

The Theory of Motivation in Dog Training



By: Ed Frawley



Leerburg Kennels

Foreword

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[Leerburg Kennel](#) and Video is owned by Ed Frawley.

Ed has owned German Shepherds (GSD) for over 45 years. Since 1978 he has bred over 350 litters of German working bloodline GSDs. His dogs work in law enforcement, as S&R dogs, as competition Schutzhund dogs, and as family companions and protectors.

Since 1980 Ed has produced over 120 dog training videos and DVD's. He was a police K-9 handler for 10 years, competed in several dog sports, including AKC obedience and Schutzhund. In addition he has built one of the top dog training supply businesses in the world.

If you go to the web site **Leerburg.com**® you will see that it has over 10,000 printed pages. The Leerburg Web Discussion board has over 10,000 registered members and over 120,000 posts in the archives. Learn to use our site search function.

The Theory of Motivation in Dog Training

One of the most important concepts that every new pet owner must learn, if they want to become an effective dog trainer, is how to motivate their dog to want to follow commands and participate in training.

When people first begin to train their dog many confuse “rewarding their dog” with “motivating their dog.” While these two concepts are very close in nature there is a difference. The sooner a handler learns the subtleties of these differences the sooner they become effective trainers.

Simply put motivating a dog means creating an environment where the dog has a desire to perform an exercise.

When handlers learn the art of motivation they take their training one step further and create an atmosphere where the dog wants to learn. They create an atmosphere where their dog actively tries to figure out what it is that his owner is trying to teach him.

This article will discuss the different ways to motivate a dog during training.

While there are any number of methods to train a dog there is only 4 ways to motivate a dog:

- 1 - By using food as a reward
- 2 - By using toys or prey items as a reward
- 3 - By using praise from the handler as a reward
- 4 - By using force (corrections) to make a dog do what you want

How you mix and match these methods will vary according to your dog, the circumstances you are in, your dogs level of training and your experience.

The fact is some of these methods will work for some dogs and not others. In fact some methods will work for a dog in one circumstance but not in another. The difference between a good trainer and a great trainer is the great trainers know how and when to use all 4 methods of motivation.

Which method you use will vary according to:

- 1 - Your dog's temperament,
- 2 - Your dogs genetic drive,
- 3 - Your relationship or bond with the dog,
- 4 - The distractions your dog is facing at any point in time,
- 5 - Your experience and skill at handling and training dogs
- 6 - What stage of training you are in with your dog.

Basic Dog Obedience

\$40.00 +s&h



4 Hours Long

USING FOOD AS A MOTIVATOR

Using food as a motivator is as old as the domestic dog.

Most dogs, not all, like food treats. New dog owners quickly learn that using food works well to reward a dog for doing something they ask the dog to do.

In its simplest form it's easy to learn how to give a food reward after the dog does what you ask.

Whats not always that easy is learning how the presentation and timing of a food reward is used to build motivation and drive. This is a learned skill that is acquired through training and experience. When this is done properly a good trainer makes it look simple, when it's done poorly the reward

accomplishes little towards motivating the dog to want to participate in the training process.

The key to training dogs with food is to have a hungry dog. Americans historically over feed their pets and have FAT DOGS. So if you are going to use food to train don't feed your dog just before you go out to work your dog. Feed him at the end of the day. Also keep your dog thin, you want to see a definition between the end of the rib cage and the loin of the dog. Bottom line is a thin dogs live longer healthier lives.

New dog trainers are always going to be faced with advice from neighbors, friends and old school trainers who try and tell you "don't use food because you won't always have food when you need to ask your dog to do something and/or why train with food when you are going to have to wean your dog off food at the end of training anyway. So why use it in the first place." As with many old wives tails – this his hog wash.

All-Natural Dog Treats



The fact is if a dog has a strong food drive it's a mistake for a trainer to not learn to train with it. Training is composed of a learning phase, a distraction phase, a correction phase and a maintenance phase. Food can be used in the learning phase, it can be used as a distraction and it can be used in the maintenance phase throughout the life of the dog.

