

Dog Talk

The official *unofficial* newsletter for FEMA dog handlers

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The Conditioned Response

(or why doesn't my dog alert all of the time?)

The two largest problems that appear in testing and real life, is victim loyalty and the alert. While having dinner with two friends and long time evaluators, I mentioned this and the first response was "It has to be a Conditioned Response".

Often a dog will do what it enjoys or he is clever enough to react to what is going on around him, and the handler will believe it is a conditioned response. Or a dog may have been taught an alert behavior and the handler believes it can be plugged into a search situation. But, if it is a conditioned response, the dog will not fail to stick with a victim and alert. One's dog should not just be searching (they can all search), it needs to be searching for somebody to alert on.

While the symptom of the problem appears to be the same, the causes are not. These are the prevalent causes, and often one leads to the other;

- **The dog is confused or does not understand the exercise:**
This usually means that the dog does not feel the criteria for the alert has been met. One must consider if during training, the dog has not generalized the way you want it to or the situations have been too predictable/dull. You may need to vary many factors such as, victim placement and behavior, handler placement and behavior, reward system, locations, duration, and if there have been enough successful high energy repetitions.
- **The dog is missing a part of its foundational training;**
The exercise is not motivating to the dog because it has not learned how to interact / play with people in a rewarding fashion. The dog may not understand the "Rules of Engagement" (strong play without biting or body slamming), or lacks the confidence that



comes from training the behavior rather than pushing/testing the dog. This creates stress in the dog that leads to inconsistent behavior. This also can be a problem for those who have trained dogs to “work for them” rather than the joy of finding a person that will play with them, if the situation is perceived as stressful by the dog. And, the older the dog gets, the stronger it clings to its learned coping or displacement behaviors.

The reward system is a very important part of foundation. Does the dog really know what you expect of it? Are you consistent and incrementally successful? Is your timing good, and rewarding what you want to reinforce?

The alert hole is one of the best ways to teach one's dog to alert quickly and when not to pay attention to its handler. Yet many handlers are quick to “graduate” themselves from it, or do it in such a rote manner, that any variation leads to the above mentioned Confusion. One must get enough repetitions to make the alert “automatic” and is also a great chance to neutralize the dog to distractions (ie: food, urine, etc.). This the first place I will approach the tube while the dog is alerting and then walk on by, the “victim” will then pop out and reward the dog for staying at the tube. The victims will need to have good timing and interaction skills. The handler must focus on what motivates that particular dog, rather than what they want or is convenient to for them.

So all you need is Clear Communication, a good reward system, proper use of play and stress, which translates into a good relationship with your dog.

The good and bad news:

The dog that is confused, usually just needs some thoughtful variations combined with high energy training. However, the dog that presents confusion because of foundational problems, must first fix those problems. What makes it very difficult is that the handler must identify and address the foundational problems before moving on to the former noted repetitions. The worst case scenario is when the handler denies that there is a foundational problem and becomes a pattern trainer. Doing endless repetitions hoping that the dog will “get it”, and concluding that the dog has issues.

The Operational dog:

The operational dog must have a strong Conditioned Response to work for any length of time. The CE or Type I certification is like a college degree that shows your ability to present certain skills, but it is far short of what allows an operational dog to work 10-12 hour shifts, day after day.

Happy Hunting,
Tony Zintsmaster
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Crossbreeds : What do you get from...

Pointer X Setter =

Pointsetter, a traditional Christmas pet

Smooth Fox Terrier X Chow Chow =

Smooch, a dog who loves to kiss

Airedale X Spaniel =

Airel, a dog that brings in good TV reception

Labrador Retriever X Curly Coated Retriever =

Lab Coat Retriever, the choice of research scientists

Bloodhound X Labrador =

Blabador, a dog that barks a lot

Chihuahua X Whippet =

Chianet order from TV ads: 3 for \$19.95



The Challenge Has Just Begun

Lynne Engelbert

So . . . you've just passed the FEMA Certification Evaluation and you did a pretty good job. Six-for-six and the handler didn't screw up. Awesome! You and your dog are ready to deploy tomorrow if called to respond to anything. Anything? Are you sure? You've trained your dog to work on concrete rubble, construction waste, green waste and in the few buildings that you were able to find. But, are you really ready for anything?

Too many of us pass our Certification Evaluation (CE) and take that as the ultimate accomplishment, when in fact this should only be the beginning. There's much more we need to think about. Have you trained your dog on the following?

