



No Motivation, No Training

It's a three-way partnership between client, dog and trainer to achieve success in getting the job done with best outcome

By John D. Visconti, CPDT-KA

You should feel extremely proud for following the advice of medical experts when they urge you to eat more vegetables, work out even when you're not in the mood, go to bed early, and cut back on sugar, salt, and caffeine. And it's also praiseworthy that you consistently back up your computer files; maintain your car before something goes wrong; get things done early rather than waiting until the last minute; spend less time watching TV and spend less time on-line surfing the internet.

Oh, you don't always do all these things? What's up with that? They're all scientifically proven to be good for you. Isn't that motivation enough? Well, if you're like me, no, it's not enough. We don't always do what we should. Therefore, it shouldn't surprise dog trainers that motivating clients can be a continual challenge. You might feel otherwise; after all, the reason dog

owners contact us is because they know they are in need our assistance. In order to find us, they have submerged themselves into the information swamp known as the internet and waded through tons of often confusing and contradictory material. Presumably, they have spoken with a few trainers before making a hiring decision. And they have agreed to our fee structure in advance of the first session.

With all of their investments of time and money, motivating a client should be as easy as inspiring Fido to chomp down on a bully stick, right? Not so fast. Similar to medical experts providing helpful advice that is scientifically sound, it hardly matters that you, the trainer, have science on your side when it comes to motivating your clients. They, just as their dogs, would still require motivation. And that motivation often needs to come from an external source – the trainer.

What are the sources for motivation?

Motivation derives from two sources, internal and external, aka intrinsic and extrinsic. It's important to keep in mind that most trainers find the process of dog training intrinsically rewarding. That is, we enjoy engaging in the activity for its own sake. Participation in training is rewarding for us and as such, we derive much of our motivation from the very process itself. Perhaps because of this, we don't spend enough time sharpening our motivational skills because we simply can't understand how our clients aren't equally motivated.

Lest you think otherwise, our clients can be motivated as well, just in a different way – they are often extrinsically motivated. Extrinsic motivation is the product of external factors. Clients frequently participate in training because participation will provide a desirable outcome. It's not that they are anti-training but unlike you, who derives motivation from the actual training process, your client's motivation is often the derivative of external sources, such as the results of the training process. For example, most of us, thankfully, are not anti-dental hygiene. But we don't find the act of flossing to be rewarding. On the other hand, we do find the upsides to be.

Have you noticed how your dentist's office walls are often adorned with posters of awful looking teeth and gums, side-by-side with pictures of healthy ones? Visuals motivate us and dentists realize, when it comes to things like flossing, their patients need external motivation. Our training clients are no different. Yes, at times it can feel like pulling teeth, but a critical part of a trainer's job description is "client motivator."

It's important that we present our training in a way that answers the usually unstated client's question, "What's in it for me?" Clearly, we know that the dogs we train are motivated by self-interest and we're OK with that. A similar perspective should be embraced when we interact with our clients. It's OK most dog owners need to be motivated by self-interest. In one way or another, we are all motivated by self-interest. Heck, even Gandhi felt that altruism and self-interest were both acceptable foundations for action. As a trainer, I've accepted that motivating clients is an ongoing part of my job. As noted by sales and life consultant, Zig Ziglar, "Of course motivation is not permanent. But then, neither is bathing; but it is something you should do on a regular basis."

Motivation is a three-way street

As mentioned above, there are two fronts on which we must provide motivation – our clients and their dogs. But it's important to note that there is a third element in the equation – you. Your sense of self-value and feelings of motivation are partly determined by the success of both client and dog. When clients aren't motivated, when clients only engage in lukewarm attempts to train their pooches, our sense of self-value suffers, and our motivation is negatively impacted. We visualize that rowdy Labradoodle, jumping on guests, as a negative reflection of our abilities. We identify with the finished product. And if that product isn't one in

which we can take pride, it's difficult to maintain a high level of motivation.

