

Working in Drive

Everyone has heard the phrase of a dog working “in drive”. Whether the dog is doing obedience in food drive (what type of treat am I getting tonight?) or prey drive (where’s my ball?), most trainers use some type of motivator for their dog. Unfortunately, this is mostly utilized by obedience enthusiasts and competitors and not pet owners. We have all heard the phrase, ‘what’s in it for me’, like their human counterparts; dogs do what is good for them.

Training in Drive?

If your dog has a high food or prey drive, it may not be wise to train your dog in that drive. Points are lost in training because of the dogs precision or lack there of. In order to make sure your dog understands what you want from him, you may want to leave the drive out of the teaching phase of your training. Teach your dog basic commands and positions without putting him into a high drive. Drill your dog without putting him in high drive; not that you are withholding rewards completely but don’t reward your dog with his most favorite object or toy. Once you are completely sure your dog knows what you want and expect of him, then put him in drive for the reward. For example, I’ll teach my dog commands and positions for food but then when I want to bring the drive up, I use a toy or ball. This would also be done during the correction/proofing phase of your training. You can ‘pump’ your dog up for the reward, command him, put him through his paces, correct for lack of precision, and then jump into drive after the correction. The correction will teach him the correct behavior and the reward will bring him back into drive.

Breaking drive:

Correcting your dog will not break drive. If you have taught and repeated the commands you have taught your dog to the point you are 100% sure that he understands them, then he will never sulk for a correction. Breaking the drive of a dog (i.e. sulking to the point the dog does not want to work) comes from a dog being either (a) unsure of what you want from him or (b) inconsistent handling. Some examples of this are, allowing your dog to get away with misbehavior one day and not the next; inconsistent corrections, and using different commands such as sit and sit down.

What type of drive should you work in?

I think everyone needs to build up their dogs prey or play drive if it doesn’t exist. Many dogs will work for treats but the flashy routines come from the desire for a toy such a ball, or a jute/tug toy, or maybe even Frisbees. Food makes everyone

happy; however, excitement comes from playing and interacting with you, his owner.

If your dog doesn't want to play or tug, tie him to a tree and let him watch you play with another dog. When you are done playing, put the dog you were playing with away, untie your dog and bring him to his crate or pen without any interaction. After a few sessions, he is going to want to interact with you. It is important when you are doing this to keep your dog secluded from other dogs or pets. If he can play with other dogs, he is not going to interact with you. I would keep him crated or kenneled, leash walk him and feed him but don't try to get him to play. You will know when he wants to play because he is going to continue to pester you and beg for your attention.

The "Drive Toy"

Whatever toy you are using to 'drive' your dog, keep it away and only have it out when the two of you are playing. If he can grab his favorite tug toy and play in the yard by himself, why does he need you? This toy is your special toy that you share with your dog, and that is the only time you and your dog can play with it, during your special play/training sessions.

Conclusion:

Be sure your dog understands the commands and teach him basic positions without him being in a high drive state. Some dogs just can't concentrate in high drive and they are bound to make mistakes. Teach him in a lower drive so he can focus. Once you move into the correction and proofing phase of training, you can use your toy and bring out his drive so he doesn't come down from the correction. Don't show all your cards at once, keeping your high drive rewards for later gives you something to work with in teaching drive.