

When Agility Zone asked me to write "an inspirational piece," to encourage readers to go away and train harder, or feel better about what they are doing, I realised I had writer's block. Writer's block that lasted for a whole year. How can I motivate somebody to be a hard worker if I'm not a hard worker myself? I'm in dog training because I don't want to work from 9 to 5. I need my 10 hours of sleep per night. And what good training steps can I offer if I don't believe in steps? If I believe listening to your dog and doing whatever feels right is the way to go? How can I possibly write about the dos and don'ts of dog training when I don't believe there are any rules that are applicable to all, and when I have always said that I will stop training dogs when there is nothing new to learn?

What can I say about handling if I believe that there is more than one way of doing things and that everybody should spend their time getting to know their dog, and adjust to that particular dog? That I couldn't find any joy in agility anymore if somebody proves me wrong and that the whole sport is just about following the rules?

How can I steal readers' time with some abstract training advice that might not even be useful for that particular team, if I strongly believe that their time would be better spent outside, playing? Yes, my father was right: I will never be rich. But, since I don't need much more than some dog food and lots of free time to play with my dogs, that's fine with me.

Therefore, I can be honest with you! I don't think the knowledge you can buy is anywhere near as important as playing with your dog. I think agility is a way of life and mutual understanding on a course, and is not necessarily a result of complete discipline, consistency and work. I'm living proof, as those three qualities are unknown to me. My dogs were never trained for rear, front or blind crosses. They just know them. "So you never do circle work", I was asked. "What is circle work?" I asked. And they explained to me that it's running in circles with the dog on one or another side. And well, I have to admit, I do try to do that at least twice a week, however my circle is about 8km long and I call it jogging with my dogs. And they couldn't believe it so they asked me "but surely you need to do some foundation work because they need to learn what your shoulders and feet mean". And yes, of course, they learn what my shoulders and feet mean! They watch very carefully what my body language suggests before I turn in the direction of a dog-food-closet - OR in the direction of the car keys - OR in the direction of the door! They have it all figured out. So yes, I guess I do lots of foundation work, I just don't have any fancy words for it: I simply call it life.

I think the two parts that I love most about my life with my dogs is hiking with them and trying to think together with them, to think of new tricks. I just love tricks and all the freedom it gives me. Figuring out how to master that or another trick is just so much fun! Of course, agility is our big passion too, but it comes far behind hiking and tricks. And well, you have it all covered already: living with your dog and teaching him



some tricks is all you need for agility. Yep, that's why I always laugh when I hear "you need to have at least some agility equipment at home if you want to succeed in the sport of agility". Well, until a few weeks ago, I lived in small apartment in a city and the only agility stuff I had was a plank for training running contacts (when I had a new puppy, not all the time!) and a few stick-in-the-ground jumps that I won once, but never used. Over 90% of things that make my dogs as successful as they are were trained away from agility equipment.

By far the most important thing they ever learned about agility was for sure Cik & Cap - again away from agility equipment first. But I guess it's not just about Cik & Cap after all. Or it would be too easy otherwise! I think that with every stupid dog trick, they learned something about how much fun it is to work with me, about how to learn, how to use their body, something about confidence, something about fun and something about speed.

And, probably even more importantly, *I* learned something about how they learn, how they think, how they feel, what they love and what they fear. We just became a very good team somewhere along the way. And that's all agility is about, right?

So no, if you expect to get a magic formula to success in my videos and articles, you'll be disappointed. Magic happens when playing with your dog. Videos and articles might give you some ideas, but don't fall into the trap of just following the steps. Just dance through them.

Silvia Trkman



Silvia Trkman presents

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