

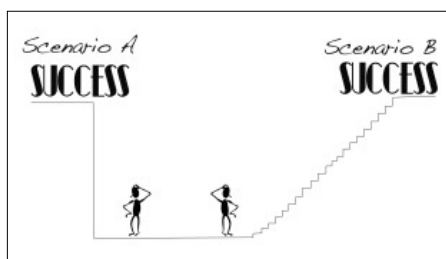


## SEEING SUCCESS

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How you define success determines its existence; it doesn't exist until you learn to see it. Success is critical to dog training, but like the mechanics of training, seeing success is a skill that requires development – both in definition and process. Whether or not a person can acknowledge success and what they expect it to look like have profound implications for the outcome of and their commitment to training.

In which scenario is this person most likely to succeed?



Scenario A involves one single step to success – but it is an unachievable step. Scenario B involves many little steps, and each step is an increment of the end goal. The person in Scenario A must scale a sheer cliff in order to succeed, whereas the person in Scenario B will succeed through a series of smaller steps, each a success in itself.

I've worked with a number of clients who have an idea of success that

derails their training. In addition to learning training skills, we must also learn to redefine “success” – sometimes easier said than done. Typically, sessions with such clients involve a variation of this conversation:

**Me:** “Well done, did you see how Fido disengaged rather than escalating into a reaction when he noticed that dog?”

**Client:** “We were walking yesterday and saw a dog and he flipped out and just about dragged me across the street!”

**Me:** “Yes, we've discussed how to manage that until we can train in that situation, but Fido needs a better foundation before we can tackle that. Both you and Fido made really good choices just now. Instead of freezing up and staring at the dog, did you notice that Fido softened his eyes and ears and turned back to you?”

**Client:** “Okay, but when I walk past the school yard he goes crazy by the fence when he sees dogs playing!”

The client in this dialogue is that person in Scenario A. Unless they acquire a sense of self-reflection and see the opportunity that lies in Scenario B, they will continue trying to scramble up the wall in front of them.

The definition of success for these dog owners is simply the end point. Success for them means doing away with all training and management. These owners don't see the success in the daily choices Fido makes, don't understand their own role in how Fido makes these choices, and don't understand that Fido's success is their success.

Positive training is about working with our dogs toward a common goal, not “winning.” If you don't see successes early in training, you are not going to see it through to the “end point.” Understanding success as a process for both your dogs and yourself motivates you to continue working toward your end goal.

Success is not only cultivated by acknowledging small successes; it is also a product of the lens through which owners see their progress. “Good behaviour” is too often defined as no behavior at all: the dog doesn't bark, doesn't jump, doesn't sniff, doesn't bite, doesn't run away, doesn't, doesn't, doesn't. When a person can depart from this standard of success, a whole world of possibility opens up to them and, consequently, their dogs.

Corrective training does “work.” It works very successfully if the definition of success means “the dog doesn't do X.” Shifting away from punitive training requires acknowledging the shortfall of this definition of success. While the success of a clicker-trained dog can encompass similar ideas of being mannerly, we can further define success as a set of skills rather than just a lack of behaviour. Success may now encompass problem-solving, self-regulation, and focused attention – and with these inevitably come desirable behaviours.

Consider what you need from your dog and what your dog needs from you. Understanding the mutual exchange with an animal is part of learning to define success and turn it into something realistic, tangible, and desirable for both you and your dog. Success is unattainable if it consists of one giant leap. Success is cumulative, a process. What that process consists of depends on its very definition.