

Rewards and Training

In previous editions of Obedience Tips, we've focused on how to train. In this edition, we focus a little on the "why". During the past several years, the term reward-based training has become very popular and for good reason. But what does it really mean? Without getting too deep into learning theory, the idea is that behavior that gets rewarded tends to stick. When first teaching a new behavior, like sit or down, we use a treat or some other thing the dog wants (ball, toy, etc) to help the dog focus and move into position. When teaching, using treats or rewards each time helps this behavior become ingrained. We call this luring. "But Rocko won't do anything unless I have a treat in my hand!" Not knowing when a reward becomes a bribe is where some go wrong. If the dog understands the command but you have to show the dog the treat BEFORE he obeys, that's a bribe. If you give the command and the dog obeys and you show / give the treat AFTER he obeys, that's a reward. The fact the Rocko does not know when he gets a treat and when he doesn't is what keeps him on his toes. The trick is that you have to hold up your end of bargain and treat BIG every so often so that Rocko keeps coming back for more. Bottom line...when teaching a new command, show and use a reward often to get your dog motivated. Then, once the dog shows he understands the command, keep the dog guessing when he gets a treat. In the next edition of Obedience Tips, we discuss why punishment doesn't very well. Happy Training!