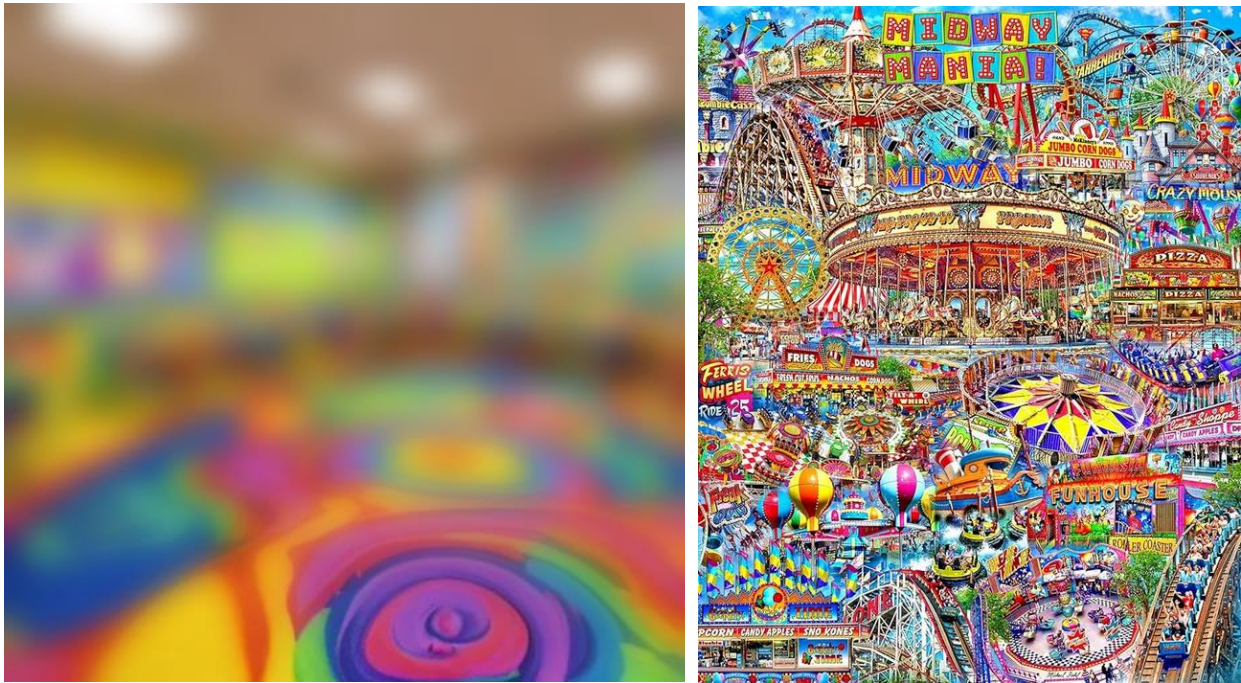


### **Getting precise indications**

When a dog gets their nose right on the hide or target odor, it's known as "being at source". It's what we expect a dog to do in scentwork. Either get their nose right at the source, or as close as they can for an inaccessible hide that they can't physically access. They can make that look simple, so you might not think we have to do much training to get that. But the longer you do scent sports, the more you learn just how complex that task can be!

And of course getting their nose to source involves several steps before the dog can GET to that point! They have to first find the faintest whisp of odor, recognize it as important, have a desire to follow it, and then repeatedly determine which direction has a stronger amount of odor while dismissing a massive amount of other scents that are in the area.

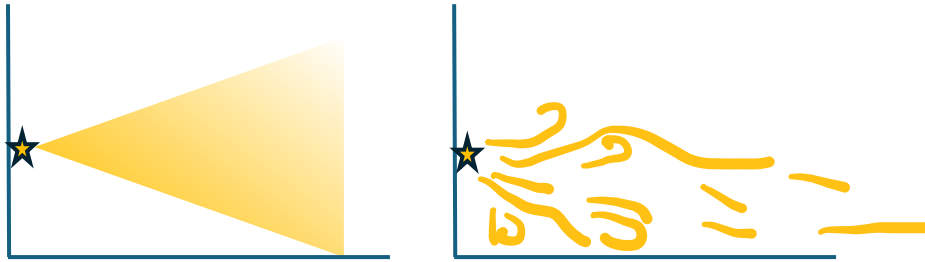
I imagine it as how we could focus on finding one specific color out of a scene with MANY other colors, even if we could only see clearly for a few feet in front of us and if the colors moved every time the air currents did! But it's probably more like working that way while in a location that is saturated with a multitude of colors (scents) for the dog, like the photo on the right is for us, with the colors all on things that move.



