

Why Should Your Dog Listen to You?

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Does your dog listen to you when you ask him to do something? Does he listen half of the time? What about only when you have a treat, or only if you're inside the house?

If I had to take a wild guess, I'd say that the majority of dog owners wish that their dog responded better when asked to do something. This brings up some questions: *Why isn't the dog responding? Why should the dog respond, or listen to what you're asking? Is the dog being stubborn? Is the dog consciously making the choice to disobey you?*

Lets break it down:

First, it makes no sense for a dog to listen to you just because you're a human. A lot of people have the mentality that just because they're human, the dog should listen to them. It really doesn't make any sense behaviorally. Animals' behaviors are shaped via consequences. If a dog does something, and something good happens in return, the dog is very likely to do that thing again. The opposite is also true. If a dog does something and it hurts, scares, or has no benefit, the dog is very unlikely to do it again. This is mostly how they operate. So really, being a human and getting a dog to listen to you only happens because you are motivating the dog with stuff that it really enjoys, (food, toys, praise, etc.) or you are motivating the dog by threatening to add pain, fear or force. (Or a combination of both.)

Motivation via good stuff:

What do you get for doing your job? A paycheck. Why not treat the life of a dog like it is doing a job? Ask him to do the things you'd like and reward him for doing so. Would you do your job for free? Should your dog have to do his job for free? Paying him motivates him to work. A motivated dog responds quickly and loves doing what you ask.

Here's how to use motivation to get your dog to do what you'd like:

When your dog does something you like, immediately let him know it and reward him with something good. (Treat, toy, praise etc.) This is referred to as Positive Reinforcement. (R+) This basically means that when a

behavior happens, and the consequence of the behavior is something the dog enjoys, the dog is likely to do that behavior again. To let the dog know that he did the correct thing, you'll want to mark it either verbally, or with a clicker.

By utilizing R+ and using lots of prevention and management, you can get your dog to listen to you. This happens because your dog wants to listen to you. Why? Because he knows that listening to you will lead to good things for him. This is the primary reason why animals continue to do behaviors. Here are some examples of how to use it:

You're cooking in the kitchen and you don't want your dog in the way – Ask your dog to go lie on its bed, and reward him for doing so.

You want your dog to come to you when you ask – Call your dog to you and give him something he enjoys for doing so.

You want your dog to not pull on leash – Teach your dog that walking next to you equals good things, and that pulling gets him nowhere. (Literally, nowhere. Plant your feet if the leash goes tight, or go the other way.)

You want your dog to stay while you go and get the ball that went into the road – Ask him to sit/stay and give him good things for doing so. (Teach this in small steps. Work on Duration and Distance separately.)

In order to use R+ you just have to be proactive. Ask him to do what you'd like him to do and reward him accordingly. Don't forget to teach him what you'd like him to do in small steps. Practice the skills in different environments with different distractions. Don't expect your dog to do something that you've never practiced. (Especially if you haven't done a bunch of reps with a bunch of reinforcement.)

Motivation via bad stuff:

The other way that you could get your dog to listen is by using pain, force, or fear. "Do what I say or something bad will happen to you." Would you like to live this way? Should your dog have to live this way? If you were a dog and you were treated this way, do you think you might be a little more temperamental? I'm not really going to dive too deeply into this style of training. Science has proven that it is inferior to motivation via good stuff.

So, why should your dog listen to you?

After reading this, I hope you have a better idea of what it takes to get your dog to do what you ask. There is no magic involved with it. It's science. Dogs don't just listen to other species for no reason. If you want an awesome relationship with your dog, find something it likes and use it as payment for doing what you'd like. It's a win-win.

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