

Food, Glorious Food

Below are some notions I pose to all my advanced students that are working to gain better outdoor, off leash control with their dogs. The concept of controlling access to daily food intake and rations can be used for all dogs, puppies through adulthood, trained or untrained to help you get better overall attention and success with training your dog in general. You may "bristle" a bit at this idea initially as it seems a bit cruel or unfair. Dogs in "the wild" however search long and hard for their food and are quite motivated to choose efficiently which behaviors are most likely to gain them access to a food source of some kind.

The choice is yours, this is only an idea for you to mull over in your head while you drive home one day and there is only one bad song choice after another as your radio scans channels. This concept is not for everyone and that is fine too- I am not offended in any way (not that anyone is concerned about thatJ). What I will tell you is that IT WILL WORK if you are looking for better attention and better work ethic in your dog. Hunger is a motivator for any dog- probably the best motivator there is. If you use that to your advantage to create or change behavior, you will see an overall change for the better in your relationship, working or otherwise, with your dog!

Food, Food Glorious Food! So here is the first "tough love" session- We feed our dogs too much as a general rule. This "exercise" will not be easy for most of you as you all have big hearts and love your dogs more than life, as do I, but please listen and try this for at least 1 week, then we can talk alternatives if we need to (but we won't)! I want you to stop feeding your dogs out of bowls, treat balls, Kongs, etc. for 1 solid week- both meals. I would like you to incorporate that daily kibble ration into your training sessions, whatever they might be (ideally outdoor stuff). You will have dogs staring at you, but isn't that what you all essentially want?

Seriously, as a society, we tend to over feed our dogs as a general rule. We create these round little buddies that really have no reason to "work" with us or pay attention because they know the next meal is coming at 7 AM or 5 PM regardless of what they give us for "work ethic" in between! Why not ask them to work for their meals and see what happens?!

Hunger and thirst are the number one and number two motivators for all animals and especially our dogs.

In another article titled "What's in your bag"- we discuss "high value" rewards (chicken, liver, jerky, ham, etc), but **what is more motivating than hunger itself???** Nothing as far as dogs are concerned, so let's use that to our advantage. If we create a scenario when they are not really sure when or where their next meal is, they are MUCH more likely to check in and pay attention. Look at it from the dogs perspective- we become the keeper of all that is worthwhile and good, instead of the "robot" that routinely goes to the pantry at 7AM and 5PM like clockwork just because someone said they should. Our dogs know it's coming, so when they compare our liver or ham to some high value life reward (dead squirrel, deer poop, rabbits, etc.) out there, it often becomes less enticing because they are already TOTALLY satiated and they know another overly big meal is headed their way in a few hours. The big life reward will always win in that situation because the dog is simply NOT HUNGRY even for the good stuff.

I have personally changed the rules in my house (after stubbornly bucking it for weeks from my agility instructor) and the results are UNBELIEVABLE!! Hungry dogs have an unbelievable work ethic and you change your status to more of a leadership role in the relationship. Your dog is now counting on you for something that is of PARAMOUNT importance to them- basic food- kibble! **Can you imagine working in an open field with only kibble in your pouch- it can happen- I've done it!!** The dog has to be hungry though and not grossly overfed as many dogs are! We won't eliminate the high value stuff, but we will incorporate their daily ration of dry kibble into their working sessions instead of giving it for free in bowls and treat balls, etc.

Don't panic on the days that your life is too busy to really do much training- those days they can eat from treat balls or Kongs or out in the grass while you plant flowers, but make them work for it in some capacity. Try to work them for at least one meal per day at a minimum and then if life gets in the way, give them a little less than normal for the second meal and hand over the treat ball or Kong, etc!

AND..... I would like you to consider cutting their food rations overall (I said this was a tough love session)- all dogs should have obvious waistlines, an "indent" if you will before their hind end starts. If your dogs are hungry as a general rule, their work ethic will go through the roof, I promise and they WILL NOT starve to death- this I promise!! From a

veterinary nurse perspective, dogs can go easily 5 days with no food at all and be just fine, without medical complications of any kind.

I am not advocating starving your dogs, I just want you to limit their intake to help you get the results, attention and relationships you all crave and deserve with your dogs! What motivates them? ~ **food**, hunger more specifically and access to what eliminates that hunger for them. If you control the access, you have their attention- plain and simple. Dogs repeat behaviors that get rewarded- remember? If paying attention to you when outside regardless of what else is going on, gets them a handful of daily ration kibble AND they are hungry- you have just won the war!! They realize you are "it" and the only way to access "it" is to keep an eye on you and work when they are asked to in order to earn their keep so to speak!

As I said, I know this will be hard for most of you and it was hard for me too, but it works and if you trust me for a solid week or two, I promise the relationship and attention you get will be different and amazing! Plus your dogs will be healthier in the long run. Overweight dogs have more arthritis, cardiovascular and various other health problems from the additional weight they carry, even if it doesn't look like much to us! I will happily tell you on a personal level if you like how much I think your dog should eat and weigh! Most of you can and should cut WAY down on what you give them daily. The average 65-70 pound Labrador should eat about 2.5-3 cups max daily unless they are a performance athlete or have VERY high metabolism. My 25 pound Gracie eats 1 cup kibble daily on average. Very active athletic days, I may up that by ¼ cup, but not much more. Don't trust what the manufacturer bags tell you, they of course want you to feed more, so you buy more. Ask me, I'll happily help you decide what is "too much"!

It will make all the difference in the world and you have nothing to lose (except weight off your dog), by trusting me for a week or two and seeing what you get!

Good luck!!

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