in the vehicle with no further bites for at least the next fifteen minutes, or the whole day, if needed. If the dog was competitive, and most hard dogs are, he could be tied to a tree off to the side to watch other dogs get bites.

Time Outs

Tying a dog on a "time out" to watch other dogs work and get rewards is extremely effective. I used this on a black Lab who decided that sniffing dog scents in an area everyone relieved their dogs was more important than finding the articles we had put out. After he spent his searching opportunity sniffing and scent marking instead of finding the articles, he was told "no" when he urinated on a bush, and we tied him out where he could watch and worked another dog in the same area, making a big fuss over the working dog and having the Lab's handler give the dog rewards along with the dog's regular handler. Everyone totally ignored the Lab for fifteen minutes. By the time we were done, the Lab was standing and whining and whimpering, begging to be let loose to do the problem, which he did perfectly after his time in the "penalty box."

Putting a dog up or tying him out so he misses his "turn" at bite work after misbehavior requires some adjustment of the training schedule. A dog that has a particular problem, like failing to recall when he knows the exercise, can be brought out

once the first time with the handler and trainer knowing that he will fail, then dragged back to the car and put away or tied up. The same dog may be brought out to try again in the middle of a number of teams that are running, make the same mistake and be put up again, then brought out for a third time before the session ends. My experience has shown that training time is not “lost” with “time outs.” I have accomplished more in one or two “time outs” or putting the dog up after an inappropriate bite than I ever did in ten sessions of bite work with physical corrections, because of the great desire a hard dog has to do apprehension work. When you are working with a tough, dominant and smart dog, some thought and innovation have to be used during training. It helps to think of training such a dog as psychological warfare rather than training. With such a dog, sometimes the dog wins, but hopefully the handler wins the game more often than the dog. Training this way is always challenging and never boring, even when the dog wins.

Calming Signals

One way you can know if you are having an impact on your dog when using negative punishment is by observing the dog’s behavior when you stop the training action after saying “no.” Dogs will use what some behaviorists call “calming signals” to appease their handler or other dogs and animals. One signal my dog uses a great deal when I have “got” to him using negative punishment is a yawn, usually accompanied with a high pitched whine. I know that when I say “no,” make him pause during the training routine and he gives a big yawn, he has got the message. Other calming signals are looking away, scratching, sniffing the ground (but with indirect attention on the handler, not really on the ground) and other appeasement gestures. Most calming signals are a behavior that does not include direct eye contact with the target because direct contact is a threat to canids, therefore the dog does something that seems as if the dog is not paying direct attention to the target person or animal the dog is concerned with. Thus, even though the dog may seem NOT to be paying attention when they are yawning or scratching, often they ARE paying attention if the behavior follows some sort of punishment. An excellent reference on calming signals is a book by Turid Rugass called “On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals.”

A Note of Caution

Truly hard and dominant dogs with high fighting drive and/or pain/correction-induced aggression are difficult to handle. If the dog really thinks that he is the pack leader and can “correct” his own handler, or is used to fighting with his handler during apprehension training, sometimes the dog’s frustration at being dragged away as a penalty can result in the dog showing aggression towards the handler. Usually this won’t happen the first time the dog is deprived of his “work” session because that takes the dog

by surprise, but it may happen the second time. I have not seen this type of aggression happen very often. I don't have all the answers to this situation because every dog is different. It helps to drag the dog away with a lead that is long enough to put some distance between the handler and dog so that the dog is dragged away while facing and looking at the decoy rather than colliding with the handler on a short line. This helps the dog to take his frustration out on the decoy rather than the handler. I made a mistake by using a short line and had my dog growl and snarl and do a "fake" bite on my arm when I dragged him off the field for disobedience during bite work. I ignored him and kept on marching to the vehicle. We had just had a particularly ugly bite work session with him on a pinch collar, which only raises his aggression level to an uncontrollable level, so I was in trouble from the start of the session. Since my dog got no reaction for his aggression towards me when he threatened to bite, he then directed his aggression towards the decoy as he was dragged off in a tremendous, snarling display as if to tell the decoy, "I know its all your fault and I'll get you next time." Since that time, he has not shown aggression towards me during a bite work session.

Even dogs that aren't particularly hard can show aggression if their handler has been a poor pack leader and has let the dog think he is in charge. This happens quite often with pet dog owners who don't enforce rules and let the dog run the house, but it can also happen with working dogs that are allowed to run the handler's life through poor management and training.

The best way to handle a hard and dominant dog is to gain his trust and respect by controlling resources away from the apprehension field or other "hot button" items before tackling difficult training areas. Once the dog understands that you have control of the resources, he will become more submissive and compliant. When he understands that desired behaviors will be rewarded, and that any corrections you give will be fair, he will start to follow commands even in contexts where he has ignored you before. I know it amazed me when, after working on overall control and training using negative punishment, my dog began to come readily when called, even when he was "busy" scent marking and sniffing around and I had no way to correct him.

Once a dog respects his handler, the handler has to show respect for the dog and not use this power capriciously, but allow the dog time "to be a dog" when it is appropriate and to be generous with rewards when training and time allows, and to have a clear understanding of what the dog "knows" in training and what the dog does not know. Achieving this state with the hardest of dogs is difficult, but the end result is a better than average working dog.