Our sense of self-worth is directly tied to our client's successes or lack of. When we motivate our clients to work with their dogs, we're actually motivating ourselves as well. In that sense, motivation is a three-way street: dog, owner, and trainer. At times, we, too, require extrinsic motivation and client compliance is a powerful extrinsic motivator. In the end, the math is simple – the more time we invest in motivating our clients, the more we are helping ourselves, and the more enjoyable training becomes.

The Power of Analogies, Visuals, and Stories

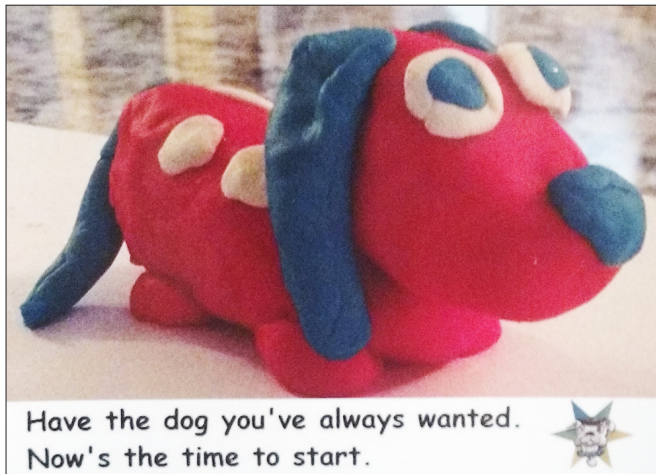
Effectively communicated stories, analogies, and visuals activate many parts of our brains, other than just those associated with language. For example, in addition to the traditional language processing areas of our brains, certain scent related words activate areas of the brain that are related to processing scents. In 2006, researchers in Spain published a paper in the journal *NeuroImage* explaining that the primary part of the brain dealing with the processing of smells was activated when participants read evocative words such as "perfume" or "coffee," but not "chair" or "key," which have no association to smell.

In the same year, researchers in France discovered that words describing motion also stimulate regions of the brain distinct from language-processing areas. In this study, cognitive scientist Véronique Boulenger, of the Laboratory of Language Dynamics, instructed participants to read sentences such as "Pablo kicked the ball" and "John grasped the object" as their brains were being scanned. The scans revealed activity in the parts of the brain that are linked to processing information about movement as if the movement was actually occurring in their bodies.

Furthermore, in 2012 researchers in the United States published their findings with regard to how our brains process metaphors that involved textures. Again, while having their brains scanned by functional MRI machines, participants were asked to read a metaphor such as "he had leathery hands" vs. "he had strong hands." Or, "the singer had a velvet voice" vs. "the singer had a pleasing voice." In all examples, when reading metaphors, not only was the area of the brain that processes language active but the area that perceives texture through touch was active as well. Non-metaphorical sentences produced activity only in the language processing part of the participants' brains.

Clients can't gain what they want based on what they should do, or what they're planning to do. In fact, they often need us to motivate them into action. Motivating someone to do what they might not want to, in order to gain something that they do want, isn't a burden, it's an opportunity for great rewards for all involved.

Motivation is a self-perpetuating cycle. When we motivate our clients, they in turn motivate us, which magnifies the chances that



Play-Doh Magnet

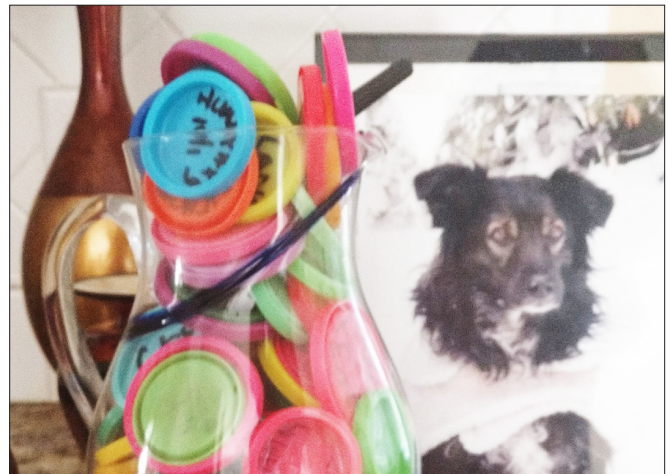
we will in turn, motivate them. Our client's motivation is ours. In that way, It's a bit like tandem sky diving. If you can't motivate your diving partner to pull the rip cord, you're both going to be in for a less than happy landing.