Springbok Midway Mania Puzzle image

When you learn that cadaver dogs in Croatia have been able to locate burial sites from 700 B.C. (roughly 2,700–3,000 years old), and some tracking dogs can follow the path of a single human that walked through an urban area over 24 hours earlier, you start to get a idea of just how many scents the dog can smell in any given space! Every person, dog and critter that has been in that space in the recent past and any other enticing scents have to be dismissed as irrelevant and ignored along with any visual or auditory distractions.

And we would like to think that odor is an unbroken cone that gets progressively stronger and leads the dog right to the hide, but that is not likely to be the case. Air currents and the odor they carry are not unbroken, straight lines. They constantly change and can suddenly shift, sometimes drastically! Meaning odor can be there one moment and be gone the next! And there are MANY factors that affect how the air moves and which direction it moves, even right at the hide/source.



So that searching dog that just picked up a faint whiff of odor has their work cut out for them! And because we can't SEE the odor trail, there isn't much that we can do to help them locate it or follow it. And TRYING to do so will likely cause more issues than help.

### **So what CAN we do to help the dogs?**

#### **Building desire:**

The dogs must have a strong DESIRE to locate the source or they won't have the motivation to work through all the challenges along the way. We can help foster that desire by using top notch motivators like their favorite treats/toys.

And we can also help build that desire by making the training fun and as free of confusion and frustration as possible. They have enough to work out without us also being unclear on what we expect from them or adding too much challenge too fast! This is especially critical with dogs that have a low desire for food or toys or that hate to do a lot of repetition.

We can also understand how to use dopamine to our advantage to build in an 'addiction' to the odor and for the searching. This creates a dog that will do everything in their power to find the odor source even in the face of very difficult challenges and unexpected distractions!

#### **Proper hide setting:**

Many pet dogs no longer have to use their noses to cover much distance to find food or mates or find their way back to their home. So they don't have a chance to work on the skill of following odors to source. And it IS a skill they need to learn, not something they are born knowing how to do!

Having a class that is designed to help the dog learn HOW to follow the odor from the first whiff all the way to source in incremental learning steps is important! And teaching you how to set hides with an appropriate level of difficulty is also very important! A dog with high motivation will work through a lot of challenge in spite of poor hide setting, but they shouldn't have to. And a dog with low motivation might just give up if you set hides that they are not yet ready to tackle. And it is VERY easy to accidentally do that!

But while you don't want to set hides that are too difficult, you also don't want the hides to be SO easy that they are boring to the dog. Providing enough challenge to be interesting and allowing the dog to feel a sense of accomplishment is what you want to strive to set.

**Proper criteria:**

We can help the dog understand that we want them to put their nose on the source by being very clear in our mark/reward process right from the start, and on every hide. If you accept and mark the behavior of 'not quite on source' (known as fringe alerting or fringing) then the dog is less clear on what earns the mark/reward. Why would they do the extra work of getting all the way to source if 'close enough' also pays? We start out by making it easy for the dog to target the source and hard for them to be off source, but as the difficulty progresses, they will have to make the extra effort. So knowing WHAT to do if the dog has his nose confidently stuck on "not quite right" is also important!

Many classes focus on just setting odor for the dog to find once that odor has value and letting the dog 'work it out'. And I have been guilty of it as well! It's how scent sports have been trained for a lot of years because many dogs can learn to compensate for our lack of proper instruction! But as the hides get more complex, they struggle because they were not actually taught HOW to solve complex odor problems.

My goal for the training I offer is to make the skills they need to know as crystal clear and motivating for the dog as possible and as fun and easy as I can for the handler to learn new skills as well! Learning new skills is HARD! Confusion and frustration make it much harder!

Chris Puls

<http://ScentSportsDTC.com>