



Laurie Luck, KPA CTP  
Box 1111  
Mount Airy, MD 21771  
(240) 848-3468  
laurie@smartdoguniversity.com



## Your Smart Dog *My Dog Is A Thief!* October 2009

**H**ave you made a sandwich only to have it disappear in a flash? Are you constantly looking for *the other* shoe?

Have you lost a remote, or maybe even your phone, only to find it in the yard? I think you live with a thief. Of the canine variety.

**I start out with this advice for people with young dogs: Don't even let the dog figure out there are goodies to be had.** Keep all your valuables up high. Keep your closet door closed. Put your sandwich in the microwave if you have to leave it. If the dog gets it, it's kind of your fault, isn't it? You left it where he could get it.

So you've done all that – shutting doors, keeping things out of reach – but you have kids or visitors and they're not so good with following the rules. **The dog gets a shoe. And off he goes. What now?**

**This month's newsletter will answer the "What now?" question.** You'll need to un-do some things, you'll teach your dog some new skills – and in the end, you'll have a dog who isn't a thief!

### FIRST THINGS FIRST

**Teach your dog how to give up an object. This is easy!** Find an empty toilet paper core. Have some delicious treats ready. Hold onto the core and offer it to your dog (don't let go!). Say "drop" or "give" (or whatever word you want), and put the tasty treat right on your dog's nose. When he drops the core, say "Yes!" and give him the treat. Pick the core back up and give it

right back to him (don't let go!) and repeat this sequence a few times. You're teaching the dog a few things:

1. How to give something up to you.
2. The word for doing so (give or drop)
3. That giving things up is FUN!

**You're going to do this several times a day, always swapping the core for the good treat and always returning the core to the dog.**

You always initiate this game. You start it and you stop it. As your dog gets better at this, you're going to say the word "drop," then *wait* for him to drop the item before offering the food. This is an important step! If you don't wait for him to drop the item, he won't let go unless you've got the food.

**When he's good at giving up the toilet paper core, switch to one of his toy's that he's "so-so" about.** One that he likes, but isn't *in love with*. Do the same trading exercise as above. Gradually, you're going to work your way up your dog's "goodie hierarchy" and you'll eventually be trading his rawhide with him. You'll have to increase the value of the food treat as you go up the goodie hierarchy, don't forget! *[Note: if your dog growls or otherwise threatens you – STOP! Call a qualified positive reinforcement dog training professional immediately.]*

**When your dog is good with this step, occasionally ask him to give up the toy he's playing with.** You don't want to *only ask him* to give up the things he shouldn't have. When



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he gives up the ball (or whatever it is), praise him and then give the ball back. Or better yet, play with your dog with the toy! He'll begin to look forward to your approach when he has something. It's a whole lot easier to get something back from the dog when he's not running away from you!

### CHANGING YOUR REACTION

**Now that the dog knows *how to* and is willingly giving up goodies, we need to work on you. We need to change your reaction to the dog's thieving actions.**

Don't forget: never leave goodies accessible to your dog. That prevents this problem from occurring in the first place.

**When your dog gets something he shouldn't, remain calm.** Don't rush to get the goodie, don't jump up and chase the dog. Just wait. Casually glance over and say "Hey boy, whatcha got?!" in an enthusiastic and playful voice. Make no moves to actually get the dog or the goodie. Just wait.

**Casually get up and walk in the other room, sing-songing your dog's name.** "Fido. Fido! I've got something goooooood!" Go find your dog's most favorite toy. Squeak it, throw it, do whatever your dog likes you to do. If he hasn't already dropped the goodie, he probably will now. Cheer him on to get his toy. "Good BOY, Fido! Way to go!!" Don't jump to get the goodie. Play with the dog a little while, *then* ever so casually, walk over to get the goodie. Calmly put it *in a spot the dog can't reach* and resume playing with your dog.

**What we're doing here is removing the chase part of this game.** Most dogs find out really

early in their life with you that if they grab something, they can get you to chase them. They *love this game!* They don't play this game to be a pain, they play it because it works – you chase them! It's fantastic!

So, being the smarter of the two beings, we realize how much the dogs like this and we change the rules around. **We no longer chase!** Ha!

**Using a combination of prevention (keeping stuff out of their reach), teaching (how to give), and strategy (I'm not chasing you), you'll have a dog steals with far less frequency.**

Laurie Luck, KPA CTP  
Faculty, Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training and Behavior  
[Smart Dog University, LLC](#)  
Box 1111, Mount Airy, MD 21771  
(240) 848-3468  
Check out [The Smart Dog Blog!](#)

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