



My Dog Is Not Motivated By Food

It is not uncommon for owners to tell me their dog is not motivated by food. To a certain extent they are right but they are also could not be more wrong.

Each and every dog needs food to sustain life. Any dog not motivated by food will die. So a more correct statement would be there are times in which the dog is not motivated by food. If the dog is in a highly emotional state of anxiety or fear, the emotional state should be addressed through private consultations but this is not the case for most dogs. Owners of dogs that are friendly, not anxious but that appear to not be motivated by food under certain circumstances have 4 steps they need to take to train their dog successfully using rewards.

1. The owner needs to honestly evaluate their dogs weight and correct any weight problems
2. The owner should start using other things the dog is motivated by (ball, social rewards environmental rewards) when they can.
3. The owner can increase the dog's motivation for food under all

circumstances

4. The owner can stop rewarding the dog for disregarding food

The majority of the time in which I'm working with the owner of a dog that does not perceive food as a reward, the dog is over weight. It might not be by much but when I run my hands down the dogs sides, I can not feel that nice healthy ripple of ribs under my fingers. The owner needs to start feeding this dog less food and to over time bring the dog's weight down to a healthy level.

In addition to looking at the dog's weight there are many dogs that really love something else that the owner could be using as a reward. You can test your dog's motivation. In a non-distracting, non-stressful environment, give your dog a choice of food or retrieving a ball, which would your dog choose. If your dog prefers retrieving a ball to food, you should use a ball as a reward for training. When I trained my present dog, I only used food rewards in the beginning. Once I was past the lure stage of training, I primarily used ball rewards. Using a ball reward is more cumbersome, it takes more skill but if it is what the dog loves, use it.

Even if the dog loves something else such as retrieving balls more than food, the owner should work to increase the dog's motivation for food. There are times such as in the vet office in which rewarding with a ball would be dangerous or not practical. To increase the dog's motivation for food, the dog should be hand feed all

food. Each and every piece of food the dog gets should come off the owner and the dog should be working or following commands to get that food.

Sometimes it is not so much a matter of the dog not being interested in food, as it is the dog has learned that if it ignores the food it will get other things that it wants. I see this a lot. The owner is doing their job, they are putting high value treats to the dog's nose trying to lure a behavior and the dog is turning away from the food while simultaneously struggling to engage with something else and eventually the dog succeeds in moving the owner closer to what it wants. If the dog is turning away from high value treats, straining on the leash and not upset, the owner simply needs to hold the leash extremely short making it so the dog has absolutely no freedom and move further away from what the dog wants. The owner needs to stop offering treats and to stop struggling with the dog. This is a big bummer to the dog as they do not want to be moved further away and they do not want the lack of freedom caused by the short leash. Usually after about 1 minute the dog will eagerly eat the same treats it was disregarding earlier and will begin working for the owner.