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Your Smart Dog Your Dog, the Accountant May 2008

Your dog is barking at the dogs outside your yard on the sidewalk. To stop the noise, you yell for her to come inside. She flicks an ear in your direction, maybe even glances at you, but doesn't come! She's got nerve – you *know* she heard you. She's just being stubborn, so you call her again, with a more serious and stern voice. Nothing. Finally, after the distraction of the other dogs on the sidewalk have passed, she trots happily back to you. Where you resolutely tell her what a bad girl she is and shut her inside the house.

What you just witnessed *wasn't* a stubborn dog, not a hard-headed one either. Just a dog that can perform a cost-benefit analysis faster than most CPAs. You've got a four-legged accountant and didn't even know it! This month's newsletter will examine how dogs use their accounting skills to make decisions – and how we can convince them that cooperating with us is very valuable to their bottom line.

People perform these calculations all the time. For instance, if you want to renovate your kitchen, you'll probably get at least two or three estimates from different companies before you make your choice. You want to make sure you're getting the most for your money, right? No one wants to pay \$20,000 for \$10,000 worth of work.

Another example: You've got a coupon that expires today for \$1.00 off your Starbucks order. It's pouring down rain, you're cold, and you don't have an umbrella. You've got a \$20 bill in your wallet. Saving a dollar isn't worth getting drenched, especially since you have enough money on you anyway. You decide to stay warm and dry and let the coupon expire.

When your dog was barking outside and you called her in, she did some quick calculations to see if what you were offering was worth the price. What you were offering: leaving the excitement of seeing her doggie friends on the sidewalk. What she was getting for her effort: nothing. **The proposition you gave your dog when calling her inside simply wasn't worth it – she wasn't getting her money's worth.** And you proved it – when she finally *did decide* to come inside, you didn't give her anything, nothing, zippie. You confirmed her suspicions and proved her right: there was no good reason to come inside to begin with.

I run into people who tell me their dog should do what they ask “because they said so,” or “because their dog loves them.” I laugh and ask them if their spouse or their kids do their bidding for those reasons. I love my husband, but I'm not taking out the trash – we split the chores and that's on his list. And I certainly wouldn't do something for him “because he said so!” **Dogs aren't any different – and expecting them to be different only sets them up for failure and yourself up for disappointment.**

If your dog has trouble coming when called in the face of distractions, teach her how to work through those distractions. Yes, it may take an extra hour or two of work on your part. You'll have to gradually build up the distractions so your dog can be successful. But put in that effort and you'll have a dog who comes when called and does it eagerly!

One of my clients has a dog who loves to be outside in the yard. When it's time to come in,



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the dog plants himself and won't budge. The dog has learned that going inside ends all the fun. Once inside, the owners are busy getting their dinner ready and the dog basically gets ignored. The dog's not dumb. He's not stubborn. He's not hard-headed. **In his world, it simply doesn't pay to go inside.** Going inside means going from fun, fun, fun to **BORING**.

I recommended that the owners stuff several Kongs™ with delicious goodies like chicken or steak. And the **only time** the dog gets the stuffed Kong™ is when he comes inside. And only after they've stayed outside for about 30 minutes, running and playing with the dog. As soon as the dog realizes that the fun doesn't end when he goes inside, he'll start cooperating with his owners. Both the dog and the people will be happier.

Just because the dog isn't doing what we want him to do doesn't mean he's dumb. It more likely means the dog is pretty darn smart and has figured out that what you want him to do isn't really a whole lot of fun. **We should be striving for a cooperative relationship with our dogs, not an adversarial one.**

It may take a little bit of creativity and a little bit of time, but it's worth it. Most dogs live for 15 years or so. It's worth 15 good years to put a few weeks of training time in. You'll be happier – and so will your dog!

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