- Dark tunnels
- Fully exposed victims
- Half exposed victims
- Exposed screaming victims
- Dummies stuffed with stinky cadaver materials and a live person beside or beneath the "dead"
- Subjects placed in very high places
- Several subjects placed within 10 feet of each other
- Two people are in same hole, one under a false floor directly beneath the first victim
- A trapped victim in an area where the dog cannot physically get close
- Any kind of bizarre situation you can come up with

Unfortunately the great majority of us train to pass the test and forget that we need to go beyond the minimum requirements the test prepares us for. To prepare our dogs and ourselves for the real search we need to go well beyond the minimum. Passing the test doesn't grant us the right to kick back and put our feet up on the crate. It should be the signal to go out and get creative with our future training. Think . . . get creative! Challenge yourself and your dog!

Disasters are not as cut and dried as our training and tests are . . . think about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Pentagon, the WTC and other disasters. Disasters will throw us into situations that we never imagined in our wildest dreams, and every one is different. While it's true that we usually arrive after most of the surface victims have been found, either by spontaneous volunteers or local rescue professionals, this may not always be the case. We need to think about the recent tornados and other disasters where we may well be among the first responders. If we are, we need to be ready for our dogs to locate, and alert on, surface or partially exposed victims and/or clusters of victims close together, as well as those entombed in the rubble.

We need to be ready for the kinds of rubble we rarely see and almost never train on. Most of the rubble worked on at the WTC wasn't concrete but enormous piles of twisted metal. How often do we train on metal? It's difficult to find and we often hesitate to put our dogs on it because of the dangers we perceive. But if we don't and this is what we are faced with when we arrive, we have done our dogs, ourselves, but most importantly our customer, the victim, a disservice.

Think about areas in OKC where groups of victims were found together or in very close proximity. How about the stairwells at the World Trade Center? Every once in a while we are blessed with a rubble pile that gives us the opportunity to put several people very close together. How often do we take advantage of it? The dog is likely to be better in this situation than the handler. Are we comfortable enough to "call" multiple alerts in close proximity? Place three or four live subjects in a 10 sq. ft. area and see what the dog does. What does the handler do? Put them in a straight line, 8-10' apart, and run the problem all over again. If possible, let the handler work it cold.

As handlers we need to go out and look for different ways to challenge our dogs, and ourselves, to be the best that we can be. We truly do need to be ready for anything and everything. The problems we come up with don't have to be long or difficult, but they do need to be different. When that Certification Evaluation is over, the challenge has just begun. Are we up to it?



NEW YORK POST , July 15, 2007

9/11 'HERO' CHARGED IN 40G SCAM
By BRAD HAMILTON and GINGER OTIS

A self-proclaimed Ground Zero hero who says he and his golden retriever rescued victims from the World Trade Center rubble has been charged with fraud for allegedly ripping off \$40,000 in federal relief funds.

Scott Shields could face up to 35 years in jail after a Manhattan grand jury indicted him and his sister last month for allegedly swiping rental-assistance money from FEMA and other agencies.

Shields showed up in the days after the attack, accompanied by Bear, his cancer-stricken canine, but the dog was too sick to do any real work, and the two were on hand only for "a couple of days," according to a former NYPD officer.

"There's something wrong with the guy," said Lt. Dan Denadio, who as head of the NYPD's K-9 unit spent nine months at Ground Zero. "I don't know how he got so far."
Shields claims he and Bear "made the only live finds" at the site.

"Nonsense," Denadio said.

After his brief stint on the pile, Shields, who had resided in Greenwich, Conn., moved into an apartment across from the site - a swanky \$3,182-a-month pad on Rector Place - and got one check for \$16,443.50 from FEMA to pay for it, records show.

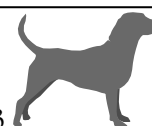
Shields collected thousands in additional rental assistance, the indictment says.

Foundation Training Weekend

September 15 & 16, 2007

The **K9 Search and Rescue Foundation, Inc.** will be holding a **Foundation Training Weekend Seminar** September 15 & 16 in Indianapolis, IN. This two day seminar will cover the fundamentals of canine motivation and learning theory. Handlers in all disciplines of canine search and rescue are welcome and encouraged to attend. Spaces will be limited in order to provide hands-on instruction, so register early.

