



## Maplewood Dog Training

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### How to Get Your Dog to do *Anything* You Ever Want or “The Premack Principle”

by Katrin Andberg

Dogs, just like people, are motivated by different things at different times. In one situation your dog may find value in a bit of hot dog, in others your praise, or even others chasing a squirrel. One of the strongest motivators for any being is the motivator that excites them in the moment, and that motivator may change from moment to moment or situation to situation. **When training your dog, it is important to figure out what is motivating and reinforcing your dog in that moment.** And you may have to look further than that bit of hot dog, the verbal “good boy,” or the tennis ball in your hand.

We can use what motivates your dog in the moment as a very strong and desirable reinforcer to encourage behaviors that your dog may currently find less motivating or less valuable. **This concept of using more probable or more motivating behaviors, to reinforce less probable or less motivating behaviors, is called “The Premack Principle.”** The Premack Principle was first derived, in 1959, by Professor David Premack, during a study of Cebus monkeys, but the principle can be applied to any animal’s behavior, including your dog’s, or your own!

An example of utilizing what motivates your dog in the moment, to reinforce behavior you want and make the behavior you *do* want incredibly strong and valuable to your dog can be shown with a dog named Jess. Jess was a young, adolescent yellow lab who had learned that it was more fun to stay outside and play in the yard, than come inside when her owner called her. Jess found staying outside, running around, amusing herself and ignoring her owner, **more** motivating and a stronger behavior, than coming when called.

Now Jess’ owner had already tried, with little success, giving Jess a treat and lots of praise on the rare occasions when Jess did come inside when called, but she still saw little improvement in Jess’ behavior. What was Jess’ owner doing wrong? Let’s look and start with the question- “What did *Jess, the dog*, want in this situation? What did Jess find most motivating?” Answer- Staying outside and playing. What did Jess’ *owner* want Jess to find more motivating in this situation? Answer- Coming inside when called. How could Jess’ owner apply the Premack Principle to teach Jess that coming inside when called was just as motivating and fun as staying outside and ignoring her? Again the Premack Principle means using a strong behavior to reinforce a weaker behavior. So in Jess’ situation, her owner could release her back outside to play (what Jess wanted) when Jess came when called (what her owner wanted.) By giving Jess an opportunity to do what she already finds strongly motivating, her owner can strengthen the less motivating coming when called. By allowing Jess permission to go play again, on a random basis, her owner can keep Jess running inside as fast as she can when she hears her owner call, “Jess, come!”