



## Pitch the Pouch

As you learned in class, there is a technique involved in moving from training with immediately available food rewards to getting consistent behavior from your dog without constantly using treats. You may have concerns about the reliability of the behaviors your dog performs when you don't have their favorite cookie. We want to be sure that your dog can perform reliably in real-life situations even when you don't have that hotdog in your pocket.

Let's examine why reducing the dependency on treats seems to be such a daunting task. Most of the time, this is something you haven't practiced. Usually training means you take out the treats. You may not have tried using play, a toy or another life reward. The thought may not have even crossed your mind, especially if you are in the early stages of training. Consider the last time you didn't **lure** your dog or show them the treat before asking for a behavior.

Training with food initially is one of the fastest and easiest ways to help dogs acquire a new behavior. However, it is easy to become a Pez dispenser and spit out cookies for every little thing your dog does. It is important to have a training game plan so once your dog gets the hang of a cue, you can begin to move away from consistent and immediate food rewards.

Imagine your boss one day told you he wasn't going to pay you with money anymore. You would not have much motivation to go to keep working. Many people think that no food equals no behavior from their dog. This is simply not true. The difference between you and your dog is that the only thing you want from your boss is money. Your dog, on the other hand, most likely has a repertoire of things they find rewarding. Offering things your dog wants for a job well done will ensure he repeats the desired behavior in the future. Once your dog reliably performs behaviors, the reinforcement doesn't have to be as substantial and shouldn't need to always be immediate.

Pitch the Pouch should start at home in the least distracting setting possible. This is not the time to ask your dog to give up treats entirely. This is about establishing a trust with your dog that doing a behavior will eventually be worth it. Think about when you were a little kid and you did odd jobs for neighbors to earn some spending money. As soon as you were done raking those leaves, mowing the lawn, weeding the garden, you ran right up to that person's door and knocked because you were ready to get paid NOW. As a child, you wanted that immediate gratification. As an adult, you understand you don't get paid immediately for completing your work. You wait for your paycheck. As we matured, we were forced to come to terms with the idea of an IOU. We learned to trust that our employer would pay us eventually.



This is essentially the transition we are trying to make with our dogs. If you want your dog to accept an IOU, you need him to trust that you are not taking advantage of him. Trust takes time to build. Like with any great structure, a strong foundation is paramount – and lots of small, careful successes is what helps you to build a strong foundation of trust with your dog.

Here are some things to keep in mind to practice Pitching the Pouch without perplexing your Pooch.

**\*Rewards are fluid.** Find out what your dog considers a life reward **in that moment**.

What that means is that what seemed like a fantastic reward earlier may not be as valuable down the road. This is the same reason we shouldn't go grocery shopping when we are hungry – if we are hungry, **everything** seems like a good idea!

**\*Remember that you don't decide the value of a reward – your dog does.** Just because he's a dog doesn't mean he loves walks or tennis balls or belly rubs. You must figure out what your dog actually enjoys, now what you think he should enjoy.

**\*Practice actually pitching your pouch.** If you normally practice with a treat pouch, try working on known cues with the pouch hidden or in another room. You could even set up hidden treats in the area and surprise your dog with a reward they weren't expecting.

**\*Use the game of chance.** Sometimes the best way to get your dog to give it their all is to keep him guessing when or if a treat will appear. Think about playing a slot machine. Say you put \$20 in. You lose again and again until you are down to your last spin. Then suddenly, **BIG WIN!** You have \$40! You're so excited to finally win that you completely forget you just almost spent \$20 to push a shiny button a few times. Find the line between winning and losing and be sure your dog stays on the winning side to keep him playing!

**\*Noncompliance** If you ask your dog for a known cue without the presence of a treat and your dog fails to perform the cue, **DO NOT** then get a treat and lure. This will teach your dog to not listen to you the first time and to only perform in the presence of food. Instead, you could ignore your dog for a few moments, reset and try again. Alternately, you could end the session.

Here are a few exercises you can try to help Pitch the Pouch.

**\*Add movement instead of food.** Ask your dog for one simple behavior without the promise of a reward. When he performs it, celebrate and run across the room, allowing him to give exciting chase! When you get to the other side of the room ask for two



behaviors in a row. If he gets it right, an even **bigger** celebration takes place and it's off to the races again!

\***Change up your tempo.** Changes in normal routine can sometimes intrigue our dogs. Try putting a few extra seconds between your cues, as though you are leading up to a big master plan. Or, try asking them rapid fire and being more animated so they are excited to do the next behavior – if you're excited about it, why shouldn't they be?

\***Change your Habits!** Try changing random things about what YOU do! Give a hand signal with your non-dominant hand. Cue from sitting on the sofa rather than standing near the food bowl. Be sure to try using verbal cues only.

Pitching the Pouch is part of 'proofing' the behavior. You want to be sure the behavior is reliable in the first place in a variety of situations. If you have recently asked your dog for a relatively consistent behavior and he didn't respond, don't brush it off. Replicate what happened and try to figure out why it didn't go as planned! Did your body language change? What were you doing when you asked for the behavior? What was your dog doing? Sometimes answering these questions first can make or break the behavior down the road, so don't be shy about experimenting!

Remember, Pitch the Pouch isn't a race. It's about trust. It's not about being more clever than your dog and tricking him into doing a behavior, but the exact opposite. This should help a trust so solid and unshakable that your dog no longer feels the need to check for his reward. Instead, your dog will know that engaging with you is always worthwhile