Motivating Your Dog

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| Motivating a Dog for Attention You can use the food as you teach your dog to give your attention when you say his name, and as you work with him to learn what else motivates him. You can build many motivations in a dog by how you play with him, interact with him, groom him, take him places, teach him words for him toys and for other things he likes. All of those things will help you work away from the food. Also, keep the food out of sight. Don't dangle it out in front of the dog. When he has earned the treat, give your reinforcing signal, or praise (my personal preference) then whip out the food and give it. If the sight of the food means the dog is going to immediately get the food, you're not "teasing" the dog. Dangling the food around as you train can teach the dog to not "believe" the food. The dog sees the food but doesn't get it, doesn't get it, doesn't get it, and eventually loses faith in getting the food. If the food is in sight in advance, it can accidentally become part of the command, very confusing to the dog. Then when you don't show food before giving a command, the dog may actually think you're not giving a command, because part of the command is missing! If you always praise before giving the food, your praise increases in importance to the dog, because it becomes associated with good things to follow. Using praise before petting, or a game, or any other reward does the same thing. It makes the dog value your praise more. When dogs don't care about praise, its because he has not been handled in the right way to give praise a positive meaning. Give the food in alignment with your face, so the dog looks at you when getting it. This will improve your dog's ability to give you his attention. Allow him to earn at least 3 to 5 treats in a row, not just 1. As much as possible, use movement as part of what he does to earn the treat. In other words, move way from the dog. Just a few steps will do. Then say the dog's name and the word for what you want him to do. It could be "Come," "Heel" (if you want him to move to your side), "Front" (to have him move to your front and face you) whatever you want him to do. When he does it, IMMEDIATELY praise him, whip out the treat you have previously kept out of sight, and give it to him. Always repeat the movement/name/command/praise/treat sequence at least 3 to 5 times in a row, never just once. This will sustain the dog's attention on you until you release the dog from attention. It's not just 1 treat and the dog immediately turns attention elsewhere. Keeping the food out of sight will make the dog far less dependent on you having food with you when you give a command. However, you still need to reward the dog very frequently, not get lazy about it. The dog is not a person, not motivated like a person, and needs you to really show appreciation and dog-motivating rewards for work, lifelong. As your dog gets more solid on training, a relationship with you, and other motivators, you may often praise and then say the words for a nice reward as you move with the dog to that reward like "Good Dog! Want to Play Ball? Let's Get You a Ball!" When you throw the ball as a reward, drop it from the area of your face, and do it at least 3 times, same as the food. Many toys will work this way. The key is to use those toys your dog loves best. My dogs love tennis balls, so I use a tennis ball with a short rope through it. That way it doesn't roll off down the sidewalk if I want to use it to reward the dog when out on a walk. Teaching a dog to happily give you attention because you make it a happy experience and always reward the dog for it, is a humane and enjoyable way to train any dog. Excerpt from; Kathy Diamond Davis, Therapy Dogs. |