What follows is a fun motivational example for your client, incorporating all that we covered above— words that create visuals, scents and touch that light up more parts of our brains than words only. And, what follows is also a way to keep yourself motivated while having fun, which is the antidote to trainer burnout.

Socialization- Play-Doh and Puppies

At the beginning of my discussion about this critical period in a dog's life, along with providing my clients with socialization checklists/training plans, I retrieve a canister of Play-Doh from my carry case, remove the top, and hand the canister to the client. "That canister of Play-Doh is your pup. I am going to keep the lid. I'd like you to display the canister in a place where it is highly visible. Each time you see it, I want you to remember that as each day goes by, the clay is becoming harder and less malleable. Within a few weeks, it will be so hardened, it will feel like this." At this point, I drop a lump of hardened Play-Doh on the table. CLUNK! (Oh, how I love the sound it makes.)

"Pretty darn near impossible to mold that into anything right? Your pup is similar. If you don't engage your pup in socialization training, very soon the window of opportunity will close and you could have this on your hands." I pick up the hardened Play-Doh and hand it to the owner. "That said, there are genetic factors at play. You'll notice that the Play-Doh in the canister is red. It's never going to be blue. Just like the color of your Play-Doh is fixed, your dog is genetically imprinted in many ways. We no longer debate nature vs. nurture because we know the roles both play in a pup's development. So, yes, your pup comes with some preprogrammed traits but we can go a long way toward molding his behavior, just as we can mold that Play-Doh into something that we find appealing. Obedience training is very rewarding for us. There's nothing



Play-Doh Tops

more enjoyable than watching a puppy racing toward us while practicing our recall. Your socialization protocols are nowhere near as rewarding because they don't provide immediate results. But, following those protocols is the most important thing you'll ever do for your dog. And when you're done, you'll have a dog that you've molded to fit your lifestyle.

And with that, I give them a refrigerator magnet (image above left) showing my very own created Play-Doh dog to display on their fridge. The response I have received to this approach has been nothing short of amazing. In direct contrast to the energy once required to motivate pup owners, now it's not unusual for clients to inquire, "When can we schedule our next session? My Play-Doh is getting old." How great is that!?

What's at play with the Play-Doh analogy

Much as it would give me great pleasure to claim that the above protocol was the result of careful planning and thoughtful design, the fact is, its creation is more akin to the words of "Seinfeld's" George Costanza, "This is like discovering plutonium by accident!" For me to suggest otherwise would place me somewhere on the long-nosed Pinocchio continuum. The truth is, as is often the case with my approach to training, I created it during client discussions (and refined it along the way) to amuse myself. If I'm not motivated and having fun, how can I ever expect my clients to be?

Let's take a look at the many facets at play in my accidental discovery of plutonium:

Negative Reinforcement—Clearly, my Play-Doh analogy utilizes some very effective negative reinforcement. While I am a staunch, dyed-in-the-wool, positive reinforcement trainer, when it comes to motivating my clients to perform socialization protocols, a little negative reinforcement goes a long way. I establish my framework by creating some angst by pointing out the long-term negative implications of not socializing a pup. The open canister of Play-Doh is a constant reminder that time is ticking – it's a

perpetual angst-creating machine. Similar to the incessant bell dinging in your car which continues until you fasten your seat belt, the only way to reduce the anxiety caused by the lidless canister is to do some puppy socialization training. Each time the client performs my socialization protocols, they diminish their angst, which in turn reinforces them for socializing. Hence, the likelihood for socialization training is increased — classic negative reinforcement.

