RETRIEVING GAMES

Game Day 3 - It's Yer Choice (IYC)

"It's Yer Choice" is the core value that Susan Garrett introduced me to when educating my dog. The concept revolves around using treats initially to convey to your dog that they can earn rewards through making good choices. However, this approach can evolve to encompass any form of distraction or reinforcement that your dog finds enticing. The essence is collaboration: work with me first, and then you can indulge in your reward.

Implementing this philosophy has been transformative for my dog. Previously a notorious scavenger, she would eagerly seek out any food scraps on the ground. Now, thanks to IYC, I can confidently walk with her, assured she won't veer off course to hunt for snacks. The days of anxiously scanning the horizon for potential temptations and issuing the "leave it" cue (which was white noise to her) are behind us – it's been over two years since I have used this cue.

More than just a training method, IYC has become a way of life for us. It instils invaluable self-regulation, empowering our dogs to consistently make the choices that align with ours, while still fulfilling their own needs and desires. The result? A true win-win situation for everyone involved.

As usual, start your training session with an engaging game.

What you'll need:

1. Your dog
2. Treats – chose treats based on your dog's motivation level. For highly food-motivated dogs, opt for lower value treats or kibble. For those needing more motivation, select higher value treats.
3. A distraction-free room
4. Your mobile phone on a tripod to video your session
5. A timer – make sure to keep sessions short

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Step-by-step guide:

1. Sit comfortably in a chair with your elbow anchored on your knee.
2. Position yourself low enough so that your hand is below your dog's head when they are standing or sitting.
3. Take some treats and enclose them in your hand, then extend your hand towards your dog.
4. Allow your dog to sniff, nibble, or lick your closed fist, ensuring they cannot access the treats.
5. Maintain silence and exercise patience, especially with highly-food driven dogs; this may take some time.
6. When your dog backs away from your hand, open your hand, and see what their choice is:
    a. Do they attempt to steal a treat? Close your hand again.
    b. Play this game of your dog backing away, and your hand opening until they refrain from reaching forward to steal reinforcement.
    c. When your dog remains in position when you open your hand and say "cook" (this is a location specific marker that tells your dog "I like what you're doing, keep doing it the reward is coming to you"), watch for their choice. Since this is the first time you have spoken to them, they will likely reach forward again as they expect a reward. Close your hand again. We want them to show great self-control.
    d. Once your dog remains in their position when you say "cook", you can pick up a treat. However, if they are reaching forward while you pick up that treat, put it back and close your fist. The reward is coming to your dog, not the dog coming towards the reward. Opening your hand is already reinforcing for your dog.
    e. They should only get a treat once they can remain in position when you say "cook", pick up the treat and deliver it to their mouth. Reinforcement is a process, and this process already starts when you open your hand.
    f. Now that they understand the game's concept, you can ask for different positions (remember not to cue your dog, let them make that choice). We worked with a back away to start with. Wait a little longer and see if they can offer a sit? Repeat the same steps in the sit as above.
    g. Can they offer a down? Repeat as above.

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h. Mix the positions up to make your dog understand that reinforcement is not limited to one position.

Daily Use: Playing IYC is the first step to a dog that understands they can make choices that lead to great consequences. What starts as a party trick – imagine having friends over and your dog is showing great impulse control while a cookie is lying on the floor or even on their paw without you saying anything – will lead into a life of IYC. All I do with my dog is based on this philosophy and I know I can trust her not stealing reinforcement.

You are preparing food in the kitchen and accidently drop something – your dog will know that this is off limits unless you tell them to "get it". Preparing the environment for our dog so they can learn what is expected and make great choices is really empowering for them and much more fun for both of you – micromanaging a dog about their poor choices can become cumbersome.

Checklist:

1. Have you recorded and reviewed your session?
2. Is your dog engaged?
3. How is your dog's T.E.M.P throughout all the stages?
4. Does your dog understand the Location Specific Marker?

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