

Reducing Sandy's Begging

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I remember first meeting Sandy. She was a new born pit-bull, by far the cutest dog I had ever seen. My brother had just purchased her from my brother-in-law. They thought pit-bulls were "cool" because of their bad ass reputation. My brother, being the guy who wanted to appear tough, purchased her. Over several months I would see her occasionally. She would always make me laugh and smile. To my brother's dismay, she was no attack dog; she was a sweetheart.

Eventually my brother began a full-time job. He was gone often and left Sandy alone in the house. Being just a puppy, she chewed on things and had many accidents. Due to these incidents, my brother decided to get rid of her by taking her to the humane society, where she would likely be euthanized. I cried and begged my dad to let me keep her, and she has been my dog since.

I love Sandy. She is like my child and is my constant companion. We walk together, sleep together, and eat together. You name it and most likely we do it together! I rarely say no to Sandy. When she begs, I usually give her some of my delicious food. The poor girl must eat yucky dog food all day; providing delicious food is the least I can do for her!

Everyone tells me that Sandy is spoiled. But that is how I trained her. She begs for food by sitting by the food, whining, drooling, pawing at the person with the food, and trying to eat the food. This begging was increasing, and though it never annoyed me much: it annoyed my roommates! Whenever they were eating, Sandy was in their faces whining and drooling. But they did not always feed her. Instead, they chased her around the house and yelled at her. To stop their harassing my beloved dog, I decided I should stop her begging.

So, I stopped reinforcing begging. I also told my roommates that if Sandy were begging they should not feed her. They should only feed her when she first sat, shook her paw, or spoke. This of course, was way harder for me to implement than it was for them.

For example, initially I was studying at my desk, eating Combos, one of Sandy's favorites. She started begging, drooling, whining, the whole works. But I turned to her and said "no beg" and continued studying. She continued begging for some time until she returned to our bed. After she had lain on the bed, I said "speak" and she barked. So, I gave her a Combo. Then she barked quite loudly and even tried scratching at me. It was hard not to give in but I did not feed her. Finally, after a few minutes without obtaining a Combo she lay back down.

Her begging was worse after I stopped reinforcing begging. She scratched at my legs, and begged persistently. But eventually, not giving Sandy treats for begging slowly decreased her rate of begging. Now whenever I am eating something she might eat, I command her to sit, shake her paw and speak. Only then do I give her a treat. Sometimes before I command her she does the behavior that has been reinforced. For instance, she will sit and lift her paw when I have food. But unless I say the command, I do not give her food. When Sandy obeys my commands, I provide treats.

Sometimes Sandy still begs but I continue to not reinforce begging. I am also not sure if my roommates are reinforcing begging. If they are then Sandy's begging may never completely extinguish. Overall, as long as my roommates are not chasing her around the house, I consider reducing her begging to be a big success.