For more information, go to: www.K9SARF.org



From the Editor:

The usual summer “dog demos”.... I don't know about your team – but we get more requests to do them than we have weekends. We do as many as we can without cutting into our precious training time too much. It was at a recent Pet Carnival when we were sitting at a table in the sweltering sun, and had a donation bottle on the table. I had printed out pictures of Jackie McCarty and her FEMA dog Logos along with a little history of how he got paralysed playing ball on May 1st. The pet carnival attendees donated \$52.67 to the “Logos Fine Spine Fund”. It's not a huge amount – but very much appreciated. And when I put that with the \$79.54 from our gig at the Indiana State Museum Pets in America exhibit – it will really help Jackie with those rising vet bills. He is an awesome dog, and I want him back on the rubble. I won't give up on him.

Back to that table in the sweltering sun... a cameraman from our local news station stopped by to read the info at our table about Logos. He remembered Logos from Hurricane Katrina and Rita! He told me he was going to have a reporter call me.

Sure enough, Jennifer Carmack (WRTV6 news) called me up requesting an interview. It aired last night (7/17/07) and Jennifer did such an awesome job, she made ME cry when I watched it. I have received countless emails offering to donate to Jackie's vet/rehab bills. Somehow people outside of Indy heard about it. Even dog handlers in other states contacted me (Lynne in CA and Sylvia in FL) wow! And then Lynne sent it out to all certified handlers. (Just a ever present warning – this happened to Logos when he was chasing a ball... that is it . In a split second he has crying on the ground unable to move his hind end)

I have gotten some generous emails:

- I am willing to contribute \$500.00 to help Logos. Please e-mail me with an address to forward a check.
Homer

Some heartfelt emails:

- How sad. I too have a dog Yellow Lab Golden Retriever mix. Unlike Logos though mine wasn't a spinal injury. He was just being a typical puppy and ate a piece of metal and some Christmas tree decorations. He had to have over \$1,000 dollars in surgery to “clean his insides out”.
I truly wish I could help but we had an addition to our family 3 months ago. A little girl. Money is very tight right now. I just wanted to let you know that your story is out there and hopefully someone will come along to help.
A suggestion I have though is to talk to your local animal shelter. They might be able to help with SOME of the expenses. Ours did. I think they paid somewhere around \$250 of the \$1,000.
Let me know how things turn out if you have the time.
Travis

So, I have learned a lot from this:

- Demos can be a pain, but people love to see the dogs in action.
- Reporters can be a pain, but people love to see the dogs in action.
- People can be a pain, but because of demos and reporters – they can be generous and compassionate.

Gotta run – Jeremy, Tony, Brenda and I are doing a (you guessed it) demo tonight for “at risk” kids. (40-50 of them) We won't even tell them about Logos – they have enough problems of their own.

-Kids can be a pain, but they love to see the dogs in action.



K911: Emergency Life Support for the Search & Rescue Dog

Hello, everyone!

Warm summer greetings from WMRL in Grand Rapids, Michigan!

We are writing to remind you that REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN for our "K911: Emergency Life Support for the Search & Rescue Dog" conference that is coming up Saturday & Sunday, October 27-28, 2007. Please click on the link below to see our updated K911 website, and to register for the conference.

You can register online with a credit card, or print a registration form and mail it to us with a check. Or, WMRL can invoice individual departments for the registration fees, just call or send us an email to inquire about this option.

We are pleased to announce that Paul McNamara, D.V.M. will be one of our guest lectures this year. He is a canine handler for Schenectady City Sheriff's Department and Chief of Surgery at Hudson Highlands Veterinary Medical Group. For more information on Dr. McNamara and all of our other guest lecturers, please visit:

www.wmrl.net/k911

☆☆☆☆ Kudos to..... ☆☆☆☆

DOGTALK is pleased to announce that the following Canine Search Teams have recently gained certification (or **re-certification**) as FEMA US&R Canine Search Specialists:

☆☆ Mead, NE Results – May 5, 2007

Kyle Tjelmeland & Reggie (NE-TF1), Lee Dunn & Sky (CO-TF1), Eliodora Chamberlain & Katy (MO-TF1) and Brett Henderson & Star (MO-TF1)

☆☆ Irwindale, CA - June 2- 3 2007

Linda D'Orsi & Cody (CA-TF8), Bud Souza & Kane (CA-TF4), Deborah Burnett & Keno (TN-TF1), A.J. Frank & Zara (WA-TF1), Hilda Wood & Fargo (FL-TF1), Kay Rice & Jazz (OH-TF1), Jennifer Massey & Ondo (VA-TF1), Steve Hillts & Daisy (CA-TF3), Sheila McKee & Bliss (CA-TF6)

Please forward any news, scheduled events, letters to the editor, or other info you want disseminated via **DOGTALK**, the underground canine newsletter to Anne McCurdy: amccurdy@clarian.org

