



Food Lure Training: Easy and Effective, so why not?

Training pet dog behaviors is life-saving, and creates a relationship that is filled with joyful benefits. We want our dogs to join our families and stay with us. This is not always the case. The reason, most often, is waiting too long to begin training, and not integrating it into daily living and learning with dogs.

Why Food Lure Training or Rewards?

It's poetic and humanly emotional to think that dogs live to please us, their masters, and we are alpha, and our dogs will always forgive us, and we can do anything to them because their devotion is unconditional. Long sentence? Yes, but this is what we read, and I hear, all the time.

Dogs are a different species, and enjoy pleasing themselves too. Dogs and dog packs (including wolves) have conditions. If they did not, the pack would not survive. I live and learn with multiple dogs. They have conditions. When I ask my dogs to do something, I can hear them say, "What's in it for me – right now?" Behaviors that are shaped / rewarded promptly, and especially if the dog volunteers the behavior, statistically, theatrically, and evolutionarily will more likely be repeated.

Our dogs will show up for work and play if we repeatedly reward them for a job well done! Not all life rewards (LR) or high value ranking motivators (HVRM) are created equal. Understanding what your dog finds rewarding is a powerful step in training / relationship teamwork.

Many people express concern about using food in training. Why we expend energy on this online, in books, in labs, at workshops and in our minds, is like trying to prove that dogs and humans can live without food and water. Intravenous feeding perhaps, but why if we don't have too? In a domestic home, dogs and humans need food to survive. So as long as we are sharing our teepees, we may as well do it cost effectively and efficiently! No-one has enlightened me in a different way. I believe my dogs. Let's explore!

Using Food in Training

Food can be a valuable reinforcer (paycheck) for dogs during training. **Food is one of a very short list of things that dogs are born already knowing is good!** While most dogs easily learn to enjoy praise, petting and play, all of which make good rewards, food still holds a special-survival value in their instinctual mind.

Some people express concern about becoming co-dependent on food, worrying that they will create a dog who will only work if he knows there is food. This is a valid concern if food is misused or overused. The trick (power) is to make sure that food is used as a reward and not a bribe. There is a big difference.

Reward vs. Bribe, Co-Dependency, Enabler

If you ask the dog to do something, he does it, and you give him a treat. That treat is a healthy reward. If you ask your dog (or partner, employee, friend) to do something she knows how to do, a behavior that has been demonstrated repeatedly on a request for a long period, and she doesn't do it, maybe you ask again. If she still doesn't do it, and when you reach into your pocket and get a treat, suddenly she becomes enlightened, and springs into action, for your request, THAT treat just became a bribe and you are co-dependent. If you give that treat, you are an enabler, teaching your dog that it's okay to do this whenever she feels like it.

Good training / relationships strive to avoid this by adding in anticipation and variety.





Preventing Bribery / Addiction to Food Lures

The trick is to get the visual presence of the food out of the learning picture as soon as possible. If your dog tries to tear your pants off for the treat in your pocket, you know you have to change the process. Take a deep breath. Start requesting awareness, centered behavior, while food is not in the picture, or in another place! Change the picture, change the process, and request the behavior first, and for a little longer.

We enjoy variety in our daily routine. Change and challenge can be daunting or it can increase our skills. Create variety for your dog. Once a dog learns sit, down, stay, come, etc, switch it up a bit using different places, different rewards and for longer periods (distance, distraction, duration and diversity).

Avoid teaching your dog when you or your dog is not focused. Teaching while under duress or too much stress is a waste of energy, and can damage a relationship and well-being.

Attention (watch me) → ask for the behavior → breathe → reward → Be genuine, don't fake it.

Use your dog's name. I talk to people every day with a variety of issues. I find it disconcerting after 15-minutes into a conversation of what the dog isn't doing right, that the person hasn't addressed their dog with a given name. It's the "dog did this and that." This tells me a lot about their training and relationship ATP (at this point).

Transition to Life Rewards in Addition to Food Treats (*what a wonderful world*)

- Use soft, healthy, small treats that can be eaten quickly. Use their kibble to walk and [Diner Train](#). Dogs do not care how big the treat is. They are more impressed with how many, when and where. Be mindful that if you feed your dog 2X a day, you have 14 training opportunities a week.
- Dogs do not get fat because of food. They get fat because you feed them too much, fatty foods, and not enough exercise. Try different types of treats. Entice it! Bits of cooked and healthier, turkey, meats, cheese, hotdogs, pasta, fruits and veggies can be rewarding. Experiment! What really excites them?
- What's exciting at home may fail in comparison to the distracting sights and smells out in public. The environment is powerfully stimulating. Save your "extra special" treats or life rewards for training in distracting environment.
- Be touchable! Get into the habit of touching your dog (massaging gently in a favorite spot) when you deliver the treat. Touch their collar to desensitize them to "others" touching their collar. When you consistently PAIR petting with treats, you create a positive association, and raise the value of your touch! Now you have another way to pay your dog, and create a dog who enjoys human touch.
- If your dog has dietary restrictions and cannot tolerate foods besides kibble, you can use kibble for training. To make it seem more interesting, put some in a baggie with a few chunks of something good like salmon or turkey bits. The kibble will take on the flavor, be more enticing, and you less boring.
- Don't overdo it! Humans have a tendency to create stories and be dramatic. The goal is to train with kindness and smarts. The result is a reliably trained dog, and a relationship based on teamwork, respect and joy.