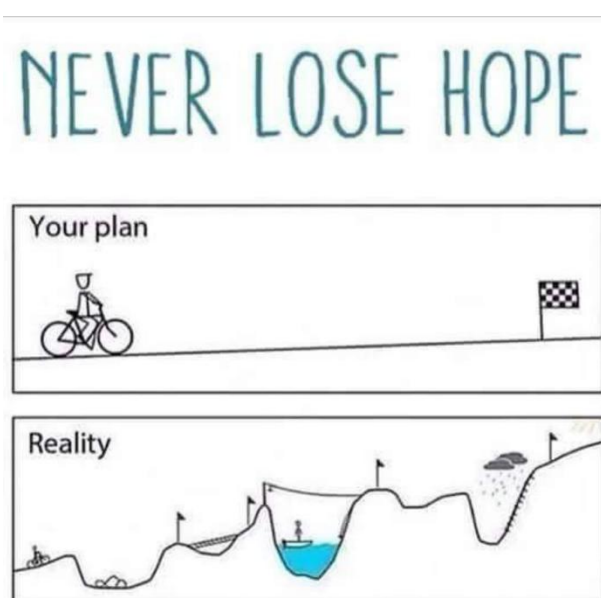


## Learning is a Journey, not a Destination

Originally, this article was titled "Training is a Journey, not a Destination." However, the word "training" didn't quite capture the essence of what I wanted to convey. You see, when we talk about training, it often seems like it's only the dog's end of the leash that's doing the learning. In reality, both humans and dogs embark on a journey of learning together. The term "training" tends to focus too much on achieving a specific skill or task, suggesting that learning has a finite endpoint. In reality, the journey of learning is a dynamic and lifelong adventure, filled with its share of highs and lows. Learning is far from being a straightforward process; it's influenced not only by our dog's age and experience but also by their adaptability and attitude. Let's take a closer look at what this journey actually entails:



As our dogs learn new behaviours, adapt to changes in their habits, or navigate through unfamiliar environments, it's natural for there to be ups and downs along the way. But why does this happen?

Age certainly plays a role, but not in the sense of "you can't teach an old dog new tricks." Senior dogs are just as capable of learning and should continue to do so to keep life exciting and to maintain their zest for learning. Witnessing a senior dog taking up a new hobby or mastering a new trick is truly heartwarming. After all, if we humans stopped learning around the age of 12, life would quickly become dull and uninspiring.

Puppies, on the other hand, are like little sponges—they soak up information readily. However, it often seems like they forget just as quickly. This is because their brains are

still developing, and they haven't yet grasped the concept of generalizations. For example, they might not understand that jumping on people is unacceptable, not only inside the house but outside too. The adolescent phase can also be a bit tumultuous for some dogs. This is because the part of their brain responsible for impulse control—the prefrontal cortex—is the last to mature. As a result, behaviours like barking at other dogs, pulling on the leash, or darting out the front door are often more prevalent during this stage.

Just like adolescent humans, dogs can be moody, and their mood significantly impacts their ability to learn. Dogs experience a wide range of emotions, from excitement and curiosity to fear and anxiety, regardless of their age. A dog in a positive mood is more receptive to learning, while a dog in a negative mood may be less motivated. It's essential to recognize and address their emotional state to create a conducive learning environment that fosters trust, confidence, and enthusiasm. If your pup isn't in the mood to learn, engaging them in activities that alleviate their stress or anxiety can be more productive than forcing them to train.

Internal pain issues can also significantly affect a dog's ability to learn and behave. However, detecting such issues can be challenging, as dogs are masters at hiding their discomfort and can't communicate their pain verbally. A general rule of thumb is that, if behaviours seem random and lack a discernible pattern, there's likely an underlying internal issue at play. Regular veterinary check-ups and attentive observation by dog owners are essential for detecting and addressing these issues.

So, what does all of this mean for us on the other end of the leash? First, it's crucial to have empathy and understand that dogs have good days and bad days, just like we do. On those challenging days, considering whether your dog isn't feeling their best and allowing your pup to relax and unwind—much like enjoying a "Netflix and chill" session—can be beneficial. Being consistent with your expectations of your dog, but having patience with their behavior in new environments can save you and your dog from frustration. Additionally, it's our responsibility to nurture a spirit of lifelong learning in our canine companions. By celebrating their curiosity, encouraging exploration, and providing support and guidance, we empower our dogs to thrive.

In embracing the journey of learning, we not only enable our dogs to reach their full potential but also deepen our bond with them, creating a partnership based on trust, communication, and mutual respect. So, let's cherish every step taken, every lesson learned, and every moment shared with our beloved companions, for in the end, it's not just about the destination but the journey itself.



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