

## My Training Philosophy

My Goal at My Wonderful Dog is to encourage pet owners in the use of the most up-to-date, humane, yet effective methods in dog training. I feel this can be accomplished through reward training. Reward training uses motivators to get results. A motivator is anything your dog wants. Typically food and toys are used. To begin, you must find what motivates YOUR dog.

### What's a Reward? Why is it important?

There are several factors, which go into reward-based training. First, consider what makes a thing reinforcing? Think of a reward or reinforcement as a motivator in the eyes of the beholder. Reinforcement is anything that YOUR DOG finds motivating. It will be satisfying to him; it will be pleasing to him. It may not please you or other dogs. The more you reinforce your dog's good behaviors, the more the dog performs these behaviors. The more he performs the behaviors, the faster they turn into habits – and GOOD ones, for that matter.

You must find your dog's motivational triggers in each of the following categories. List them in order of your dog's preference, #5 being the lowest and #1 being the highest. This means you must look for things that YOUR DOG is willing to work for.

- 1) FUN – This category includes anything your dog 'enjoys' doing:
  - A) Play: Name 5 games your dog loves to play. These are games YOUR DOG might initiate, not what satisfies your own needs or what you think the dog should enjoy. Some dogs love to fetch, others are inclined to play tug, some love to chase, some like to be chased, some like shredding objects.
  - B) Toys: Name 5 toys your dog loves to play with. Your dog should 'shop' for his toys (with your assistance of course). How many people buy toys for their dog and the dog never touches them? Some dogs love fuzzy toys, some like rope toys, and others like tennis balls. Some dogs love empty plastic bottles. Use your imagination and watch what your dog is drawn to.
- 2) FRIENDSHIP - This category includes things that make your dog's tail wag as a result of the relationship you have with your dog:
  - A) Praise: Some dogs are highly motivated by praise, but most dogs really need to learn to like praise since praise alone has little or no meaning to a dog. Dogs learn to like praise because praise is usually followed by petting, food, play, etc. - - something which is reinforcing to the dog. If you NEVER linked it with something good, it would have very little meaning and would be low on the motivational totem pole.

B) Petting/Touch: List 5 ways of touching your dog that excites him or makes his tail wag, in order of preference (i.e. stroking, tummy rubs, scratching base of tail, body pats, fingers at the breast bone, scratching behind the ears, caressing, etc.) Be careful not to give #1 away for free or it will quickly lose its value when you want to use it as a reward. This holds true with all of your motivators. You will use massage a great deal in this course. It is important that you find ways of touching your dog that he enjoys and that you spend time getting your dog to enjoy being touched.

3) FOOD: This category covers food items which your dog enjoys eating.

Name 5 food items, which your dog prefers. Start with the lowest motivational food and use it for the earliest and easiest training to sustain behavior. Examples might be a) your dog's meal and things you add (i.e. dry kibble, canned food, chicken, leftovers, vegetables); b) large treats (i.e. large milk bones, carrots, stalks of celery); c) stuffed objects (i.e. kongs, marrow bones, Buster cubes); d) training treats (i.e. liver, cheese, hotdogs, salmon); and e) 'human food' (i.e. vegetables, fruit, turkey, steak). You may have to do a food sampling to know. His kibble might work very well at home and on familiar walks, but it is meaningless to him if he has just eaten a bowl full and now you attempt to use it as a reward around distractions. Most dogs should not be fed prior to any training session, if you intend to use food as a motivator.

When training in environments with many distractions, you must be able to offer high value rewards for your dog to help him through the early phase of training. If your dog gobbles his kibble down at dinner time, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is of high value in the presence of other dogs or other distractions.

I cannot stress enough the importance of using **extremely powerful rewards** when working with your dog. Get creative and experiment. You are going to have to be able to keep your dog's attention when he is in an extremely distracted state. His dog food probably will not work at that point. The use of high value rewards is critical and key to your success.