

The Rewards of Using Rewards

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Excerpt from *Help! This Animal is Driving Me Crazy*

If I reward my dog, isn't it bribing him for doing what he is supposed to do?

Many people have asked me this question. They somehow feel that correct behavior should be done for its own sake, without the addition of some extraneous reward. They say "He knows what's right and what pleases me. I don't see why that isn't enough. Why do I have to give him a dog biscuit?"

These people are on a responsibility trip. They feel they have to do things which do not get rewarded, so why should their dogs get special favors? But a reward is not a special favor; it is a bribe when administered correctly.

Rules for Effective Reward:

It has probably become obvious by now that reward is not as simple as giving your dog a biscuit. There are many types of rewards, and there are many ways you can unintentionally train your dog to bother you! To have a happy, well-adjusted, and trouble-free dog, you must master the correct way to reward. This is outlined in the four simple rules below:

1. Reward must be under your conscious, intentional control. In order to do this, you must start paying attention to your own behavior, as well as that of your dog. Ask yourself the following: What do I usually do when my dog pleases or bothers me? Is my behavior a reward for my dog's behavior? If so, do I want to reward this behavior?
2. Reward, to be effective, must immediately follow the behavior that you want to reward. The longer the delay, the more likely your reward will be ineffective. This is because your dog might do something else in the meantime, and then the other behavior will get rewarded. For example, if your dog brings you your newspaper and you take it and wait, he is likely to jump up on you or nuzzle your arm. If you then reward him, it is the jumping or arm nuzzling that is being rewarded, not the newspaper retrieving.
3. The reward should suit the behavior as much as possible. Reward your dog for sitting quietly by the door by giving him the opportunity to go out. This will allow you to take advantage of the numerous things your dog likes to do. You can make these things rewards for pleasing or good behavior. This means you will be training your dog whenever you are with him.
4. The reward for any one behavior should be as varied as possible. This will prevent your dog from becoming a chow hound. For example, when he

sits on command, sometimes he will get food, other times he will get a drink, or gets to play with a ball, or a scratch behind the ear. Keep in mind that many things will reward your dog. In fact, a reward can be defined as anything that increases the behavior it follows.

You can use this knowledge to train your dog to eventually do almost anything without ever giving him a biscuit. The key is to know what your dog likes to do, and then let him do it when he does something you like.

The Lure... How to Use It and Then Lose It!!



Here's the process for transitioning from using food as a lure to using it as reward. You will want to make this transition as quickly as possible in the training process, because when you use food as a reward you are getting your dog to really think about what he's doing, and that's when true learning takes place.

1. Put a treat in your hand so that your dog can see it. Use your hand to lure your dog into the position you want. When he is in position, immediately use your CR and then give him the treat and smile.
2. When he is reliably performing the behavior you want, continue to use the lure, but no longer give it to him. Use your CR, but have the reward come from somewhere else (the counter, refrigerator, a container sitting on a chair). Now is also a good time to vary the types and the amount of reward you are using. Sometimes it should be food, sometimes a toy or a game, sometimes access to outside or to the car... sometimes a small reward and sometimes a larger one. Remember, GOOD TRAINERS are unpredictable, variable and generous, too!
3. Now, use your lure hand with no food in it to lure your dog into position. This will now become your signal to get the behavior. If he performs the behavior, use your CR and give him a large, special reward. If he doesn't respond, drop your hand to your side, and quietly give him a few seconds. If he still doesn't respond, ignore him for a little bit and then try again.