

What's Your Motivation?

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There are a lot of different ways dogs feel motivation to work, and they vary from dog to dog. Some are motivated by attention and petting, others are not so easily rewarded. Their handlers will have to be very creative to motivate their dog through a difficult training challenge.

Giant breeds, especially the livestock guarding breeds like Great Pyrenees or Newfoundlands and many northern breeds and scent hounds don't come with a built in work-to-earn ethic. You have to work very hard to build one. Genetically, they are programmed to work alone or in a pack without human direction - for intrinsic rewards. Some breeds come with their own agenda and mindset of "what's the point?"

What is a Reward?

A reward is *anything* the dog wants and is willing to put forth effort to gain access to. A hound might work for a chance to go sniff something. A Newfoundland might work for a chance to go lie in the shade or go swimming, but turn his nose up to a treat. A bully breed might do anything for a chance to play a rousing game of tug, but not have the energy to walk across the yard for a cookie.

If you make a reward contingent on working to earn it, you can increase motivation and performance in your dog. You also become a better leader and create better learned behaviors for your dog.

A "primary reinforcer" is something an animal can't survive without. Food and attention are high on a lot of dogs' lists of things they crave. But praise is a secondary reinforcer - something they have to learn to appreciate, not something they are born needing. Most secondary reinforcers become important to the dog because they have become paired with a primary reinforcer.

Avoid Spoiling

He isn't going to put out any effort to earn it if he gets it for free. Why work for something you can have anytime you want and as much as you want? This applies to attention, playing with dog friends, full food bowl on the floor 24/7. A dog won't work to earn a treat if his stomach is stuffed full of kibble.

Quit while you are ahead.

Don't train 'til he's full, bored or loses enthusiasm. You want him to say "darn!" not "thank heavens" when it's time to end a training session.

How do you build motivation where it is lacking?

Control access to what the dog wants: If ___ > ___ then:

If you do what I want, you will get what you want - in spades.



Sit at the door, sit before feeding, petting, throwing a ball. Access is contingent on a prompt and correct response, calmness, self-control, good manners.

Picky, Picky, Picky

Lack of motivation can be addressed by:

- ❖ Finding high-value treats that your pet enjoys
- ❖ Training in short, fast, fun sessions
- ❖ Training when your dog is really hungry will help to compete with other distractions

Vary the Reinforcers!

Food, toys, games, access to something the dog wants, praise, petting, belly rubs, playing with a hose, swimming, sniffing, running, jumping, tug of war. Be spontaneous and unpredictable. Surprise your dog and occasionally offer a jackpot of rewards for superior work!

Use what your dog wants!

If your dog is crazy about squirrels or tracking a scent trail in the grass where a squirrel ran two hours earlier, working to earn a chance to follow the path of that squirrel can be the best jackpot you have to offer. Be spontaneous. If there is something in the environment your dog wants to go see, instead of telling him "leave-it," use it as a training opportunity! Help him learn how to earn access through you.

Create a "Conditioned Emotional Response" - one thing predicts another and reinforces itself.

A sit with eye contact can make you touch/turn the doorknob. Holding that sit can make you open the door (bolting makes it close). Waiting for the release can get you *through* the door. Sitting at the top of the steps can earn you permission to come down the steps. Walking nicely without pulling can get you to the car (pulling causes the handler to go backward - increases the distance from the desired thing). Sitting at the car door will open the door. Waiting for the cue to "get in" gains you access to the ultimate jackpot - a ride! Each part of the chain reinforces the previous behavior.

Because the car ride is such a major reinforcer, every sit, every wait, every bit of impulse control along the way is an increasingly valuable reward in the sequence that brings the dog one step closer to the car.

A favorite trick that makes your dog smile can be a reinforcer.

If he loves to spin in circles, give that cue at the end of a string of random cues and then reward. The spin that he already enjoys becomes a signal that he's just earned a jackpot for all the other work he just did. If food isn't handy, reward him with a spin instead! Does he love to jump up? Put it on cue and save it as a special reward he can work to earn.

Be a cheerleader. Act silly!

Boring handlers make bored dogs. Ordering and nagging create deaf dogs who'd rather be *anywhere* else, doing *anything* else. Are you more exciting than grass? No? Then why would your dog choose you in the park? Attention and connection is everything. Your enthusiasm is infectious for your dog!

Set up for Success! Practice what you DO want!

Set your dog up to enjoy training sessions. He will reflect your attitude.





Raise criteria to keep the work challenging and satisfying.

Boring repetition: *one behavior equals one treat, repeat...* It's the enemy of motivation. Eager workers are made by prudent use of unexpected jackpots, variety, spontaneity, genuine enthusiasm and challenge met with success. Be generous - but only when your dog has put forth enough effort to earn it.

Where is your dog dying to go? Use it as a reward!

With this paired association, you are creating a conditioned emotional response. Working equals the highlight of his day - dinner. Pretty soon you don't even have to do it at meal time. The cue "wanna work?" will predict a chance to earn rewards - the excitement of getting to work has become paired with the excitement of the all-important dinner.

If you have a pet behavior question or would like some training assistance,
San Diego Humane Society is here to help!
Visit our website at www.sdhumane.org to view our behavior and training options,
or call the **Behavior Helpline at 619-299-7012 ext. 2244** to speak with a trainer.