



The Cost of Training Your Dog

Cathie Sabin - Dog Trainer/Owner of B.C. Dog Training

May 24, 2007

It is probably a safe assumption that for anyone taking the time from their busy schedule to read this, that price matters. A very common scenario begins with the ringing of the phone, is quickly followed by the caller confirming this is the 'place that trains dogs' and then the question, "How much would it cost to train my dog?"

In times past, I (like many other trainers) would run through my price list for the various programs I offer, while perhaps giving a brief description of each. It took a while for me to realize that my answer often failed to address the real question I was being asked. In order to answer the question, it is important to understand what is being asked, what is needed and in what context it is being asked. The fact is that for most people training their dog, the process is not simply a dollars and cents formula. Indeed the total currency required in this endeavor amounts to a combination of money, time, energy and ability.

In order to get to the true cost, one has to have a clear idea of what they are looking for. For each person calling, how their dog is now and how it will be once trained, offers a unique understanding of "training." Once the dog owner begins the training process, the outcome they seek may change or grow but every goal has to begin with a vision of something.

Right, so the owner has decided they want their dog to walk nicely at their side on a loose leash and they want him to come when they call him - for now that's it, nothing else - how much? In this example let's assume that everything they would need is included in a basic dog training package. The average numbers might look something like this:

Option 1. Group classes. Ten weeks/classes @ \$23.50/week - total \$235.00.

Option 2. Private sessions. Five sessions @ \$95.00/session - total \$475.00.

Option 3. Six week E-Collar Private. Six private lesson @ \$134.00 - total \$800.00. Does not include collar

Option 4. Four week Board and Train. - \$1995.00. Does not include remote collar if wanted.

Does presenting the above four options really answer the question? Not quite.

Option 1 seems like the best deal but starting with 'time,' lets consider the rest of the currency that is required if the goals are to be realized. In the group class, because the instructor must be available equally to all, the dog owner gets the least amount of their instructor's time. Over the ten weeks of training, the owner will have to put in at least forty minutes of training per day if they are to succeed. (40 X 6 days X 10 weeks = 2400 minutes or 40 hours) Unless you have more time than you know what to do with, those hours are worth something. If we place a value of even \$20.00 per hour on each of those hours, we must add \$800.00 to the \$235.00 course cost. If time is tight, the value of each of those hours goes way up!

(continued)

Next consider the energy requirement. Simple question: How much value do you place on your energy? An ten week commitment does not seem like much but this means doing the work EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE IT. The fact is that many people run out of gas before they run out of class and they end up coasting. Sometimes this means they try again with another class or they settle for less than their original goal.

Finally consider the ability angle. Is the owner able to physically do the exercises as outlined? Are they able to follow through working mostly on their own with minimal instruction and assistance from an instructor? Are they able to apply the generalized instruction to their own unique experience and set of circumstances?

Option 2 certainly offers more. Instructor time is plentiful - practice time may be a problem. You still have to find 40 minutes per day over a five week period. The total time requirement in terms of hours is still in the neighborhood of 16 hours. Using the same modest \$20.00/hour figure the value of the time would equal \$320.00 added to the \$475.00 paid for the program.

Option 3 requires much less time and energy and is much easier on both the owner and the dog. The process is faster, clearer and more effective. Using the same time formula we arrive at about 8 hours practice over a six-week period costing \$160.00.

Option 4 requires no time or energy on your part other than maintenance to continue the work once dog goes home.

Now might be a good time to revise the figures mentioned earlier in this article:

Option 1 (group classes). Course \$235.00, Time \$800.00, Energy (half as much again as the time cost) \$400.00 - Total \$1435.00

Option 2 (private instruction). Course \$475.00, Time \$320.00, Energy \$160 - Total \$830.00.

Option 3 (E-Collar Private). Course \$800.00, Time \$288.00, Energy \$144 - Total \$1232.00 (plus collar)

Option 4 (Board and Train). Course \$1995.00, Time and energy not a factor. - Total \$1995.00 (plus collar)

From the above example it begins to become clear that the cost is relative and depends on the resources you have and are prepared to invest in the project. The fact is that the value of sweat equity is a far more important price to add to the cost of training a dog for without that, the job will not get done.