

Getting Owen to Live with the Dishwashing Machine

Ms. Accentuate the Positive

A year and a half ago my husband and I adopted Owen, a Golden Retriever mix. Owen reacted to many household sounds, like the whirring and vibrations from the vacuum cleaner or the dishwasher. The dishwasher was especially troublesome because Owen barked, growled, and scratched at it when it was on, potentially damaging the unyielding appliance, disrupting our peaceful evenings, and distressing himself.

To ease Owen's distress and end his aggression towards the dishwasher, I waited until our bedtime to run the dishwasher and as the sounds began, I quickly vacated the kitchen and closed the louvered doors behind me. But those louvered doors could neither muffle the sounds nor stop Owen from breaking back into the kitchen to bark again. So I tried a different tactic.

Owen would do much to earn food treats. For treats he learned to sit, lie, and stand; and he responded with wide eyes and cooperation when I followed his good behavior with treats. Treats might help me and Owen.

So, I made sure there were treats nearby when turning on the dishwasher. Immediately after pressing the start button I gave him various commands and when he responded I gave him treats. When he heard the commands and smelled the food, he wagged his tail and, of course, looked at me and not the dishwasher. Training with food helped by exposing him to the commotion while doing something positive and fun. Initially, as soon as the training ended he barked and whined again at the dishwasher, but with repeated practice, increasingly longer intervals elapsed before he would start again. This was great! But the goal was to get Owen to stop barking at it completely.

Because Owen clearly would work for food, I kept using food, but changed how I used it. I planned to run the dishwasher at the same time I fed him dinner, and I bought especially delicious food for him. I prepared his meal first, and as I hit the button to start the dishwasher I put his food bowl down. He pulled his ears back, wagged his tail, and pointed his busy nose at his bowl. By the time he emptied his bowl I had moved into a different room, and *bingo!*, he would come to me and lie down without barking at the dishwasher.