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Training Tip

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Bribe or Reward... That Is the Question

By Dennis Stauffer, *Kennel Manager*

The dictionary defines a bribe as “something given to someone in order to influence their behavior.” A reward is defined as “a gift given in recognition of one’s effort.” A bribe is given BEFORE the desired behavior is offered; a reward is given AFTER the desired behavior is offered by a dog.

Some trainers use luring to initially help the dog understand the request being made of him. A treat is used to lure the dog into position. However, doing so must be phased out eventually, or the dog learns to only offer the behavior IF a treat is present. This is when we move into giving rewards. Positive reinforcement dog training is based on the premise that a dog receives a reward for choosing to do what the person is asking of him. It may require a bit of patience to make the transition from luring to rewarding, as the dog needs to figure out the change in how things are now being done.

Stand still, breathe and wait for your dog to think about it. And yes, think about it he will. You may see him offer up his entire repertoire of tricks, in an attempt to do the “right” thing for you. As soon as he does whatever you are asking, immediately offer him a reward. “Yes!” or a high value treat or a click – whatever you do, do it as soon as the desired behavior is offered. Reward given and lesson learned!