As a dog gains experience in training the application of a food reward changes, the possibility of a food reward becomes the motivation for a dog to perform and exercise. When a dog is past the learning phase the application of random rewards produce drive. With holding a reward can result in frustration and when it's done properly frustration builds drive.

In my opinion the best application of food in training is in combination with [marker](#) or clicker training.

Understanding the applications to train with food is not the topic of this article. It's beyond the scope of what I am trying to do here. I only want this article to explain the options you have to motivate your dog.

USING A TOY OR PREY ITEM TO MOTIVATE

Dogs with prey drive are good candidates for training with toys and prey rewards.

In its simplest form prey drive is the drive to chase a ball or chase a stick or a rabbit or a squirrel. Some dogs have a ton of prey drive while others have none at all. Some dogs fall in between these two extremes.

Prey drive is an inherited characteristic. It can be seen in puppies as young as 6 ½ to 7 weeks of age and owners can start to develop or build prey drive as young as 8 weeks. It should be noted that even though your dog is born with prey drive it can dissipate and go away if it's not developed.

Bite Tugs



Great for training and play!

When police officers look for a new drug dog they look for a dog with intense prey drive. These are dogs that would rather play with a toy than eat or sleep. K9 trainers use this drive for a toy as a reward for a dog when it finds drugs.

It should be pointed out that some dogs with extreme prey drive may be better off to be started in training with food. Dogs with extreme prey drive can be so driven for a toy that they can't think clearly in the presence of a toy. These dogs are rare but they do exist.

While most dogs don't have enough prey drive to be narcotics dogs they do have enough genetic prey drive that a toy reward can be used to motivate the dog in training. In addition many times a dog's prey drive can be increased through drive building to make training with prey a very legitimate tool.

Once again the application of toys as motivators for training is the subject of an entire book. I did a training DVD titled [Building Drive and Focus](#) which teaches people how to use prey items as motivators during training.



USING PRAISE FROM THE HANDLER

As surprising as it may seem less than 1% of all dogs work strictly for praise from the handler. In 45 years of owning and training dogs I have only know one or two dogs that only needed their handlers praise to be motivated in all phases of training.

With this said, in my opinion handler praise is a critical component of all dog training. With that 99% of the dogs that don't fall into this category (where handler praise alone is they need to work) praise needs to be combines with other forms of motivation (food, prey or force).

For praise from the handler to be most effective the dog must have a solid relationship (bond) with his owner. A bond is built on trust and takes time to establish. When there is no bond the effectiveness of handle praise means little to nothing.

There are dogs that have crazy prey drive who will play with any handler. These dogs are so crazy for a tennis ball they don't need to have a bond. Everything they do relates to their reaching goal satisfaction (getting the prey item – a toy). Handler praise to these dogs means little to nothing but with this said the dogs lack a personality too.

When people send their dogs off for training the dog has no bond with the professional trainer. That means the pro has taken the “praise tool” out of his bag of tricks. In fact some dogs may have prey drive to play with their owners but their pack drive is such that they will not play with anyone else. That means the pro has lost 2 of the 4 tools for motivation.

This is why I never recommend sending a dog off to be trained by a professional trainer. (Read the article I wrote on [My Philosophy of Dog Training.](#))

Bottom line is it takes time to build a bond and time is not something that a pro trainer has much of. So if you want to use a pro the way to do it is for you to take your dog to the trainer and have them teach you how to train your dog. Don't let them do it for you.

Ed Frawley's Philosophy of Dog Training



eBook

USING FORCE TO MOTIVATE A DOG

When a dog has no food drive, no prey drive and will not work for praise from the trainer (i.e. a professional) the only option left is to train with force. This means the dog either does what you want or it gets a correction. This is sometimes called escape training or avoidance training.

Fortunately there are not a lot of dogs that have no food drive, no prey drive and will not work for praise, but they do exist. The unfortunate thing is there are too many trainers who use too much force and in the process sacrifice a relationship with their dog. I call these people "old school trainers" or "Yank and Crank" trainers.

