

## **Motivation! THE Key Ingredient to Training**     Nancy Weller, CPDT, CTC

You've brought home an adorable little pup who adores you too! For several weeks. Then, one day that pup turns into an adolescent and apparently forgets everything you ever taught him/her. What went wrong?

Nothing, really. Your puppy is completely normal. Frequently owners mistakenly believe their pups are trained and "know" things because they responded to them in their first couple months at home, a period when owners are the center of their universe and there are few distractions. Consequently, owners start cutting back on rewards, assuming the pup is "trained." Then puppy turns into a teenager and discovers there is an exciting world out there to explore and no real reason to pay attention to you anymore. When you started cutting back on rewards you also took away your dog's motivation to respond to you. If you really want to complete your dog's education, you must find a way to motivate your dog. There is no way around that.

Training is all about motivation. If there is no motivation, there is no training.

To put that in a human perspective, if I were to ask you to stand still for 2 minutes for \$5, would you do it? Probably. If I were to ask you to stand still for 6 hours for \$5 would do that? Why not? You did it for 2 minutes. That means you KNOW how to do it. Don't you want to please me? Or are you just being stubborn? Of course not! It has nothing to do with me. There is just no motivation to stand still for 6 hours for a measly \$5. But would you do it for \$1 million? Hmm.

And so it goes with other animals as well, including your dog. Every behavior has its price. Your job, as your dog's teacher, is to figure out what that price is for any given behavior, and pay it.

"Sit" in the kitchen is easy and quick, not much energy is expended and nothing else is going on at the moment. It is the equivalent of you standing still for 2 minutes for \$5. "Come" (to you) when called when there are dogs across the room that your dog wants to play with is the equivalent of you standing still for 6 hours. It's difficult because your dog wants to play more than whatever you usually provide and he can't tear himself away from the "good" choice. How would you pay to get your dog to come to you in that situation? You need more than kibble. How about a juicy piece of steak? You must learn to provide a very high value payment for things that are harder for your dog. That is, a reward that is even better than those dogs he wants to play with.

The good news is if you reward your dog, you WILL increase his responses. The bad news is that you will have to completely give up the "he did it before," "he should want to please me" or "he should do it because I am the leader," or "he's only doing it for the food" or "he knows it, he's just being stubborn." Your dog is unlikely to do things for any of these reasons.

Until your dog is reliable, you must continue to reward behavior you want until behavior is automatic and burned into his "hard drive." Repetition builds reliability. So get smart, figure out what motivates your dog, pay accordingly, and you will get the responses you want!