

## The End is in Sight, or Should Be

While driving to an appointment last week I saw a young man dressed in a statue of liberty costume waving a signboard. He was advertising a tax preparation service in an adjacent strip mall. His enthusiasm was commendable. Although it was a pleasant spring day, it was a job that could only be tedious under the best of circumstances.

I wondered just how long he was required to stand out there, dancing and gesturing like Lady Liberty on a high dose of stimulants. I imagined he has break periods, as well as time out for lunch. In fact I expect his first question when his job was explained to him was “how long do I have to do this?”. An indeterminate sentence is more punishing than a fixed one.

Yet I often talk to owners who are disappointed by the inability of their dog to hold a consistent stay. The frequent complaint is the dog progressed well when he began his training, and perhaps even maintained compliance for a while, but that quickly began to deteriorate.

An interesting revelation when they explain the process of training the stay is the absence of a consistent release command. The dog is left there waiting without the certainty of an end point, and he doesn't even get to dance around to dissipate his growing anxiety. With time it becomes the dogs decision, and since initially he releases when his human decides to go, it is accepted. That is, until the fickleness of humans emerges and they become upset with what had previously been acceptable. The owner began to walk away, and then changed his mind, before the dog apparently should have read it.

Knowing he has to hold the stay until he receives a consistent, clear release command results in a more reliable stay. Consistency is a fundamental precept of successful training, and certainly the dog cannot be left in charge of when to end his task.

How long would anyone stand out there with a signboard, if choosing when to leave was at their discretion?