How to Fit a Prong Collar



eBook

How often have you seen a trainer put a prong collar on a dog and take him to a training field to teach him to heel. The dog is not allowed one mistake. The first time the dog gets out of position it gets a [prong collar](#) correction. Then after a number of corrections when the handler feels the dog is complying he drops the ball and plays with his dog. One friend who does not train like this says the ball is not a reward it's more of an apology to the dog for stupid training. Unfortunately many, many, many professional dog trainers train like this.

Don't get me wrong here corrections are an iatrical part of almost every training program. There are 4 phases of training: a learning phase where the dog is taught the meaning of a command, a motivation or drive building phase, a distraction phase and a correction phase.

The million or so dog trainers out there that promote 100% positive training without corrections lack experience. These purely positive trainers limit themselves to a very narrow group of dogs that their methods will work on.

When dogs have gone through the learning phase, where they are taught the meaning of a command and they then refuse to perform that command the trainer needs to ask three questions.

- 1- Does the dog really understand what I am asking him to do?
- 2- Is the dog refusing the command because it was not motivated enough?
- 3- Is the dog refusing the command because it is challenging the leadership of the handler?

Dogs in this category require a correction. How hard that correction is will be determined by a number of things.

I wrote an article titled [THE THEORY OF CORRECTION IN DOG TRAINING](#). You may want to review this article.

The Theory of Corrections in Dog Training



Article

As a general rule a correction needs to be firm enough that the next time the dog considers not following his leaders commands he remembers what happened the last time he refused a command.

The following sections of this article will address these areas.

Allowing Mistake is Part of the Motivation Process

Many dog trainers, both beginners and those who have been training for years are afraid to allow their dogs to make a mistake in training. They don't understand the simple fact that making mistakes is part of the learning process.

When a dog is properly motivated simply withholding goal satisfaction becomes motivation

enough for the dog to rethink what he is doing and look for a different path to reach his reward.

If the dog is actively trying to seek goal satisfaction in most cases there is nothing wrong with allowing the process to continue or simply telling the dog “no not that – keep trying”

The point where you would either back up the training steps or move to a correction is when the dog simply blows you off and quits trying.

At this stage of training many people get stuck in what I call the LURING trap.

Luring a dog through an exercise (or into position) by using food is a common method of training. This simply means we guide the dog into position by allowing it to follow food in our hand. There is nothing wrong with doing this during the first stages of teaching an exercise.

The problem is that many people never stop luring their dogs. They become so obsessed with not allowing a dog to make a mistake that they continue to lure their dog through exercises. At some point this becomes counter productive because the dogs never learn to think for themselves. These dogs are always looking to their owner for guidance.

So there is nothing wrong with asking a dog to do something and simply not telling the dog “no I wont reward you for your effort – we are going to start from scratch and do this all over again” In the right circumstance and with the right dog – you don’t correct the dog wither physically or verbally. You simply say no we are going to do this again.

When the dog understands how you work, or how you play the game, this becomes motivation for the dog to try harder. You will see dogs actively participate in the training process.

Then when he gets it right he gets goal satisfaction – which is either food or a prey item.

When you do this work you will find out that your dog has what I call his bag of tricks. These are all the things he has done in the past that has produced a reward.

During the training process when you ask him to do a new exercise and he starts to go through his bag of tricks – sit, lie down, bark ect. This is his way of telling you that he is motivated, he wants to participate he just does not understand what you are asking him to do.

Preparing Your Dog for the Helper

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HOW TEMPERAMENT EFFECTS MOTIVATION

A dog's temperament (personality) is shaped from his genetics and the socialization that dog has had up to a given point in time. Generally dogs are graced with good nerves or weak nerves and a hard temperament or a soft temperament.

Weak Nerved Dogs

Dogs with weak (or thin) nerves are easily distracted by things they are not familiar with. In the worst case scenario a "fear biter" is the extreme version of a weak nerved dog. These are dogs that are so nervous or afraid that they quickly slip into "fight or flight" when faced with strangers.

While some dogs become fear biters because they have been miss-treated the vast majority of fear biters are the way they are because of the genes they were dealt from their parents.

One would think that all weak nerved dogs would be difficult to motivate. The fact is this is not always the case. One of our house dogs (Morgy the Corgi) has very weak nerves. She will spook away from a paper is it moves to quickly, yet she has excellent prey drive and super food drive

You will see the same thing with many dogs. I have seen this in Malinois and border collies where a dog may have a great deal of prey drive and yet spook at the drop of a hat or become very sharp in an unfamiliar location.

