

# ASK THE TRAINER

## DOG REFUSING COMMANDS - STUBBORN?

I'm trying, TRYING, to be so patient with my dog, but I'm just not sure if she cares enough. What I mean is, she seems to be terribly stubborn (or at least slow to respond) about responding to commands. Even calling her name, with the come command (which we've been working on with treats) she just kind of stares at me from the couch like "what? I'm here!"

Signed, Ugh...

Dear Ugh,

There are a myriad of reasons she might not be doing what is asked, even with a good incentive. To rule out the causes, first consider these factors:

1. Are you sure your pup knows what you are asking her to do? Have you helped her generalize the commands and have you worked with them in different areas with different levels of distraction?

2. Are you following a leadership program? Is your pup initiating lots of interactions and getting lots of free praise?

3. Is your pup free fed? If so, putting her on a schedule might help. Also, think about making her work for her meals. That is, she doesn't get fed out of a bowl but she gets fed for working. She sits when you ask,

she gets some of her breakfast. She lays down, she gets a bit more, etc. Measure out how much food she gets per meal, put it in a bait bag or something else and use that as your training tool. At first, you may not get much success (as she's used to having food available at least at meal times)...I would expect within a couple of days she will be significantly more food motivated. Also, pay attention to how much work she's willing to do for food before she decides that's enough. That way you can end

the training session with success, before she can.

4. What is your reaction when she blows you off? You may be inadvertently giving her more attention, albeit unpleasant attention, for being a pill and blowing you off. You can try switching that scenario around. She blows you off, that's it

we're done, no attention for you. She does what you want right away...big time attention, lots of love. This is still consistent with the Nothing In Life is Free program as it is attention she has worked for.

5. Are you sure she's actually being stubborn? We tend to be very quick to call a dog stubborn, but there are a lot of other possible reasons.

For example, if I offered you \$100 to sit in a chair. You might or might not sit in the chair. If you think about all the reasons that you might not sit in the chair, they could include things like: you didn't hear the instructions (can't hear well, or weren't paying attention); you don't understand the language in which the instructions were given; you didn't understand that I'd actually give you \$100; you didn't believe that I'd actually give you \$100; you'd sat on that chair before and it had a spider or a tack on it; you had pain in your back or rear that prevented you from sitting; you just won the lottery and

didn't need my stinking \$100; there's something you'd rather do; you really, really have to use the bathroom and can't do anything before you do that; etc.

Sometimes I think it can be more helpful to try to figure out a more specific reason why a dog won't do something. When you get a better handle on the "why" you can start to come up with better solutions, better motivators, etc.

-Kelly Ryan

