

Your Smart Dog Does Your Dog Ask Questions? August 2010

I'm sitting at the kitchen table, eating my lunch and Nemo is standing at the patio door. He's just looking outside, unmoving. Suddenly, deliberately, Nemo looks at me, then looks outside at a toy laying on the patio. Everyone knows dogs can't speak our language, but there's no doubt that Nemo is asking me a question: Can you open this door so I can get that toy?"

I oblige. I get up from the table, ask Nemo to sit, open the door and release him when he complies with my request. He goes right out to the toy and brings it back in the house and into his crate. This month, we're going to talk about how to recognize when your dog is asking you something, and when or how you should answer that question.

How Do Dogs Ask?

I think all dogs ask us questions. The methods by which the dogs ask might vary, but nonetheless, they're asking questions. Some dogs have obvious signals - they may paw at you, bark, whine. Talos had a great way of asking for his meals - he'd raise his right paw and bang on the pantry door right around mealtimes.

Other dogs have less obvious ways of asking. Most of my dogs ask silently. Lily sits next to the pantry, ears perked, looking at me then at the pantry; back to me, then

to the pantry. I know exactly what she's asking: "Can I have a rawhide? Pretty please!" If Tango's tennis ball rolls into a bush and he can't retrieve it, he stays with the ball and looks directly at me with expectant eyes. Sometimes I tease him: I ask innocently "Where's your ball, boy?" He looks from me to the bush repeatedly until I come rescue the ball.

The methods by which the dogs ask might vary, but nonetheless, they're asking questions.

Should Your Answer Always Be Yes?

I sometimes answer my dogs with a "No," if I'm busy, if it's inconvenient, or if I just don't feel like it. It's not a

harsh no, it's more like "sorry, not right now." It's information, rather than an admonition. I want my dogs to ask questions! I want my dogs to come to me when they need my help or when they want something. The alternative is that the dog goes and gets what he wants which could be dangerous and/or could ruin my house (or harm my dog).

I prefer to be part of the process by which my dog gets the things he wants.

Look at it from the dog's perspective: I get to save the day for him - I get to be his hero! I want my dog to understand that we're on the same team, that I'm a trustworthy and loyal friend. I'll get that back from him ten-fold.



Laurie Luck, KPA CTP
Box 1111
Mount Airy, MD 21771
(240) 394-1112
laurie@smartdoguniversity.com



Avoiding Trouble

Some dogs might try to take advantage of the situation and start asking for lots of stuff all the time. As I mentioned above, don't feel bad about saying "Maybe later." Tango used to bring his tennis ball to me every time he wanted me to take him outside for his retrieving sessions. Sometimes it was too hot. Or I was busy. I told him "not now," but he'd still drop the tennis ball in my lap. So I simply took the ball away and put it in my desk drawer. When it was time to play, I'd call Tango to me, ask him to sit, then I'd grab the ball out of the drawer and run outside with him to play. You don't want to become your dog's personal butler, so make sure play time is convenient for you, not just for the dog.

Be especially careful if your dog asks questions by barking. Barking can be a lot of fun for a dog, and it definitely gets him attention. I don't like to encourage barking (unless it's on cue, meaning it only happens when I ask for it), so I typically don't respond to my dogs when they bark. If you sometimes respond to your dog when he barks, and other times you don't respond, you'll be giving him mixed signals and he may actually increase his barking because he's not sure of the rules.

I hope after reading this, you'll have a new appreciation for your dog and that this will open a new avenue of communication between the two of you. I love talking with my dogs. What I especially enjoy, however, is that my dogs look to me when they need help. They really understand that I can understand them -- and that I'm there to help them. That really changes your relationship with your dog.

Over the next month or so, take the time to watch your dog -- and see if he's asking you questions!

Happy training!

Laurie Luck
Faculty, Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training & Behavior
[Smart Dog University, LLC](http://SmartDogUniversity.com)
Box 1111, Mount Airy, MD 21771
(240) 848-3468
laurie@smartdoguniversity.com
[The Smart Dog Blog!](http://TheSmartDogBlog.com)
www.twitter.com/smartdogu
Helping good dogs become great dogs.

© 2010 Smart Dog University, LLC. All rights reserved.