These kinds of dogs can be motivated in training with prey items and/or food but it needs to be in an environment that they are familiar with.

Liver Biscotti Dog Treats



In fact short nerve dogs are best trained through repetition and repeated routines. It's within the familiarity of a routine that these dogs find comfort and security. When trainers realize this they can often motivate their dogs to want to learn.

Take the same dog out of their routine and to a different location and the same dog will be too nervous and distracted to become motivated.

Solid Nerved Dogs

The opposite end of the spectrum of a weak nerved dog is a dog with completely rock solid nerves. Nothing bothers a solid nerve dog. They are self confident and live their lives trusting people and new places.

Trying to motivate and train dogs with solid nerves requires a different approach. Assuming the dog has prey or food drive these dogs need to be mentally challenged or they get bored.

If one would train these dogs in a routine they lose focus. So a solid nerve dog needs the opposite of a weak nerve dog. To motivate these dogs you need to break things up and change pattern of training. You need to challenge them to think. Don't let them try and anticipate what you are going to ask them to do next, force them to listen to you and then reward the dog that rises to the challenge and works out the problem.

These dogs will rise to the work and become motivated by the challenge the handler brings to training.



Hard Dogs vs. Soft Dogs

Every trainer should understand if their dog is a hard dog or a soft dog, or something in-between.

A hard dog recovers very quickly from a correction, a very soft dog goes completely out of drive and does not recover quickly from a correction. When a soft dog is corrected with a normal correction it acts like its life just came to an end.

With this said both hard dogs and soft dogs can be put in drive. The difference is a soft dog will quickly come out of drive if it thinks it's getting a correction or not go back into drive if it has been corrected.

How Your Bond with the Dog Effects Motivation

Dogs with a strong pack drive and a good bond with their owner are always easier to motivate.

Some dogs, because of the way they were raised or because of their genetics have a strong pack drive. By this I mean they bond very tightly to their owners and willingly accept leadership from their pack leaders. If these dogs have a fair minded handler they feel very comfortable in the presence of their handler they are easily motivated.

Dominant dogs usually don't have a strong pack drive. They will work for a handler but only when it serves their interest and needs. With this said many dominant dogs are the way they are because the owners have not established pack structure with the dog. When these dogs either go to a strong pack leader or their owners re-establish pack structure the dogs can often become good working dogs that are able to be motivated in training.

This article is not intended to explain how to create a bond. I wrote an article titled [THE GROUND WORK TO ESTABLISHING PACK STRUCTURE WITH AN ADULT DOG](#). You may want to refer to that [eBook](#).

Ground Work to Establish Pack Structure with Adult Dogs



eBook

HOW DISTRACTIONS EFFECTS MOTIVATION

New dog trainers learn the less their dog is distracted the easier it is to get him to play games. Conversely the more distraction the more difficult it is to motivate untrained dog.

This becomes evident when a dog willingly plays tug or chases a ball in your house or back yard but shows less or no interest in the presence of other dogs or in new surroundings.

Trainers can establish the optimum level of motivation in a local environment (your kitchen or back yard). Once they establish that level this then becomes the goal of drive building training.

The handler's job is to gradually increase distractions.

They need to learn to motivate the dog to the level of drive it demonstrated in a distraction free environment.

The biggest mistake new trainers make is to increase distractions too quickly.

MOTIVATORS HAVE TO FIT THE DOG'S INTEREST

Have you heard the old saying that “some guys like blonds and some like brunettes”? Well some dogs like certain food rewards more than others. Some dogs like certain toys more than others.

It's the owner's responsibility to determine what trips your dogs trigger. I always shake my head when a trainer tells me that his dog doesn't like a ball but he will play tug. They want me to tell them what they need to do to get their dog ball crazy.

My answer is “THROW THE BALL AWAY and BUY TUGS!”

If I am going to train my dog with food I will always ask the dog what food he likes first. I will ask someone to hold my dog on a leash as I let the dog smell 5 or 6 different kinds of food treats. Then I put each type of food on the ground in front of the dog. When all 5 piles are down we let the dog

go. Usually, not always, the dog will go directly to the food he likes the best.

