



UVHS Behavior Tips
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Earn While You Learn – There Is No Free Lunch!

By Dee Ganley & Nancy Lyon

There is no free lunch! Your dog needs to earn everything – and we mean everything! Pats, praise, food, & toys are your dog's paycheck for learning to be a good citizen. Don't put your dog on welfare by letting him live on handouts - make him a proud member of the family by earning the food and play he wants and deserves. You aren't being dominant by withholding what your dog wants. Instead you are helping your dog develop a cooperative work ethic by creating the jobs (obedience behaviors) that will earn the attention, food or play he desires. Dogs need to earn what they get - just as we do. Otherwise we turn them into beggars, slaves or outlaws when what all we ever wanted is a friend and partner.

How does this work? You will only notice and reward those behaviors that you initiate. For example, if your dog drops the ball at your feet wanting to play, no play. Play is always initiated and carried out only by you. It must be your idea, not your dog's. If he nudges you for a pat on the head, he doesn't get one. He only gets patted and rubbed when you decide the time is right. All activities – meals, going outside, play, even attention, are initiated by you. In addition, the dog must complete a simple obedience command before you allow him to engage in any of these activities. Request a sit or a down before dinner, going out, playtime or any activity your dog likes. You must go through doorways first. Use your body to block the dog instead of a sit, stay command. The body block is easy and is in the dog's own language. As you open the door and the dog tries to push past you, simply move your body to block him. Continue in this fashion until he looks up at you in expectant attention and understanding. When he hesitates and looks to you for the "cue" to pass, then release him. If the dog is going outside, just open and close the door without letting him out. When he finally looks at you and steps away from the door, reward him with a treat, or by letting him out. Do this consistently so he learns he must wait for you to say okay, and not simply rush through the door.

If you put your dog on the payroll, and are consistent, s/he will learn that all good things and all necessary things come from cooperating with your requests. All you ask of him is cooperation, which is well within his abilities. You will impress upon him that you make the decisions in this house because you control the payroll. The "tougher" the dog the more necessary and effective a "no free lunch program" will be. And best of all you will have created a loving, loyal partner without having to lift a finger, scruff of a neck or raise your voice. Not all dogs require 100% "no free lunch" - but most can benefit from being on the payroll at least part time.

When Dee feeds her three dogs she asks them to wait while she puts their bowls down. Sometimes she walks around the house while they continue to wait until she gives them their release word to eat. This is called the **Food Bowl Game**, which is an easy and wonderful example to both you and your dog that there is "no free lunch".

Try the "Food Bowl Game/Exercise" as an example of how the no free lunch program can be fun and effective. This is a self-control exercise that is easy to teach because your dog is so motivated to get what is in his food bowl. You'll need your dog's food bowl with at least 10 pieces of something really good and smelly to eat. The goal is for your dog to stay sitting while you lower his dish onto the floor and to wait until you release him to eat.

1. Start standing up facing your dog with his food bowl in one hand and covering the top of the bowl with your other hand in case he jumps up to get it. No free treats!
2. Ask your dog to sit then start to lower his food bowl. If your dog stands up and or moves toward the bowl stop lowering it - lift it up so the dog can't get it. Have your dog sit again. If he sits, give a treat from the bowl so he knows he can earn a reward for cooperating.
3. Start to lower again, stop and give treat just before your dog moves. Watch your dog he will be obvious about this. You want him to succeed. If he gets up again just stand straight and say "too bad". Ask your dog to sit. If he is still wants what you have, don't give another cookie (we don't want him to think this part is the game). Once again start to lower the dish and make sure you reinforce him for staying in a sit. Just reinforce from the dish with your free hand (take piece from the dish).
4. By the 6th or seventh time your dog should be waiting while you are lowering the food dish and not diving into it. What a wonderful way to link good manners to something your dog wants without any scolding, pushing, pulling or correcting by you. Your dog is learning that he can control what he earns by exercising self-control.

This exercise is so easy to teach and sends a powerful message to your dog.

Once your dog will stay sitting while you take your hand away from the dish on the floor, then you can release the dog with a "get it" or OK or some word you have chosen that will mean your dog is free to eat. You can stretch the time your dog will wait until you are able to walk around the room before releasing him to eat.

An extension of this exercise/game is to have your dog sit/stay letting him see you have his bowl of food, which you then take to another room and hide. Return to your dog and then release him to go find his bowl to eat. The "hide the food bowl" game becomes two training exercises in one session - it teaches self-control, and it also becomes a scent game.

Self-control can not be imposed on any animal. It develops when the individual (dog or human) sees a positive benefit coming to them by waiting rather than acting on impulse.