Capture This! How to Put Your Dog's Cute Behaviors on Cue

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May 31, 2017 | 2 Minutes

When you're training a dog, there are several ways to get him or her to do what you want.

The method of capturing a behavior may be a bit time consuming, but sometimes it's the only way to get a very specific behavior.

Capturing means marking and rewarding a specific target behavior.

There are some behaviors that are nearly impossible to achieve through luring or other methods. These include things like a tail wag, barking, yawning, and lip licking. These natural behaviors can be put on cue through the method of capturing.

A behavior that I like to teach through capturing is "head down."

The dog is lying down resting and puts his chin on the floor. To train this behavior, I sit down in a location where I normally relax, such as the couch. I have a bowl of treats nearby and my clicker in my hand. (If you're new to clicker training, check out this article to give you some tips on how to get started.)

My dog likes to settle down on the floor nearby when I sit down, so it makes it a perfect situation in which to capture this behavior. Now comes the hard part: waiting!

I wait for my dog to lower his head to the ground. As soon as he does, I click and toss a treat to him.

Once I click and toss a treat, my dog gets up and hangs out next to me for a while, hoping for another treat. This is the time-consuming part of capturing. I just wait until he settles back down on the floor and lowers his head again, and CLICK! I toss another treat to my dog.

Continue this pattern for a few repetitions (or for as long as you have time) each day, until your dog starts deliberately offering the target behavior. Click and treat each attempt. Once you see that he is offering it consistently, you can add a verbal cue.

Wait until your dog is intentionally performing the target behavior to add a cue, so you don't inadvertently name the wrong behavior.

And there you have it: a captured behavior! Capturing is also a great way to teach "down," "roll over," "paw your nose," and "sneeze.