

**Will Training Work?**  
**How owners create training failures**  
**Karen Peak**  
**West Wind Dog Training**  
**www.WestWindDogTraining.com**

I am not going to sugar coat things here. Training may not work for your dog. Do not blame your dog; blame yourself. Many dogs are salvageable. Occasionally, you may find a dog "hardwired" for excessive fear, heightened stress, or other issues, therefore making the dog difficult to bring about, possibly requiring medications, etc. This can happen even in the best planned out breeding or the worst. Genetics is a cruel mistress at times. However, a dog genetically hardwired for major issues is not as common as those who have issues created by their environment. Sometimes there is a dog that so much damage was done that the average owner cannot rehabilitate him. Now the concern becomes how serious the owner is in regards to working issues through. I hope that through this, you will see your role in training the dog.

Sadly, too many owners allow undesired issues to go on for weeks, month and even years before addressing. Alternatively, they teach dogs undesired behaviors without even realizing it and do not see how their actions are affecting the dog. The longer undesired behaviors persist, often the more work to bring the dog back is needed. When the owner decides to address an issue, it may be too late and/or the dog further past what the owner is willing to or capable of working with. Then there are owners looking for fast fixes: TV shows, video tapes, trainers promising results in a day, etc. Fast fixes may use variations of painful techniques that train for the wrong reasons (avoidance of pain as opposed to actual adapting and acclimating to situations). Alternatively, they look for ways to absolve themselves of work by sending the dog away to train. None of these means will address the situation and may make things far worse long term. Dogs that are trained with methods that increase stress (painful response from us in reaction to what the dog does, when dog stops, the pain goes away) can create a significant risk even if you begin to see what is assumed to be improvement by you or your trainer. When dealing with even basic training of simple behaviors, it may take days for a dog to learn a new action depending on many factors: this greatest one being the human aspect.

The greatest failure I find in working with dogs is the owner is not able to give the time or effort needed. No matter how promising the situation looks, if the owner cannot do the work for whatever reason, the results will not be as desired. No matter how effective, kind or skilled the trainer is, if the owner is not following through, the dog will not improve and may worsen to varying degrees. Here are some of the concerns and issues many owners fail to address:

1. **Not giving enough daily training time.** Many owners assume that a couple short sessions a day, or even just that one session a week or so with the trainer is enough. No. Dogs learn best when there are many opportunities to repeat the lesson in short sessions. Twenty sessions a day of three minutes are far more effective than one session of twenty minutes.

2. **Not following through after the trainer leaves.** Once a trainer leaves your home or you leave the class, you are responsible for working with the dog. If you do not keep up with the lessons or contact the trainer for more advice between or even after sessions are done, you run a greater risk of things not working out as desired. Trainers need feedback. Not all can afford to rig your home with cameras and watch you on video.
3. **Failing to give the dog proper exercise and mental stimulation/activity.** No matter how well you are doing with training, if your dog is not getting the physical and mental needs met appropriately, there is a greater chance that undesired behaviors will persist. Stimulation does not mean shoving a dog in a back yard for longer periods; this means you are active with the dog, playing, walking, doing a sport, etc.
4. **Failing to have others reinforce the behaviors.** It is amazing how fast a visitor can undo your work. For example, if you are finally able to eat a meal without your dog jumping all over the table, yet your guest sneaks food to the dog or even encourages these behaviors, all your work can be trashed.
5. **Expecting immediate results.** This expectation is worsening with the popularity of training shows. Very rarely will a situation, especially a severe one, be resolved in an hour or even a couple weeks. What the shows do not air are the hours of work the family may be doing on a daily basis. They do not show the effort to create training scenarios. They do not show the families that fail. What you see in that 30 or 60 minutes show is a scant fraction of the work that may be done. TV shows give an unrealistic expectation to the average viewer.
6. **Failing to make changes in management and environment.** When an owner does not make recommended changes in how the dog is managed and the environment, then the success of training may be greatly lessened. For example, if your dog is developing aggressions because neighborhood kids torment the dog while he is in the yard when you are not home and you fail to keep the dog inside during these times, then the issue will persist. If your dog is biting a child due to how the child is acting and you fail to teach the child manners as well, the dog will continue his actions.

However, if you reverse these points of failure, this increases the chance of success. When an owner is willing to put in the time, effort, make life changes, etc., the chance of a good outcome increases. Again, no matter how great the trainer is, you have to be equally as dedicated.