

## Where's my Motivation?

Today's modern trainers very rarely talk about dogs being "stubborn" and or "uncooperative". Using the canine reinforcement analysis, what your dog likes and what he will work for, your dog's preferences can be assessed by asking just a few questions.

Each dog will value some reinforcers over others, and relative values will vary from day to day and moment to moment. Primary reinforcers are reinforcing as a result of the dog's evolution as a species. They include food, water, sexual stimulation, foraging, sniffing/scenting, attention, grooming, coolness (when body temperature is high) and warmth (when body temperature is low). A thirsty animal works harder for water; an isolated animal works harder for social interaction, a rested animal works harder for play or exercise.

Successful trainers experiment with a variety of reinforcers, so for dogs that are people oriented, attention might be a big payoff. For those dogs, that are "chow" hounds, food and treats maybe the answer. The touch sensitive dog that likes to be stroked or scratched on different parts of his anatomy and lastly the social/competitive type that likes ball games, tug, or any games that have a high calorific burn up!

With each of these criteria one could have a list in order of the dog's preferences with each of these headings:

Food: List your dog's favourite food/treats

Play: List ways your dog enjoys playing with you

Praise: Words that you use when interacting with your dog

Touch: List your dog's favourite petting/touching/scratching spots.

For example: Touch could be described in a number of ways:

Location (chest, tummy, ears, top of head, tail, feet)

Pressure (hard, soft)

Texture (scratch with fingers, flat of hand, stroke)

Duration (how long it lasts)

Movement (shaping patterns)

Find out what your dog likes! For more information read the "Tellington Touch" a book that comes highly recommended.

Once you have listed the reinforcers that work for your dog in each section, further categorise by selecting the favourite in order of priority for each heading. Analyses of this type should be carried out to determine the likes and dislikes rather than assuming something is a reinforcer. Breed differences, learning histories and specific environmental and physical conditions all play a part in detecting which stimuli will work as reinforcers for a particular dog. The effectiveness of a reinforcer is often described in terms of motivation, deprivation and satiation. Motivation is at the heart of reinforcement, if the dog is not motivated to do something, the event cannot be a reinforcer. An example would be to offer a piece of carrot to a dog that dislikes carrots. Deprivation occurs when a reinforcer becomes more powerful after the dog has gone a period of time without it. An example is a dog being more interested in food when it has missed a meal. Satiation occurs when the dog has had enough of a particular reinforcer, making it less effective. An example is a puppy being fed at 8.00 am before going puppy training at 10.00 am, the appetite for motivation has lost some of its appeal.

The next step is to select and define the target behaviour(s) and make reinforcement immediate and certain. Withhold

any reinforcement to non-contingent behaviour, thus accelerating the behaviour you want!

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