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ACE – INSIDE FLANKS AND OFF DRAW FLANKS

Accompanied video link here

Hana has done a fantastic job with this young boy, Ace! I had the wonderful opportunity to work him and had a great time. When I watch Ace work, he is brilliant and confident, rarely making a mistake, so I was seeing how he did with closer spaces and off-the-draw flanks. I am using the "**Inside-Off Draw Circle Game"** (or perhaps the audience has a better term) to help Ace free up, get used to closer work, and be more comfortable flanking off the draw.

I love this exercise because it helps a dog with many things and is fun.

In this setup, we are using goats, and the draw is to my left or to the reader's right on the screen. The goats really want to pull that way, and the dogs feel it. Ace wants to be on that side and doesn't trust he can go all the way around to catch the goats if they leave. This is very common for eye dogs and draw-sensitive dogs.

I am up against the goats and having Ace push the goats to me to hold them on the fence. He gets a little sticky, so I encourage him to push a little harder. Ace hesitates because the fence/wall is there. He thinks he can't push anymore. He is also more focused on the goats in front, trying to sneak away. I am using "Yes" and noises to encourage him to keep walking forward and push those two back in. This gets a dog used to holding pressure on balance, understanding their responsibility to hold the herd together, and more comfortable pushing and holding pressure.

Since he is in the correct spot on the edge of the bubble, without moving him, I can call him to me to start an inside flank. If he was directly in front of me and the gats, I would have needed to push him to the side before calling him in. (You don't want to call a dog through the stock for this exercise. That's a different exercise!)

Calling a dog to you and immediately sending it around the stock gets the dog used to coming to you easily, knowing you are not calling them off but just helping them reposition. Note that I am also right up against the wall, so Ace has no choice but to move inside (in front) of me on a flank.

It is tight, so he has to create a small gap between me and the goats – He says, "Yikes!! That's tight!".

I am purposely flanking him inside, *away* from the draw. He has to leave the draw side and then go all the way around to cover (get to the side between the draw and the goats).

You first see him not able to do it because he comes to me and starts to go around but feels the goats try to leave, and that is just wrong! He starts then decides he can't let go of the draw and pops back. " Wait, if I go there, I can't cover the draw, and they are getting away!"

This is no big deal, simply try again. To help Ace understand what I am asking, I slightly move my body to the other side of him so it makes sense for him to continue the flank. You can tell he is getting a bit excited because it is uncomfortable. He doesn't trust he can get around the stock to cover the way I am asking him to do it. The dog often goes fast because they have to get to the other side and want to get

there quickly!. They still speed up as they get more comfortable, but it is wider and more intentional. (rather than panic).

Then, wallah! Ace does it and instantly kicks out wide on the draw side to catch the leaving goats. The first few times, it's a little rough, but each time, it gets better.

The dog's hesitation is based on discomfort, not naughtiness, so in this case, repetition is preferred over repercussion.

I repeated this several times and mixed it up to have Ace move inside on, flanking the other way, then go back to the other side (flanking off the draw). He did amazing!

This is great for eye dogs, dogs learning to drive, dogs who go straight in to catch stock when leaving (when they should be kicking out), dogs uncomfortable with pressure, and dogs who don't come to you when driving.

It can be a little much for dogs who are really uncomfortable with pressure, are brand new to herding, or grippers who bite when close to stock. Other exercises before this one can help them be ready for the Inside-Off Draw exercise.

Try it! If it goes south, stop and talk to your trainer about how to make it more successful. If it works- that's great, but don't over-drill it. One or two good ones, and move on.

Be slow and encouraging, allowing the dog to think about it. Your dog is trying its best and managing its discomfort on its own, so don't discourage it from that process. There is nothing worse than trying to figure something out on your own and someone keeps talking!

3-4 minutes of this, then off to something else.

