



Teaching “Off” and “Leave It”

Counter Surfing - let’s start with WHY your dog does it. I bet you already guessed: its self rewarding! Think of it this way: every time your dog jumps up on the counter he gets some sort of reward; the sandwich, the butter or a grab of the collar (attention from you).

Now let’s talk about why he typically only does it when you are out of the room. It is because your dog has learned that YOU are bad, not that the behavior is bad! Think about it; when you were in the kitchen, you always got mad at your dog for jumping up, but the second you left the kitchen they could jump up all they wanted and sometimes even rewarded themselves for it by getting the food that was left out. (What? That wasn’t for me?) Our reactions to our dogs’ behavior govern their next step, whether he stops jumping on the counter or even learns to wait until you are gone...we can fix it.

TEACHING THE COMMAND “OFF”

Any time your dog is on something, the couch, the bed or has his feet up on the counter, start by calling out his name, show that you have a treat...as your dog gets off or removes his feet from the counter or bed say, “OFF”...then wait for the dog to come to you to get the treat.

During this exercise, your dog is coming toward you (to get the treat). But we are not teaching come. So, to clear up confusion, for the dog, you need to use the command “Off” and avoid saying, “COME.” You are rewarding the feet being back on the floor and doing your training by showing your dog the first several times.

If your dog does not listen – keep the leash on in the house (when you’re home) then go over to him and grab the leash – do not grab the collar...touch is reward. Say, “OFF,” give a tug and walk him away from the counter, say, “GOOD DOG” and reward your dog. Yes, reward even though you did it for him. Dogs cannot speak and are the perfect examples of show vs. tell. Spending time showing your dog what is required will build a good foundation. Once he starts to understand that good things happen when he listens and when you are near, he will look to you more often and you can go to the next step.

The next step is to offer a treat, but not go to your dog to give it. Let him take his feet off the counter and come further and further across the room to you. Offer and give a treat every time. After a few more attempts show the treat but put it away, say, “OFF” and then get the treat back out and give it. Each attempt can progress closer and closer to you, not having to give a reward (every time) but be careful not to stop the treats all together.

How to teach the command when you are NOT in the room:

This is harder but we can start by teaching your dog that the behavior is bad regardless of your position in the house. It’s time to set him up to expect a bad consequence whether you are in the room, home or not home. There are many ways to doing this, all you have to do is find out which one works best for your dog.

The shake can: This is any item that will make a loud noise when it hits the floor: for example; a coffee can full of pennies or a soda can full of marbles.

To use this method: place a piece of bread on the counter and hide around the corner or in another near by room, wait for your dog to jump up on the counter. When he does, throw the can into or onto the counter making sure you don't hit the dog and the dog does not see you. When your dog gets all feet back on the floor, calmly enter the room or "come see what all the fuss was." Call your dog away from the counter and comfort and reward for being near you.

For the wimp:

Simply shake the can but again be sure your dog does not see you. The whole point is to make the dog concerned or slightly fearful of the counter (not you). He will think the counter is making that scary noise.

For the bold dog:

Leave something small or bland like a bagel on the counter. Attach a shake can to the end of it with string. This way when the dog pulls the bagel down to eat it; the shake can will also come crashing down. Also consider tin pie plates or stainless steel pot lids on the edge of the counter, so when the dog jumps up, the pie pans will come crashing down.

TEACHING THE COMMAND "LEAVE IT"

The command LEAVE IT is used to let your dog know that there are some things, he can never have. What, you ask? Garbage, a porcupine, the sandwich you just dropped, or a squirrel running across the street, a dead frog on the side of the road.

The first step:

Begin by placing treats in both hands. Offer one hand right in front of your dog's nose, fist closed (treats inside) and wait as your dog goes after it, trying to get the treats. The second your dog gives up, looks away (even if it's distracted by something else), or looks at you, TREAT from **your other hand**. (It helps to keep the reward hand behind your back) Say, "GOOD LEAVE IT" when he chooses to give up.

Remember LEAVE IT means they can NEVER have it, so you must treat from your other hand. Never give the dog the treats from your closed fist. You are teaching that – if you ignore it you will get something else!!! Try it again and again...As soon as your dog make the connection that if he ignores the closed fist he will get a treat anyway, change fists or move your position.

The second step:

Place the treats on the floor and as your dog goes for them, cover them up with your hand, wait for your dog to 'give up' and treat from **your other hand** while saying "Good leave it!" Switch hands and rooms once your dog / pup shows signs of "catching on." Now, start putting the treats up on higher things like a chair or coffee table. Do the same thing: reward the dog for leaving it alone! The only difference is that it is now at a different level.

The third step, desensitizing them to the sound of dropping food:

(Please only attempt this step once your dog has mastered step 2)

Your dog has been conditioned to the sound of food dropping on the floor. He knows if he hears it and if he is fast enough he can have it! Let's try to reverse that and teach them the opposite: The sound of dropping food means he has to "LEAVE IT!" This is great if

you were to accidentally open a pill bottle or a bag of M & M's, or anything that is dropped.

To begin, choose a hard surface like the kitchen floor. I want you to have the food on the floor (just like in the second step), pick it up and drop it from an inch off the ground while saying "leave it". Be ready to snap one of your hands over the food if they go for it; treat them with the other hand if they leave it! Slowly try getting higher and higher off of the floor. Remembering that the higher you go, the more difficult it is to snap your hand back over it! Your goal is to be able to stand up, and drop treats all around your dog. Always reward them for leaving whatever you told them to leave! They need to get SOMETHING out of it!

Once your pup is turning away or backing up voluntarily in these three scenarios:

1. Food in closed fist
2. Food on floor covered by hand
3. Food being dropped

It's time to make it harder; approach the food item with the leash on (not close enough to actually get it) wait until the dog's head turns or for when he gives up say, "LEAVE IT" as the head turns, reward! Make sure you are giving him the choice to give up. No jerking the leash back or pulling him away from the item (Voluntary behavior is better!). We want them to make the correct decision and be rewarded for it.

1. Bring a jar of peanut butter outside and drop it in the driveway. Walk past it and add your command, "LEAVE IT." After a few days of practicing, try asking for a LEAVE IT by saying the command as you approach the item. Let's see if your dog makes the correct choice!
2. Bring a piece of trash on your walk or pick an object (like a large rock or bush) to walk by. Remember do not approach it completely, but walk by and ask for "LEAVE IT." Reward as soon as you see your pups head move... you are well on your way to a good solid LEAVE IT.
3. Moving objects such as cats, squirrels and kids on bikes are harder. Try them only when your dogs' behavior is consistent. If it's not working then you've simply gone too far, too fast. Just back up a bit and try again.
4. Above all remember that you taught your dog...if you LEAVE IT – I will give you something better, so, be sure to always bring treats and always reward...Stopping the reward too soon will compromise your results.