



# DOG TRAINING

*Helping you and your dog become best friends for life.*

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## WHY DO OUR DOGS WORK FOR US?

The greatest disservice humans have done to dogs is the fabrication and proliferation of the idea that dogs do things simply to "please us." Nothing could be further from reality. The fact is dogs are like every other living thing on this planet. Dogs behave in certain ways because there is something in it for them. The sooner we all realize this, the better for us and our dogs.

The need to motivate and reward our dog is especially relevant when training them. Just as most of us are motivated to work for a salary (which allows us to buy food, shelter, and fun), most dogs will gladly work for food. Unfortunately, many people still feel the dog should willingly do things just because they: "respect me", "love me" or "want to please me." Or if they acknowledge the dog does need to be rewarded they say, "He should work just for my praise." If your boss told you that effective tomorrow you would no longer be paid but would get an hour of praise per day for your work would you still go to work? If you answer honestly, you know the answer is "No way!"

The fact is, the best motivators and rewards for dogs are food, play, and physical contact, in that order. I have not listed praise as a reward because in most cases it is highly overrated for a very simple reason; it is overused and is often given away for free. For example, how many of you willingly praise your dog (what a good puppy!) just for being cute, or being there? Every time you give away that praise for free, it loses value. Secondly, dogs are really not into verbal communication. An affectionate pat, a moment of play, or best yet, a tidbit of liver are vastly more rewarding than words.

So, if we are going to use food to train and reward our dogs, how do we keep them from becoming dependent on the food? While we may use food to initially lure or bribe the dog to do something, we quickly want to move towards exclusively using the food only as a reward. What is the difference? Well, showing Sparky a treat to get him to sit is a bribe, whereas, pulling a treat out of nowhere when he sits is a reward. After Sparky gets many rewards for his behavior, you can actually start to wean him off food as a reward.

Unlike us, Sparky will eventually work for very few or no rewards. The key to getting to that point is many repetitions where he does get a reward every time. For a simple behavior like sit you may only need a hundred repetitions; whereas, to have a really good recall, you will probably need several thousand repetitions. The important thing to realize is that with patience and rewards you can get your dog to readily work for you. If you want to learn more about training and motivating your dog, join us in one of our many classes!

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