

By: Gary W. Fleming

To E or not to E

As usual, I seem to just now be catching on to something I probably should have realized some time ago.

I know there has been, and will continue to be, a lot of articles and assertions, supporting and disagreeing with the use of E-collars for training dogs.

Like every thing else in this world, there is nothing carved in stone. Different dogs and different training situations may call for different methods.

Maybe all of the folks I train with already understand the concept that I just recently figured out and the concept just seemed so natural to them. I guess they just didn't think it necessary to tell me about it. (Ok – I'm a little hard headed so they probably didn't think I would listen).

According to most of the videos, books, articles and conversations that I've seen, read, or participated in, one of the greatest values of an E-collar is ones ability to discipline a dog, from just about any reasonable distance. Of course the dog has no idea where the discipline cam from.

Until lately, that all sounded good to me since I don't like doing the fifty yard dash in 95 degree weather. These days I'm not running that distance in any allotment of time that I would want to admit to any way.

Most of the credible information that I've come across suggests that the E-collar may be useful during steadiness training, for dogs that range out to far, for deer chasers and snake breaking.

My experience tells me that those are good uses and there is some agreement within dog training circles with respect to the use of E-collars for those situations.

The beauty of the E-collar is the enhancement of ones ability to apply discipline anonymously. In my opinion that may actually be the best reasons not to use one.

Of course I wouldn't have come up with that profound realization without inspiration from the most reliable source of useful information regarding training. My dog told me!

My E-collar broke about a month ago so I have not been able to use it for obedience training et cetera.

Maybe it's just a coincidence but since I have not been using it I have noted a significant improvement in my dog's obedience. The dog actually has begun to acknowledges of my existence.

So here's the concept that my dog told me:

My dog needs more than anonymous discipline; he needs to know that I am the one applying discipline so that he understands his place in the pack.

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For example if my dog runs out a little further than I would like; I give him a whistle and he doesn't respond so I give him a little nick with the collar. That gets his attention and he heads back in.

What has he learned from that? On the surface you could say that he learned that if I say come and he doesn't respond he gets disciplined in the form of electrical stimulation.. If that was the lesson learned that would be ok with me.

The only problem is that it may be just a façade because the dog had no idea who was handing out the discipline. The big picture is that I want him to submit to me thus acknowledge my standing as the pack leader.

Since he really has no idea that I'm the one who nicked him; he probably doesn't see his response as submission but just a response to an unpleasant environmental stimuli.

So far the only thing the dog has learned is that if that guy says come and I don't come, this thing on my neck starts stinging me.

The dog has no clue that I caused the stimulation.

Since the dog doesn't have a tape measure with it, much less the means to read one, it can't think to it self, "gee - if I go out over 76 yards I feel pain". So the dog probably didn't learn anything regarding how close in he is supposed to hunt.

Most disappointingly of all, he didn't learn that the leader of the pack meant it when he said, "Get your rear end back here immediately".

I'm sure most dogs are very aware of who the leader of the pack is. But I'd be willing to bet that they did not learn their place by being disciplined with an electronic collar.

Although the stimuli got the correct response (what should I do?) the dog missed the most important point (who am I doing it for?).

The command was given because the pack leader wanted him to submit. The pack leader wanted him to obey the command. Without knowledge of where the discipline came from the dog is just toeing the line because something stung his neck.

Discipline in and of itself has no standing in the pack. The one applying the discipline has the standing. The more the dog understands who is issuing the discipline, the better understanding it will have of its place in the scheme of things.

Now I'm not so hard headed that I didn't understand the pack concept; you can ask any of the ten guys who tried to explain it to me. I just never connected it with the E-collar and UFD (Unidentified Flying Discipline).

I still think the E-collar has its place in training but I intend to use it very sparingly in any future training endeavors. I think it has little value in helping a handler establish him or her self as the pack leader which is, in my view, the most important dynamic of training.