

What's in your bag?

Training treats- some ideas and suggestions

(all ideas mentioned here have been sampled and approved by Gracie, Ditto and Zildjian~Woof!)

For years my students have been curious why their dogs always seem to like me better when they get to class or a private lesson. My ego always steps in with answers such as my overall good looks and charming personality, but then my conscience steps in to remind me that dogs don't care about that kind of stuff, and in many cases we should be thankful that they don't! So why are dogs "attracted" to me? Being a brilliant trainer (hee!~☺) is not always enough, it's all about what's "in the bag"!

So what's in your bag? What should be and why is any of this important?

Each dog is motivated by different things. Just like you and your best friend probably don't share the exact same taste in everything~ ice cream, favorite place to shop, favorite drink, favorite sport, etc, dogs are individuals and what your dog finds rewarding, the dog next door may not. Figuring out exactly what motivates your individual dog is the key to success in any type of training. I can offer all the cheese I want, but if the dog has an obsession for frisbee catching, then all the cheese in the world is not as motivating for that particular dog. Anyone who knew my dog Clyde knew that a Frisbee toss trumped anything else for him! Each dog has those same preferences. Some dogs prefer food as a reward, some toys, some verbal praise. Some dogs may find it rewarding to take car rides while others may find car rides very stressful. The key to good dog training is not deciding what you think your dog should like based on preferences of previous dogs or dogs owned by friends or family, but figuring out what the dog in front of you really finds thrilling and using that or a combination of his/her top 5 favorite things to reward your dog for good behavior.

Dogs repeat behaviors that get rewarded- plain and simple. Find ways to tell your dog that you like certain behaviors- reward them for stuff you like with stuff they like and you create a "win-win" for all parties involved! Dogs are VERY efficient at figuring out what behaviors they get rewarded for (be careful what you reward and remember a dogs interpretation of "reward" can often be different than yours ~see article on ***Barking Basics*** for details on inadvertent rewarding by humans). If you begin paying your dog for "work well done", you will see an increase in the frequency of that good behavior. If they are engaged in good behavior, earning their paychecks so to speak, they cannot simultaneously engage in "bad behavior". (*More on that train of thought in other articles*).