Scent Motivation—Less obvious is what's taking place internally/emotionally for the client. More often than not, when I hand off the opened canister of Play-Doh, the pup owner will take a good whiff, smile, and comment, "Ah, what a great smell. It brings me back to being a kid." If they don't voluntarily snort the canister, I encourage them to do so. Several studies have demonstrated the affect scent has on our state of mind:

...the odors people like make them feel good, whereas odors people dislike make them feel bad. These mood responses have also been reported physiologically. For example, skin conductance, heart rate and eye-blink rates in response to various liked or disliked scents coincide with the mood the person is experiencing. Downstream from how odors influence our moods is the way that moods influence how we think (cognition) and how we act (behavior). In terms of cognition....When people were exposed to an odor they liked creative problem solving was better than it was when they were exposed to an unpleasant odor condition. Taking this one step further is the way in which mood influences on thinking are translated into observable behavior. A growing body of literature shows that positive mood is linked to an increase in productivity, performance and the tendency to help others.
— Rachel S. Herz, *Scientific American*, November 2002.

Is it a stretch to think that after clients get a whiff of that wonderful Play-Doh scent, they're in a more receptive mood and more likely to embrace my training advice? Clearly, based on the science noted above, it's anything but a stretch. In fact, believe it or not, the power of the Play-Doh scent is so evocative that the Demeter Company sells a Play-Doh scented cologne, marketed as the "Pick-me-up Cologne spray." The point is, scents impact the way we feel and the way we feel, impacts how we behave.

There's an old saying, "Well begun, half done." The first step in increasing compliance is gaining attention and creating a positive context within which to present our ideas. I'm convinced, Play-Doh aromatherapy helps to achieve this. At minimum, it makes my clients smile, which is good enough for me.

Tactile Motivation—It has also been scientifically proven that tactile sensation lights up our brains in ways that are different than when our brain is engaged by other senses, such as vision and hearing.

"...genes, cells and neural circuits involved in the sense of touch have been crucial to creating our unique human experience. The reason is because these emotional touch brain areas are getting information about the social context from other parts of the brain." — Dr. David Linden, *Touch: The Science of Hand, Heart and Mind*

By encouraging the client to handle and feel the difference between the soft, pliable Play-Doh in the canister vs. the hardened rock, I've created a marked contrast between the two, which I could never achieve by simply talking. I then link that contrast to their pup's development. Along with the visuals and olfactory stimuli in which I've already engaged my puppy parents, I've now etched yet another imprint about the contrast between socializing (soft Play-Doh) and not socializing (hardened Play-Doh).

Visual contrast—We all know the saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words." When a picture is presented in an effective way, along with an analogy or story, it's not only worth a thousand words but several powerful emotions as well. And as noted previously, emotions cause us to act. There are a number of visuals at play here — the canister of Play-Doh; the Play-Doh itself; the hardened Play-Doh; and the refrigerator magnet. Each serve to create emotions and consequently, to motivate.

Trainer Motivation—As mentioned earlier, your motivation is every bit as important as your client's, and the two are linked. This is a fun protocol, one that motivates pup owners. As noted by the Danish comedian conductor and pianist Victor Borge, the shortest distance between two people is a smile. Not only does this protocol inspire your clients to do the work but it helps build a bond through shared smiles. Both help to provide a rewarding experience that will motivate your client and you, as well.

Finally, after these sessions I perform a ritual that provides me with pride and motivation. When I arrive home from a puppy socialization session, I write the name of the pup and the date of the session on the Play-Doh canister lid that I've kept. I then place the lid in a jar with dozens upon dozens of others from prior sessions. Each time I see that jar, I take pride in knowing that I've helped a pup and his or her owner, to have a better life. It's a great feeling.



John D. Visconti, CPDT-KA, is a Dog Writers Association of America Maxwell Medallion award-winning author and owner of Rising Star Dog Training Services, LLC, and Rising Star Dog Training, LLC. His book, "Fetch More Dollars for Your Dog Training Business" received the 2015 DWAA Maxwell Medallion Reference Book of the Year award. His second book "Pepper Becoming — The Journey of an Unwanted Dog and the Man Who Wanted Her" was reviewed in the Winter, 2018 issue of the *Chronicle of the Dog*. He has written several columns for *BARKS from the Guild* and the *Chronicle*. He has also served as a chair for the Association of Professional Dog Trainers business sub-committee and presented several coaching lectures and webinars to dog training schools and force-free organizations. John is also an award-winning published songwriter and performer. John may be reached at john@risingstardogtraining.com