



## Will Work for Food

Rover lives with us, in our house. He's fed regularly. Normally he eats twice a day though not necessarily at the same times each day. Rover however doesn't know that he's not living with a pack in the wild. He doesn't have the same appreciation of the finer things in life that I do. He's as happy lying in a mud puddle as he is lying on the tile under the air conditioning vent. Dogs, living in the wild, have to work in order to eat. They scavenge and hunt and if they don't find food on a particular day, they don't eat.

Rover eats out of a bowl for our convenience. His natural instincts are to search and work in order to eat. Even very young pups have to work, pushing, scrambling and climbing on mom to get to the source of nourishment.

Dogs were part of early man's hunting parties. They would find and corner prey for the hunters. Numerous breeds were developed initially to either hunt or assist in hunting. Their natural hunting abilities were further honed through selective breeding. Terriers, retrievers, pointers and spaniels to name a few were all initially bred to either hunt or help with hunting. For most of their existence if the dogs came up empty pawed, they didn't eat.

I don't want to make Rover go out and catch or find his own food. Rummaging through the neighbors' trash and hunting their cats or children would likely upset my neighbors. But it's not a bad idea to have Rover work for his food. There are benefits to having a dog "earn" his meal. It can be a great way to slow down a voracious eater. It can also be used as a way to give Rover something fun and entertaining to do. There are a number of ways to do this. Some of the strategies we use follow.

**Buster Cube:** This practically indestructible hard plastic cube is a great way for Rover to work for his food. Some of our clients even use them to give their dogs all their food. The Cube has a hole in the center where you would drop in the kibble. It also has an internal maze. Once you put the food inside, you give it a few turns to distribute the food into the maze. Rover then has to manipulate the cube to dispense the food.

Rover loves his cube and will spend a lot of time working it to get his treats. He paws it around the room often sending it flying with his efforts to get the food. The down side of it is that it's really loud on tile or wood floors. This puzzle forces Rover to figure out how to extract the food. It has settings to make it even harder so once he knows how to work it you make it even more challenging.

**Leo Canine Genius:** This is a softer yet rugged rubber toy shaped like a vase. You put the kibble in through the "neck" and Rover has to manipulate it by rolling, bouncing, tossing, and or dropping it to get the food out. The food gets harder and harder to get out as he empties it. You can even connect multiple toys together to make it even more of a challenge.

This morning I put all of Rover's breakfast, one cup of kibble, in it. Instead of taking less than five minutes to eat from his bowl he was still working on it more than twenty minutes later.

Kong: This favorite toy can also be used to make Rover work for food. Put his kibble in it and "seal" the ends with either a little Kong paste or peanut butter. Then freeze it. He'll have to lick through the seal to get to the food. While easier than the Buster Cube or Canine Genius, it will still slow him down and make him work a little bit. This one could also be used with wet food.

Because of their effectiveness in exercising Rover's brain, these "toys" are carried by most Bark Busters. Contact your local office for pricing.

Scatter Feeding: All you need is a yard or a room where you don't mind dog food on the floor. Take Rover's food and while he's watching, scatter it around. If you do it outside he'll spend time using his nose to search for it, inside he's more likely to just look for it. Either way it will slow down the eating process which can be really helpful with dogs that "wolf" their food.

All of these methods will make Rover work for his food. They encourage him to use his brain, figure things out and as I said, slow down his eating. The more we make Rover work and use his brain to figure things out the calmer he'll be.

You can use these ideas as part of a "nothing in life is free" strategy. Make your Rover work by doing sits before getting petted, going out and when you put his leash on. Dogs actually expect to have to work. The more "jobs" we give dogs to do, the happier they are.

Dogs like using their brains and we want thinking dogs. If Rover never gets mentally challenged he's liable to have excess energy. When we make dogs think and work it tires them out. A tired dog is a good dog. I didn't just make that up. Really, it's true. Help your Rover to use his brain and work for food and affection. A working dog is a happy dog. You all know the rest of it. . .

Happy Dogs = Happy Families