

## Teaching a Dog to Love Its Crate

Contributed by Barbara Brill  
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Jos Lermyte is a professional dog trainer in Stabroek, Belgium. His message about teaching your dog to love its crate is one of the best lessons I've ever read!! It teaches the handler how to use shaping by successive approximations of the desired behavior. That's a useful technique to teach many different tasks, particularly for skills that may not come naturally to a dog. The article was first published in the ClickerSolutions group. <http://www.clickersolutions.com>

Subsequently Mr. Lermyte gave me permission to publish it for the Agbeh group, for a charitable group's newsletter for adopters, and for my clients. I'm very grateful to him. It is a great pleasure to present the article here for more readers. Please just click the red "read more" link below. BDB

Here's a re-post of my article about crate-training. I hope it will help many of you.

I thank everybody who replied to my post about Tumble, the yellow Labrador. There were many reactions on this list, but I received quite a lot of private email. Some people asked me how I taught Tumble to "love" her crate.

Some of them asked for advice. Mostly they said that their dog didn't like the crate at all and started whining or barking. Not to release the dog before he was silent didn't help much in most cases.

I answered these questions privately, but because this subject is so important, I might as well write a more general answer to this list. But please always keep in mind that not 2 dogs are the same and maybe you'll have to adapt the treatment to your own situation.

Some people -- or should I say "most people" -- buy a crate, put the dog in it and wait to see how the dog will react to this new tool.

As you can see, dear friends, I took a real shortcut here :-). In fact, most handlers are "smart" and lure the dog into the

crate with some yummie treats. And it works so well ... until the treats has been eaten. Then the dog shows you the first signals of impatience, fear, loneliness, etc. In other words: he wants to get OUT.

At this moment -- I'm sorry to say so -- the evil is already done!

And as an interlude I give you some owners' reactions:

Some owners try to comfort the dog, by telling stories like "Come on... don't whine... it's a marvelous place to be ... you know it's because you're chewing the furniture..." They hope the dog will understand this blah-blah. It's the optimistic handler :-)

Others will shout loudly: "Shut up, or I'll break your neck..." He hopes to get the dog quiet by bluffing.

Some will even throw their slipper against the crate, hoping this noise will "terrify" the dog and make him shut up. It's the short-tempered type.

Another type of owner takes a "dog book" and reads "Don't go to the dog. Let him whine or bark. As soon as the dog is quiet, release him." It's the type of the owner who thinks that everything written MUST be true. He'll learn when time comes, that many dog books have been written by people who never had a dog. :-)

And last but not least there's the dog owner who wants to be well informed, who's always willing to learn more about his dear friend, the dog. It's the owner who is a member of ClickerSolutions. :-)) [I'll add here "Agbeh" as well :-)]

It's the owner who reads what follows:

The way to go is -- you can guess it -- shaping the behavior.

Put the crate somewhere in the house where YOU are most of the time, i.e. near the television (or the computer :-) AND LEAVE IT'S DOOR OPEN!!! This is very important.

As soon as Doggie shows ANY interest (not LOVE, but INTEREST!) for the crate, like looking at it (even from the opposite side of the room) you click and treat. Do this 20 times or more. Don't be in a hurry! Take all the time it needs. Doggie will look at the crate more and more to get the treats. Once you see that the dog is really watching his crate deliberately then -- and only THEN -- you "forget" to click. He'll wonder why you don't click anymore and - showing some frustration - he's maybe going to look at the crate from a bit nearer. That's what you wanted, a little bit MORE interest. So you start clicking and treating again.

It's not important that the dog comes to you to get his treat, you can just throw it on the floor. After some or many repetitions, you "forget" C/Ting and wait (to see) what he's going to do next. As the dog doesn't understand how you can be so stupid and so short of memory :-) he'll do an extra effort to make you click again.

Maybe he's going to sniff at the crate, you C/T. After a while this won't be enough any more to earn a treat, and he might put his head in it? You C/T. Do each step long enough so that Doggie realizes what he has to do to get the click and treat and that you are sure the dog knows how he can make you C/T.

After a few sessions Doggie will be so well shaped that he'll get in the crate (first one paw, C/T, then 2, C/T) etc. Don't rush! Every step should be done long enough before trying to do the next step. Going to the next step should always be done by "forgetting to click at a certain moment".

Once he goes in the crate, you wait and he'll do something different (like sitting in the crate) C/T. Then lying down, C/T. THIS IS STILL WITH THE DOOR OPEN!!!! Don't even think of closing the door.

Once Doggie lies down (many times) in the crate you wait a few seconds before C/T, and you continue waiting always a few seconds longer at the time.

Make sure that all good things (toys i.e.) are given IN the crate. Don't worry when he comes out the crate to get his treat. Don't stop him. It's okay. He'll return, because he knows that this is the way to make you C/T.

Don't ask him to go in it. Just wait, have patience, and it will work. It's best if - during a few days - the "crate-training" is the ONLY place where Doggie can get his clicks and treats.

It's only when all these steps have been taken that you can shut the door for a few seconds. C/T. You can make it longer and longer, but NEVER so long that the dog gets impatient or starts whining or barking. In this case YOU went too fast. It's not Doggie's mistake, it's YOURS. So there's no reason to be angry at the dog.

Don't get nervous when you think he'll never learn. Don't think he's stubborn. HE IS NOT! Handlers MUST have enough patience otherwise there is the danger of raising the criteria too fast, or putting them too soon too high, etc.

If it doesn't work as fast as you (maybe) hoped, try to keep smiling and ask your dog to forgive you for not being patient enough. Ask him to forgive you your human weakness.

And one day - I can assure you - he'll be in his crate, happy that he taught YOU to be a little bit more DOG.

For humans, it's HARD to become "dog", for dogs, it's IMPOSSIBLE to become human!

I love you All,

Jos Lermyte

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