You may have to run this test several times and shuffle the food around to determine if your dog likes one treat over another.

The best of all worlds is a dog that simply loves them all.

The same test can be done with dogs that are to be trained with prey item. It is common to find that dogs prefer one toy over another. Once you know his preference you will find that will motivate

I tell people that “dog training is not rocket science, it’s just common sense” the problem is it took me 45 years of training dogs to get the common sense I have today.

**Establishing Pack Structure
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HOW HANDLER EXPERIENCE EFFECTS MOTIVATION

Handler experience always effects how quickly dogs learn and benefit from drive building. Through experience owners learn timing and presentation of the reward. This is so important in how the dog becomes motivated in participating in the process.

Dogs need to be rewarded within 1 second of a behavior if the reward is expected to be effective. Working with marker training or clickers can extend this time period.

I cover marker training in my DVD on [Basic Dog Obedience](#). If you really want to become a student of motivation in dog training your should become a student of marker training.

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HOW DRIVE EFFECTS MOTIVATION

Many people confused a hectic dog as a motivated dog. Motivation without control results in hectic behavior. Think about that statement because it is important.

A perfect example of this is a dog that chases shadows in the presence of the handler on the training field during the middle of a training day.

Motivation without control (or focus) is hectic behavior. Dogs with hectic behavior can not think or learn. Hectic dogs need to be taught "impulse control". They need to be taught self control.

I will say that confusion can produce hectic behavior especially when the dog has been trained with force. You can easily see this with people who train the forced retrieve, or those who train forced tracking or even a forced recall.

With this said, a dog that is genetically hectic may have to have a level of force exerted to make the dog settle down and focus. Through force they need to be taught to channel their hectic drive into focused motivation.

So while we can motivate our dogs we must also make sure our communication is understood and teach them to control their drive if they want to reach drive satisfaction.

What is Drive Satisfaction?

Drive satisfaction is the dog obtaining whatever it is that has motivated him:

- 1- He gets a food reward
- 2- He gets his prey item
- 3- He gets to play with his prey item
- 4- He gets praise from the handler
- 5- He avoids a correction

The goal of all motivation training is to teach a dog that when we put him in drive (motivate him) he must control his drive if he is to get drive satisfaction. When the light bulb goes off in the dogs head that this is the game you play you will see the dogs self confidence improve and he will start to try and figure out what it is you are trying to teach him when you introduce him to new exercises in the learning phase of training.

The perfect example of this work is the training I show in my DVD on [Building Drive and Focus](#).

“WHAT STAGE OF TRAINING YOU ARE IN EFFECTS YOUR DOG’S MOTIVATION”

Dogs need to learn that they are being trained. This means we need to teach them that we are trying to teach them something.

That sounds a little redundant but its not. When we start to work with a new dog he doesn't know what we are trying to do. He doesn't know we are trying to communicate with him.

But as he gains experience working with us we show him that we can be fun to interact with and it's in his best interest to learn what it is we are trying to communicate to him.

When this is done properly, when we motivate the dog properly, the dog will look at the process as a game. As time passes and the dog gains experience this game becomes a form of relationship building. It becomes a way to take out relationship with our dogs to a new level, one that most people never get to with their dogs.

KNOW WHEN TO QUIT

One of the keys to successful dog training is to know how long to train and to quite while the dog is still in drive. Doing this will leave the dog slightly frustrated and frustration builds motivation and drive.

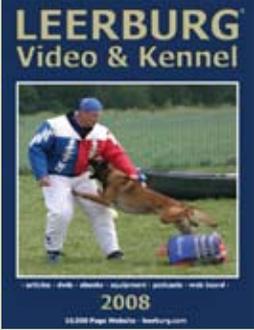
With that said, I tell people to train 3 to 5 times a day for 1 ½ and 3 minutes at a time. This is way better than training for 15 minutes straight

When I hear people say they train 30 minutes a day I know that they have a dog that doesn't like

training, that doesn't like to participate in the process and they usually have used too much force in their work.

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