

## **WHY DOGS DON'T DO AS ASKED:**

### **o They don't know why they should do it**

If your dog doesn't know why, then you don't have control of the right motivator (reward). Or they don't know you have a reward for them. The dog should know from past experience that doing as you ask will be rewarded. By practicing frequent rewards for compliance, the motivation to do as you ask will be increased. Check the value of the reward you are offering (what does the dog think its worth to him?) Is it a high enough "paycheck" to get the dog's attention? Or is it like getting a cheap pen for attending a boring IRS lecture? Does it motivate the dog to offer the behavior again? The reward drives the dog to action. Most things we ask of our dogs are not natural for them in the situation in which we ask. So rewards for those tasks should not be below "minimum wage" in doggie dollars.

### **o They don't know how to do it**

It's not fair to punish a dog for not doing something he hasn't been taught to do in that location and environment. Your dog might know that "sit" means to put his tail on the ground when you are at home, but without practice, your dog probably won't know that "sit" still means you want him to put his tail on the ground when there are multiple other dogs and people around. For complex or multi-step behaviors, break them down into smaller, easier to learn steps you can combine or shape into the final product. Then practice those training steps in many different locations so they learn to do it with distractions. Don't assume your dog understands what you want if you are in a situation that is new to him.

### **o They don't know what they are supposed to do**

Be sure they are clear about what you are asking. Dogs are masters at reading our body language, so changing the position of your body can make it a whole new cue. If you are sitting on the floor with your back to your dog, will your dog still respond quickly and correctly to your requests? This is an extreme example of a change in body position, but much more subtle changes can have the same effect.

Also be sure you aren't giving conflicting signals. If your boss or spouse yelled "get over here NOW!", you know they want you to go to them, but are you going to be excited to comply? Even if all you say is "Fido come" but your tone and/or body language are saying "get over here now!" don't expect a fast recall!

### **o They don't think your way will work**

They don't trust you to pay out or give them what they want. It might also be that the dog hasn't learned the concept of indirect access. I'll talk more about this concept in just a bit.

### **o They think their way is correct**

Sometimes they are right (especially if their nose is involved) but if they aren't getting results, go back to #4

### **o They think something else is more important**

I'm going to be talking about getting the dog's attention in detail. By helping them learn to focus and understand that listening to you will get them what they want, the dog will be willing to comply. Their senses are keen and they are thinking beings with their own desires.

You likely know how to read a book, but how effective will that reading be if you're trying to do it while your favourite show is on a TV in front of you? Are you asking the dog to do something while HIS favourite show is going on in the next ring? Can he learn to concentrate on the task you are asking him to do, sure! But have you practiced it enough? How long would it take you to learn to concentrate on the only the book and ignore your favorite show? Don't ask your dog for College level behaviors if you haven't taught him the Grade School stuff first.

### **o Little or no positive consequences for doing it**

Show them it pays well to do as you ask. Don't be stingy with rewards! The harder their work, the higher their "pay" should be.

### **o They think they are doing it**

This means your training wasn't clear. Help them understand exactly what you want by going back to training.

### **o Rewarded for not doing it**

Remember, punishments can't negate rewards. You need to remove or prevent rewards they are getting for ignoring you or not doing it in the desired way

## o **Punished for doing it**

Sometimes things that are not intended as a punishment can interfere. Learn to read your dog and see what they feel is a punishment and try to remove the punishment they might feel for doing as asked or increase the reward to overcome it. Rewards CAN overcome punishers. There are many dogs that will tolerate pain to get something they want. Lab rats have shown they will walk across an electrified floor to get a treat. If the reward is high enough, it can be used to help the dog overcome fears as well.

## o **Anticipates negative consequences for doing it**

This is true especially if punishment methods have been used in the past or something negative has been associated with the desired behavior. Make the task easier by only expecting part of the behavior and reward heavily for compliance to gain trust and overcome fears. This is exactly what we did with my Rottie when teaching him to use his paws.

If you try free shaping with a punishment trained dog- meaning the type of training I showed in the first video of my Cattle dog with the stool- the dog is likely to stand there with a blank look on his face. He has learned that you will do the thinking for him by showing him what you expect and that being creative gets punished. So it will take time for the dog to trust that the rules have changed. Start with very easy behaviors and build on that.

## o **No negative consequences to them for not doing it**

If the dog gets the same reward for doing the task as for not doing the task, increase rewards for doing it and decrease or eliminate rewards for not doing it. Look for ways to increase motivation. An example of this would be loose leash walking. If the dog gets forward movement when he pulls on leash and he gets forward movement when he keeps the leash loose, where is the motivation to keep the leash loose. If instead he doesn't get to move forward if the leash is tight and he gets high value treats AND forward movement for keeping the leash loose, he will be much more motivated to keep it loose.

## o **Didn't hear you**

This can refer to the brain not being engaged or that the dog couldn't hear you due to other noise interference. While dogs' hearing is often better than humans, things happen and noise. Have you ever "zoned out" and then came back to reality to realize someone was trying to get your attention? I'm sure this also happens to dogs. If you have a million things to worry about at home, work and personal life, will a punishment for not paying attention make things better or just add stress? Maybe the dog was thinking about the bone he left under the couch and was worrying about another dog finding it. Who knows what goes through their brain at times! :-)) Point is that dogs are thinking beings and if you want a robot dog- get a robot.

If the dog really can't hear you or didn't hear your cue because of distance or background noise or maybe their hearing isn't what it used to be, then again, punishment is not warranted. Simply try again and if you need to, reduce the difficulty a bit and work back up to the situation where the dog was having trouble.

## o **Obstacles beyond their control**

You may or may not be able to control this. It could be interference, the dog's physical limitations, or other physical reasons the dog CAN'T comply. Try to anticipate problems and obstacles and provide solutions. Set the dog up for success, not failure. One story that perfectly illustrates this is a person who was training their dog for a long down in Texas. This dog was usually excellent at maintaining his down for a long time, but on this day, the dog just wouldn't stay put. Finally the owner realized that she had asked her dog to down over a small fire ant mound! The poor thing was trying to comply, but was getting painfully bitten for his efforts. For those that don't know, fire ant bites are more painful than bee stings.

## o **Personal limits prevent them from doing it**

Be aware of physical and mental limitations. Provide alternatives, training or accommodations whenever possible. Don't ask for what the dog can't give. One person I know asks her dog for a high 4 because he can't give a high 5!