

Arms and the Object of Focus

by Bud Houston

In our discussion of the matter of the dog's focus I don't believe I have for awhile talked through how we use our arms to communicate simple information. This is a simple system based on the dog's natural inclinations and understanding of our movement and habits.

The "attitude" of the arm refers to the height of the lifted arm and the degree of the angle created by the lift. A *high* attitude is at shoulder height; a *low* attitude is against the pant leg.

I apologize for the following crude and quick drawings. I kept waiting for the art department to come up with some proper illustrations... but then I remembered, I don't have an art department.



As the handler runs lifting the arm and pointing forward is a basic cue for the dog to stay in obstacle focus and, frankly, constitutes permission to work at a considerable distance. Don't get me wrong here. The arm is not the primary cue. Consider it a detail and confirmation of the more abiding cues (running, for example is the most important cue).

Note that the arm stays arrow-straight and points on in the direction the dog is to move if not directly at the obstacle the dog should move to.

Now the handler slowing down, presumably in anticipation of a turn draws his arm down so that the hand is about belt level. However the arm stands out away from the body. The arm remains arrow-straight and points directly at the obstacle the dog is next to perform.



Again we ask for the dog to be in obstacle focus. But clearly we're giving other cues. Indeed the dog might take a little steam out of his movement in response to the handlers braking movement.



To draw the dog into tight handler focus the lead hand should drop flush against the handler's body. When conducting a tight movement in redirecting the dog we want the dog watching us closely. Now the lead hand probably becomes the predominate cue.

Oh yes, and by the way. We also use our arms to keep our balance when running.

Pointing the way for the dog and keeping balance at the same time is an important skill worthy of practice so that you can maintain your dignity while playing the game.

