



**FOLLOW THE
LEADER **K9****

MOTIVATION AND DISTRACTIONS

Often times when we begin training with our dog, we are frustrated or upset about certain unwanted behaviors we are seeing our dog exhibit. These behaviors range from excessive smelling on walks, to dogs becoming reactive to things that they perceive in their environment. Sometimes these behaviors have been practiced by our dog for an extended period of time, other times our dog has only recently began displaying such behaviors. Regardless of the exact behavior or the length of time our dog has been exhibiting them, more often than not, the root cause is inevitably the same: our dog is distracted. This means that our dog is finding more value in responding to some aspect of their environment, rather than engaging with us. Sometimes we initially never taught our dog to pay attention to us and listen to us in a way that truly fulfilled them, even in a distraction free environment. Other times, too early in the training process we repeatedly took our dog out into too high of a distraction environment and asked them to engage with us, despite the fact that they were not finding value in the reward we had to offer them. Whatever the cause, it can be resolved by creating a dog with a high level of motivation for food or a toy. Once resolved, the benefits of having a highly food or toy motivated dog are immense.

Benefits of High Food or Toy Motivation

Here are just some of the benefits that will come from having a highly food or toy motivated dog:

- Our dog is easy to teach new skills and commands to.
- Our dog is quick to become confident around unfamiliar situations and objects.
- Our dog is easier to take places with us.
- Our dog is more successful at being alone.
- Our dog is more successful at being coached in proper social skills.



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Tips for Building Engagement

Here are some methods that will help set us and our dog up for success when it comes to building engagement in the face of distractions:

- When using rewards, we reward the dog for engaging with us -- if they are distracted, we do not reward them. For example: If I say the dog's name or pull on the leash and they don't look up at me, I do not put the food in front of their face. Instead, I wait until they stop what they are doing and offer me their attention; only then do I reward them.
- Once we have a dog who is paying attention to us for the reward we have, slowly add distractions in a controlled environment to help them successfully practice ignoring distractions. For example: Ring the doorbell and then pay our dog for staying engaged with us rather than running to the door. Put food or a toy of lower value on the ground and then pay our dog for staying engaged with us rather than running to the food or toy.
- Once we have a dog who is attentive to us in the face of a distraction that we have created on purpose, then take them into an uncontrolled environment and reward them for engaging with us.
- Do multiple shorter sessions in different settings rather than 1 long session in the same setting. For example: Drive to 4 different places and have them practice engaging with you for 5-10 minutes at each location, then leave when the dog becomes distracted, instead of working with them in one spot for 1 hour straight.
- Have a leash or a long line on the dog when taking them to new places so that they will not succeed at accessing the distraction if they choose to ignore us and the reward we have to offer. For example: If my dog sees another dog and I recall them and they ignore me, I can take hold of the long line and wait patiently for them or move away from the distraction instead of running after them or calling their name excessively.



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These methods will help us succeed in creating a dog who is always willing to take the reward we have to offer with zeal, no matter what distractions may be present. If we are consistent and strategic in our approach, we will be certain to see our dog find more value in focusing on us and the task at hand with greater ease and fluidity. This will encourage us to continue to train our dog and be successful in achieving whatever our training goals may be. A great trainer once said "Dogs do things for one reason: to better their situation." When we have a foundation based on reward centered engagement, our dog will see that through listening to us, their situation will improve. If we proceed with proper marker words and training techniques under the guidance of the right trainer, the only option will be success. Just know your dog is so lucky to have an owner like you who has taken the time to read this content and apply it to best of their ability. As always, "We don't blame them, we train them."