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The Touch Command

When I was first teaching recalls (aka, “coming when called”) in my beginning obedience classes, I used to see many dogs get treats from their handler when they hadn’t quite reached them. The dog would grab the treat and run, and never complete the come. Some dogs would come, grab the treat and keep running right past the handler (I call them “fly by”). Teaching the Touch Command to these “fly boys” often helps solve this, and creates a much more solid recall.

I also use the Touch Command for shy dogs that are fearful but not aggressive towards strangers. Often these shy dogs are afraid of the stranger’s hands coming towards them. We first teach them the touch command as outlined below, and then we have the shy dogs touch the person’s shoe and pant, while the stranger stands still with their hands away from the dog. For this to work, the dog must not be afraid to approach a stranger. You don’t want to drag them.

Step One: Place your hand palm side down about 6 inches from your dog’s face. Have a second treat in your other hand and behind your back. Your dog will probably be curious and investigate and touch your hand, when they do, use your reward marker “yes” or “good” and reward. If your dog doesn’t investigate, rub your hand with some kind of food scent and try again. If you have to, you can hide a treat in the hand that is the cue hand.

Step Two: Repeat step one and add the word “touch.”

Step Three: When your dog has really mastered this, have your hand further away from his nose, so he has to walk to your hand to get the treat.

Step Four: Add distance to step three.

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