

BowWOW!

Facts, observations and musings about Our Best Friends

COME is a Four Letter Word (part two)

When we last checked in, Truman was trotting happily towards you every time you said “come”. *In* the house and *if* there was nothing more interesting going on. But now it’s time to up the ante. It’s time to move Truman’s training into the real world of smells, sounds and other random distractions.

Start small and indoors, still. Clip Truman’s leash on. This is not to jerk him or drag him to attention, but to prevent him from being rewarded for going somewhere else when you call him. Enlist a friend or family member to wander around the room while you and Truman continue to practice your short-distance recalls. Your friend is to completely ignore the dog. When Truman responds to his “come” call even with your friend milling around in the background, it’s time to drop the leash and start increasing the distance. When he can beeline for you with a person, a ball or even a cat in the room, it’s time to take the show on the road.

Again, start small. Tether him up on his lead and review the short-distance recall in the yard knowing that you’re going to have work very hard to make yourself more interesting than the nearest dead squirrel. Using your yummiest, smelliest treats, in a short time Truman will remember what the “come” is all about. As you increase the distance, clip him to a long (25 feet or so) to prevent him from being rewarded by running off to investigate an unanticipated distraction.

I have found with my clients that the “come” becomes much more interesting and understandable to the dog when it is a game, the Round Robin. Mr. F, a feisty Jack Russell terrier, was an excellent learner with the indoor “come” but was not at all trust-worthy in the wild. As a town dog facing the potential dangers of traffic and strangers it was imperative that he respond immediately to the recall. But more pressing was the upcoming holiday at the lake where it would be nice to allow him to run freely, play in the water and examine the great outdoors. His humans feared that once he was loose in the wild, they would never see him again.

Armed with our own sacks of stinky treats, Mr. F, his two humans and I headed to the park. We positioned ourselves at three distant areas of the field with Mr. F cruising along on his 25-foot trainer lead. In no particular order, we all took turns calling him using the same method as used indoors—the call, running backwards facing Mr. F and then praise and treat as he arrived. Within minutes he was happily barreling full-speed to each call; as he sharpened his skills, we broadened the area and added challenges. We hid behind trees, crouched behind hedges, we lay down in the grass. By the end of one session Mr. F was

well exercised, pleased his humans were pleased with him (and me, too), and had solidified his “come” response to where he proved trustworthy off lead at the lake.

If you want to play the Round Robin with your pet note that only one person at a time can interact with the dog. Other people must ignore him if he comes to them by mistake. No eye contact, no conversation, no petting, and no rustling the treat bag. Nothing. He’ll quickly learn that only the person who calls him has the big reward.

Make a real commitment to teaching your dog a positive “come”. It won’t happen overnight and it might not happen reliably for some dogs for a couple of years. It’s all about patience, persistence, consistency and love.

BowWOW! Is a production of Tracie Korol and wholeDog.
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