

Dog Treat Training

Treat Training your dog with repetition

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You're standing behind a curtain, holding a violin on stage at Carnegie Hall. The curtain rises and you look out to a huge crowd chanting, "Play, play, play." The audience thinks you're the virtuoso du jour. "Wait!" you shout, hands raised to hush the crowd. "I don't know how to play the violin."

Then you wake up and realize it was just a bad dream. Cheers and commands cannot make you do something you don't know how to do.

You roll out of bed and see your dog bounding recklessly toward you. "Stay, stay, stay!" you plea. And the dog railroads you. He knows "Stay" like you know "Play." Dogs, too, cannot perform commands they don't understand.

While dog trainers typically use a choke collar or treats to achieve the behavior, many shout commands like a general long before the animal knows how to respond. When the dog fails to perform, the trainer repeats the command louder. So the dog learns to ignore the first command and normal tone of voice. Consequently, it is labeled stubborn, stupid or inattentive.

Your dog is smarter than you think. Dogs have excellent hearing; yours probably knows the sound of your car, a can opener or a knock on the door. You may wonder how a dog could be this astute yet unable to make similar associations with your signals. The answer lies in how you teach the dog.

Your dog can respond to you with the same zeal it has for the crinkling of a dog food bag. You can even teach him without voice commands. Here's how:

1. Place a small throw rug on the floor about 5 feet away from you. Toss a treat on the rug. As your dog steps onto the rug, say "Good," are nothing more. Treats must be small and easy to chew because you should repeat this about 20 times. If your dog lingers around the area, drop a treat in front of you to get him to come back.
2. Try another session of 20 repetitions. Between sessions, put a treat on the rug when the dog isn't looking. Whenever you see the dog has discovered the treat, replace it. Now you will have created a fascination with the rug and are ready to make the behavior more complex.
3. Do five quick repetitions of tossing the treat on the carpet. As the dog anticipates a sixth repetition, pretend to throw a treat and don't do or say anything for at least a full minute. If the dog makes any move toward the rug, say "Good" and toss a treat. Continue to wait out the dog over about 10 repetitions, trying to get it to go farther toward the rug on each attempt. If the dog is befuddled, go back to Step 2.