

The Art of Recall

Recall or coming when called is probably the most important thing to teach Rover. Many dogs seem to understand the concept right away and are easy to teach. However with some dogs getting them to come reliably is a challenge. Understanding differences in communication methods and relationships between the two species is important because dogs are looking at what we do from their canine perspective not our human one.

Reliable recall involves all the elements needed for a great relationship with our dogs, bonding or love, respect and trust. If there is no bond then there is little incentive for our dog to want to come to us. If there is no respect Rover is not likely to leave something that he thinks is more interesting or important. If Rover doesn't trust us he's certainly not going to come to us willingly. These three elements need to be mutual between us and Rover. We need to love him and him us. We need to respect his individuality and the fact that he's a dog not a person, and finally we need to trust that with time and proper education, which is our responsibility, he can learn to do the right things.

It's not what you say but how you say it. Differing communication methods can cause misunderstandings. Rover's primary method of communicating with us and with other dogs is his body language. Because canine body language is his only frame of reference, he thinks our body language means the same as his.

People, being bipeds, usually stand straight and tall when they call their dogs. From Rover's viewpoint that's displaying an authoritative posture. It would be the same as a dog standing still with his head up and tail up, which is a dominant posture. Dogs will rarely approach a dog displaying dominance. And by looking directly at Rover, which in canine is a warning, and you are giving him the message that he better NOT approach.

Dogs, when wanting another to approach will "soften" their body language. They might lower their head and tail; they might even get into a play bow. Their body language will be more open and inviting. We can mimic their inviting body language by crouching down closer to their level.

I've gone to the middle of a dog park and stood up straight and not one dog has come near me. Then I've crouched down and immediately have had dogs come towards me. If I stand up again they will veer away.

Again, because we're people we might send Rover a mixed message. "ROVER COME" spoken authoritatively is less likely to be welcoming than a light happy tone of voice. If we've crouched low and are calling in a happy tone of voice, there's a good chance that Rover will get the right message. I've seen many dogs that would not come to their owners make the choice to come once their owners just changed how they were calling them.

Run Away! I worked with a young couple whose Australian Shepherd, Beckham, would run away every time they called him. They had called Beckham, and when he didn't come they went out into the yard, grabbed his collar, and dragged him inside. As a way to avoid getting grabbed and dragged, Beckham would run. They'd chase him and eventually corner him so they could grab him. They had inadvertently taught Beckham that "come" meant that he had better run. This was a situation where we had to start from the beginning. There was no trust or respect in their relationship.

We attached a six foot leash to Beckham and I had them, one at a time, crouch low and with a happy voice call "Here Beckham" while tapping their leg. Beckham was hesitant but just a slight gentle tug got him moving towards them. They encouraged him all the way and gave him lots of

happy praise when he arrived. It was a small win, but it was the beginning of teaching Beckham recall.

It's important not to reel a dog towards you. We really want them making the decision to come willingly and not dragged or pulled. Some common things that I've seen people do which can make dogs hesitant to come are grabbing the dog as it gets near them, correcting their dogs for a previous mistake once it does come and calling him and then making the dog do something it doesn't like.

All of these can create mistrust between dogs and people. I can't count the number of times we've seen dogs, especially small ones, veer away just out of arm's reach because they have been getting grabbed and don't trust the hands reaching for them. If Rover gets in trouble when he comes, he'll think twice about coming to us. It's important that he always gets praised for coming.

Charlie is a cute little Maltipoo. His family loved picking him up to love him, but Charlie really preferred having his feet on the ground. They would call him and if he got close enough they'd scoop him up in their arms. He would rarely come all the way to them without a very tempting bribe and often even turned down his favorite cheese. Once I convinced them to stop picking him up without his permission, things improved. When they sat on the floor and invited Charlie into their laps, he would happily snuggle with them. This was a trust issue for Charlie. Rover always needs to feel safe coming to you.

Set yourself and Rover up for success. Start with Rover on a leash or in a closed room so he can't go somewhere else. Also start in a quiet place with no distractions. Communicate with him in his language and work on earning his trust and respect. Start with him just a few feet away, on leash. As he becomes consistent increase the distance and the distractions. Use a leash until he's coming directly to you every time. Then test him in an enclosed area. Start with Rover very close and work up to the long distance recall. If you test him before he's consistent or if he's outside your sphere of influence you might not get the results you want. It's very important to build a strong foundation of success on leash before moving forward.

Never Chase. Rover is a dog and one of a dogs' favorite games is chase. If Rover doesn't come, run in the opposite direction, that will often kick his chase instinct into high gear. If you chase him, he'll out run you.

A great game is for two or more people to crouch down and take turns calling Rover with excited happy voices and give him lots of love and praise for coming. He'll soon be running back and forth between you with a happy smile and a happily wagging tail. You can use a ball or other toy and toss that back and forth also. Of course you do need to let him get it sometimes. Make it as much fun for you and Rover as possible.

Recipe for recall

1. Crouch low
2. Use a happy voice to call him
3. Encourage him all the way to you
4. Always praise him for coming to you
5. Use a leash until he's consistent
6. Start close and build a good foundation of understanding.
7. Never violate his trust
8. Make it fun.

When you put it all together, the love, respect, trust and the recipe for recall, you'll have a dog that is happy to come to you and will come as soon as you call. That is certainly a big part of having a great relationship with Rover. When we have a great relationship we'll have a Happy Dog and a Happy Family.

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