

## **What is Positive**

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From time to time I get calls from people who want to work their dogs on livestock with “positive only” methods. I would like to say that is easy to do but.... it is not that easy!

The thing we have to remember; training a dog to work livestock is a little different than training for any other purpose. We are dealing with living entities on both sides of the equation. When training a dog in most disciplines we have time to wait if the dog gets carried away. In stock work, we would be dishonest to both the livestock and the dog if we did not take control.

Now, what I am about to say is based only on my experience with “positive only” and may not be the way of everyone that practices “positive only” training. With that in mind, don’t feel that you are being targeted just because of words I use to define what I am talking of.

If your dog gets over excited and gets pulled too far into its prey drive, or into play, you do not have time to wait for it to make a better choice. We have to be able to tell it no, direct it to a better choice, or end the over stimulation some how. If we allow it to go on we run a risk to the livestock which is not acceptable. We also set our dogs up.

How does this set the dog up? We are setting it up by allowing behaviors that are not acceptable. If the dog is working in an inappropriate manner it will not be able to successfully handle the livestock. If the livestock are not handled properly, the owner of the livestock will not have the dog on their livestock. This in then loses the handler one of the options available to train. Without livestock to work the training slows or halts.

Then we go on to using the dog for trials or for work. If you want to trial and your dog is not appropriate your run will be called. Having a run called for inappropriate work is not fun for handler, judge, livestock, spectators, and often the dog (I say often because I have seen dogs that do not know they can do wrong that walk away from that with no idea they were the problem). If looking at work, no one will truly use a dog if it is causing more work than help. You then have a dog that has its time with you limited because it can not be trusted in those situations.

I want to be honest and fair when I work with a dog. If a dog is being honest with the stock I have all day to let it make good choices. If it is not making good choices I will be as positive with the dog as the dog is being with the livestock. If the dog is going to be on livestock it must be responsible for its choices.

Good choices will be rewarded with good consequences, poor choices must also have consequences appropriate to that choice. To my way of thinking this means you can not ethically train a stock dog with “positive only” training (in both ways people talk about this type of training). When you train with appropriate consequences it can be a positive experience for livestock, handler, and dog. I personally would rather a positive, ethical experience than worry that I am following someones definition of “positive only”.