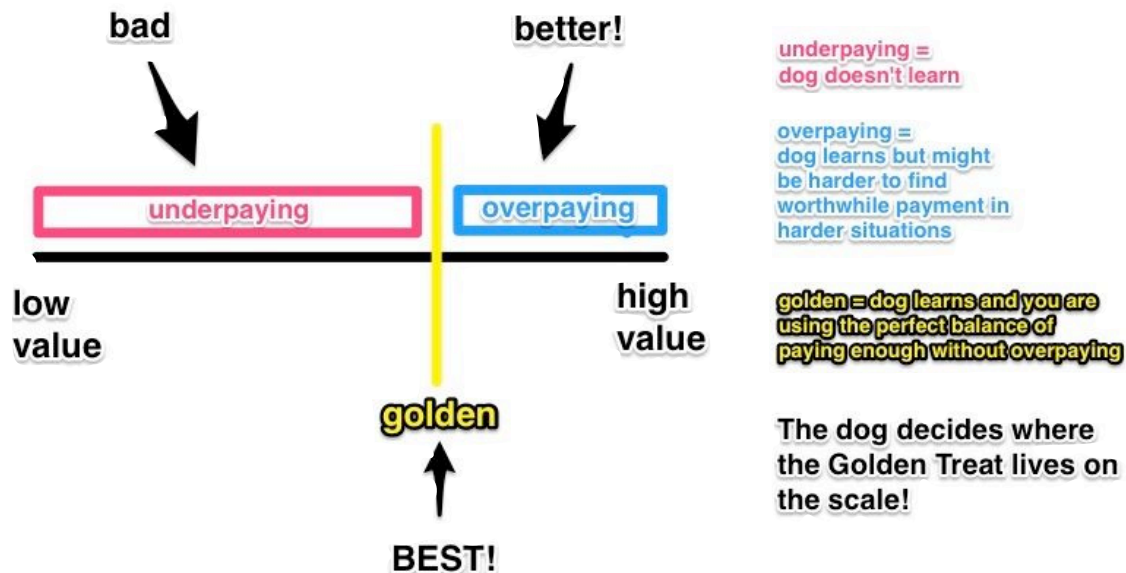## Treat Value

Every treat lies on a scale ranging from extremely low value to extremely high value.

The Golden Treat is the least valuable treat on the scale that the dog is *excited* about getting. Using any treat *less* valuable than the Golden Treat means you are underpaying the dog. Using any treat *more* valuable than the Golden Treat means you are overpaying.

The Golden Treat is the ideal treat to use in any given situation.

It's much better to overpay than underpay! If you underpay your dog won't learn anything. If you overpay your dog will learn, but it might be harder to teach the dog in more distracting environments.

bad

better!

underpaying

overpaying

low
value

high
value

golden

BEST!

underpaying =
dog doesn't learn

overpaying =
dog learns but might
be harder to find
worthwhile payment in
harder situations

golden = dog learns and you are
using the perfect balance of
paying enough without overpaying

The dog decides where the Golden Treat lives on the scale!

How to find the Golden Treat:

At home: Gather 3 different types of treats. Put them on a counter or somewhere *off* of your body, preferably out of sight of the dog.

1. **Low Value:** Dry Kibble
2. **Medium Value:** Moist treats (eg. Mini-Zukes)
3. **High Value:** Chopped up cheese, hot dog, freeze dried liver

Step 1. Ask your dog what he/she finds rewarding.

Grab 3 or 4 pieces of Low value dry kibble and show it to the dog (put kibble in front of dog's nose with a closed fist).

How much does your dog want the kibble? Does he/she A) nose at your fist for more than 5 seconds or B) turn his/her head and pay attention to something else?

If the answer is A, you have probably found "The Golden Treat" that your dog will work for at home *right now*. Go to Step 2.

If the answer is B, repeat Step 1 using the Medium Value moist treats.

Step 2. Start working on any behavior (could be "Down", "Stay", Obstacle-type work, etc).

If the dog easily gives up in under 5 seconds and turns away, you may be asking the dog for something too hard or there may be too much distraction.

The treat is no longer golden in that environment. The dog is saying "that kibble is great for the easy stuff, but just not worth it for a harder job". You will likely need to go back to Step 1.

Repeat exercise in different locations. *Make sure the treats are out of sight when you are not using them.* Do not just carry three plastic baggies full of different treats in one hand. Put them in a pouch behind your back or at your side and test them one by one, in order of value.

Which treat will grab your dog's attention on walks? What about in class?

Notes:

Dogs might get bored of certain treats within a session. I might not be able to stomach another slice of pizza but I'll happily find room for ice cream. Try to always keep some "ice cream" in your back pocket. Also, try not to overwork the dog. Take lots of breaks. Think "training bursts" instead of "training sessions", especially in hard environments.

If your dog loses interest in the Golden Treat in Step 2, it could be that what you are asking is too hard (remember to make things harder in *tiny* steps using the Rule of 3). See if you can make it easier.

Maybe you can't find a Golden Treat within an environment. That means the environment is too distracting or too hard. Work in a slightly less distracting, but comparable, place. For example, if you can't find a Golden Treat at the park, find one in a new neighborhood first. You may also need to just wait out the initial excitement of a new place.

Sometimes the Golden Treat might not be food. It might be water. It might be smelling something. It might be a fun sprint. But remember, the dog decides. Not you. Sorry to crush your ego!

Being excited about taking the treat is different than just taking the treat. If the dog is taking the treat but not excited, then you are underpaying!