

Your Smart Dog Give It Up! June 2008

Nemo's running through the house with something in his mouth. No telling if it's a sock, my slipper, a tissue, or a steak knife. I bend down and ask "Whatcha got?" in a curious, happy voice. He finishes his lap around the living room and comes wagging his big old tail, with ...aha... my slipper! I politely ask "Nemie, give" and he happily drops the slipper in my hand (and a little drool). I give him a big pat on the side and then offer him the closest dog toy. Off he trots, new prize hanging out of his mouth.

This is a daily occurrence in our house. Nemo loves having something in his mouth, especially when he's excited or happy. And he picks up whatever is closest. He's had a soda can, a basil plant, shoes, books...you name it, he's had it. **Thankfully, one of the first skills we taught Nemo was how to give up items.** This skill comes in handy when he's got something of mine that I want back, when he's got something icky (dead bird), or when he's got something that could hurt him (the steak knife!).

This is an easy one to teach, but most folks go about it the wrong way. You can't go around *demanding* things. You also can't *chase your dog* for things. And you certainly can't *scold your dog* for having the thing in his mouth. So what are you *supposed* to do? **This month's newsletter will teach you how to have a dog who actually likes giving up stuff.**

CHOOSE A WORD

Before you start, choose a word or phrase to use when you want your dog to give you whatever he's got. **If you've had less than pleasant interactions with your dog and his "treasures" in the past, choose a completely new word.** You can choose any word or phrase you'd like; here are a few suggestions: give, drop, thank you, please, out, yuck, whatcha got.

TEACHING GIVE

You want to initiate this game with your dog, meaning you want to actually give him the thing first, then ask him to give it up. I find

empty paper towel and toilet paper rolls to be perfect for this exercise. They are good for a few reasons: (1) they're free, (2) they won't hurt your dog if he steals or eats them and (3) most dogs like cardboard, but will willingly give it up for something better. You'll also want some really yummy treats. You might also be able to use your dog's most favorite toy, as well.

Show your dog the empty paper towel roll.

While holding onto one end, offer the cardboard core to your dog. You may need to wiggle it around to make it more enticing. Once your dog has the cardboard core in his mouth (and you still have hold of it, too), put that really yummy treat directly in front of your dog's nose, even touching the treat to his nose if you need to. At the same time, say your word (I'll use "give" in this article, but your word can be different) in a pleasant voice.

Don't tug on the cardboard core. Just hold the treat at your dog's nose until he spits the core out and takes the treat.

As you are delivering the treat, reach down and pick up the paper towel roll. After your dog has finished the treat, offer the paper towel roll again in an excited voice. You'll repeat these steps several times, always giving the dog a treat for giving up the paper towel roll and also giving him the paper towel roll back.

The dog is learning that giving up stuff is pretty fun – he gets a tasty goodie and gets the "thing" back, too! It's a win-win! The key to this exercise is that *you initiate it*. If you only pay attention to the dog and trade him when *he* initiates the game, you are teaching him to grab stuff so you'll trade him.

QUICK TIPS

While you're teaching your dog this skill, manage his environment so it's almost impossible for him to get something he shouldn't have. Close your bedroom door if he likes to grab shoes; close the doors to the kids' rooms if he likes to steal their toys. Put the trash in



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a closet or get a childproof lid if he likes to raid the garbage.

Resist the urge to chase your dog. Chasing usually teaches your dog one of two things: (1) it's fun to steal things – that's how he gets you to play with him or (2) if he can run fast enough or get under the bed, he can have that goodie and you can't do anything about it. We want your dog to learn that giving up things is the most fun and most rewarding option.

Work with low value items at first. Don't start out with your dog's favorite toy or with something your dog covets (rawhides, pig ears, etc.). You want to keep your chance of success really high in the beginning. Once he's readily giving up the paper towel roll, pick one of his less interesting toys and start working with that. Important: You **must** be sure that your reward is **better than** what the dog is giving up. If your dog's favorite toy is a tug toy, you might have to use steak or chicken instead of a regular treat. It's much harder for your dog to give up a favorite toy – his paycheck (his treat) must reflect that increased difficulty!

Stuff a Kong™ really tight – make it super tough so your dog can't get everything out. When he gives up on it, pick the Kong up and help him get to the goodies inside by dumping them out or pulling some of the food closer to the opening. By doing this, you're helping reinforce your dog that you are a valuable resource – you can help him get even more goodies. By giving up his Kong™ to you, he's actually benefitting from it.

Never ever hit, scare, or threaten your dog in order to get something back from him.

If your dog growls or shows any aggression, STOP immediately. Call a certified positive-reinforcement training professional right away.

The steps outlined above will also work for the dog who won't give up the ball when playing fetch. If your dog doesn't drop the ball, you can't throw it for him again. Don't chase, beg, or plead with your dog to give the ball up. This is *his* game – if he won't give the ball up, you won't throw it again. Period. He can't throw it for himself, so if you go and sit in a chair (instead of chasing him), he'll

learn pretty quickly that his game of keep away isn't much fun at all.

This is an easy skill to teach your dog. It shouldn't take more than a week or two to teach your dog that giving up things is a really fun and rewarding thing to do!

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