

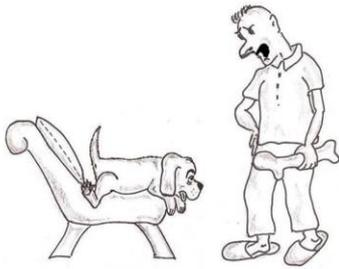
MOTIVATION

Worksheet for practical lessons with František Šusta; www.trainingisdialogue.com



WARNING, THIS SHEET SERVES FOR STRUCTURED LESSONS WITH A TRAINER, not as instructions for use

REINFORCERS / BRIBES



OK then, I accept your getting up only in exchange for a big beef bone, but you really cannot ask me to pre-chew it for you!

F.Šusta

If the trainer wants to increase the animal's motivation in training through positive reinforcement, the first idea often is to "limit access to resources" (of food, fun). The animal will get them only as a reward then. But we will not follow such method in today's lesson. First, because it may have side effects (worsened relation with the animal, stress, aggression), and second, because we cannot observe it a hundred per cent in real life. But most importantly, **THERE ARE MANY OTHER MOTIVATION FACTORS AND QUESTIONS THE OWNER SHOULD ANSWER BEFORE DECIDING TO MOTIVATE THE DOG BY HUNGER!**

Basic question: Does my dog have weak motivation only at specific exercises, or always and in general?

Note: Instead of "one or several exercises", we can also say "with one specific person, at one specific place...". Because, as we know from shaping lessons already, one specific trainer, one specific place etc. are criteria that must be
Answer:.....

If you have answered that the dog's motivation is weak only at SPECIFIC EXERCISE(S), then the problem does not consist in motivation but in the task the dog is imposed. Try to answer partial questions for that specific task:

- a) Can the dog do the task? ("He knows very well what I want, he only does not feel like doing it!" is not a good answer. The question is whether the dog has ever fulfilled the task, completing all criteria of the exercise. Is for example the speed criterion not sufficiently learned?)
.....
- b) How big is the reward the dog can expect on a good reason? (The animal works for what it expects, not for what it actually gets. Does it have a reason to expect a good reward?)
.....
- c) Does the exercise perhaps expose it to actual or perceived danger? (In other words, "does the animal perhaps, at the time of the exercise, need to fulfil the primary reinforcer of control rather than that of food?" Because, in my opinion, the primary reinforcer of control must be fulfilled, if the animal is to work for food.)
.....
- d) Is the exercise perhaps too difficult? (Or does it perhaps cause physical pain to the dog - e.g. in case of articular diseases? In case of a group exercise, there is also the question whether, for example, a dominant dog gets too far from the resource during the exercise, etc.)
.....
- e) Does perhaps the exercise execution or the commanding and rewarding technique contain hidden unintentional punishment that demotivates the dog? (For example learned conditioned aversion to a specific command from the past, luring the dog after food without giving it to the dog after fulfilling the task, moving away the target the dog was heading to...)
.....
- f) Have we perhaps, in this exercise, lapsed from positive into negative reinforcement? (Have we perhaps started correcting the dog's exercise increasingly, "enforcing its fulfilment"? If the exercise has become "enforced", it will work only to the degree to which we are able to enforce it, and not to the degree to which the animal is able to do it.)
.....
- g) Other potential reasons for this specific exercise (for example, slow performance is a display of appeasing behaviour, etc.)
.....

If you have answered that the dog's motivation is ALWAYS weak, then the reason can be searched in rewards, your mutual communication, as well as in the dispositions of your dog or its breed, respectively. We can make use of some of the following hints.

ESSENTIAL FACTORS (they are here so that your dog can be, during training, really like a "sportsman" who works because he wants to, and not like a soldier who works because he has to):

a) The first step for the animal (If your training should really work on the principle of positive reinforcement, then the dog should have the opportunity to show its interest in some manner - ideally by a pre-learned position the dog takes any time it is ready to work. The position must be such that it cannot get "unpleasantly tougher" and, at the same time, it has to be sufficiently simple. In the first steps, the dog gets direct rewards for taking the position; in further steps, the dog gets specific tasks - positively learned exercises - out of the position).

b) You should have a well working reward (please get it clear what your dog does and does not consider a reward. The one who chooses what is reward and what is punishment is the trained animal, not the owner. The rewards can include praise, activity, toys - but, in the latter case, be warned of demotivation at the time you take the toy back. In any case, reward is not something that has been imposed, but something the animal wishes, something that increases the frequency of the rewarded behaviour. BEWARE OF BRIBING - the behaviour must come first, followed by the reward; not the other way around, first a promise of a specific reward, followed by the behaviour.)

c) Short windows of opportunity (limited hold of reinforcement; long chance is not a chance but a certainty, sometimes even an unpleasant obligation. In positive motivation, if the dog is to work as an individual who "wants to work", our commands must constitute its chance of reward, not an obligation. It is therefore suitable to teach the dog that the chance lasts only for a specific, exactly defined time. Learning of short chance is actually a form of shaping - first I find out in how many seconds the dog responds now, on average, and then I go reducing the time so that more than one half of responses are successful - see shaping lessons).

d) Behavioural momentum (control exercises, It is always good to have some simple tasks in reserve - such tasks must be well learned and easy for the animal. If nervousness rises, either because of a difficult task, fear, failure or because of too many repetitions of the same task, we can insert a simple task that "restarts the animal", provides it with more success and calms it down - i.e. prepares it again for the more difficult task).

TIPS AND TRICKS (they should help to increase the animal's motivation at a given time, but they are not permanently present):

e) Jackpot (Unexpectedly big reward, often for a simple task; such reward increases the expectations of the trained subject. Warning, one thing applies to most jackpots: the animal spends a long time eating them and that's why they don't fit in the middle of the learning process, as they delay it. Personally, I suggest giving jackpots rather for simple and well learned tasks, ideally perhaps before a difficult task, as the animal will then approach it with great expectations. They can be used as rewards also for a difficult task that is, nevertheless, well learned already; after several repetitions, they will increase its popularity and accelerate its execution. In the process of learning new tasks, I would use jackpots rather at the end of the lesson.)

f) Competition training (A passive individual can be energized if a more active individual gets tasks before the passive one. Warning: don't use such motivation for a dominant individual, favouring a submissive one - that could cause imbalance in the group, resulting in fights.)

PRIMARILY, PLEASE, ALWAYS TRY TO SEE THE TRAINING THROUGH YOUR DOG'S EYES. WOULD YOU BE MOTIVATED IF YOU WERE THE DOG? AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST, TRY TO SEE YOURSELF FROM OUTSIDE - ARE YOU STILL THE TRAINER WHO OFFERS A CHANCE, OR HAVE YOU ALREADY BECOME A COMMANDER WHO IMPOSES AN OBLIGATION? BECAUSE THEN IT IS ANOTHER STORY ALREADY...☺