

What's Behind Door Number Two?

By Sandra Kruczek

I have a friend who has three wonderful large breed dogs. She's a petite, very fit woman who manages these dogs very well. There's one area though, that's been a little tricky. There are four doors in her house through which she might take the dogs. Interestingly each door offers a different set of behaviors from the dogs.

Let's use door number two as an example. This door leads from the garage onto the deck then out to the driveway. The main trouble is that the dogs will push and shove each other and sometimes my friend, trying to get through this door at the same time. There's a lot of excitement surrounding door number two because it's the gateway to everything these dogs love. There are rides in the car, trips to the mountains and rousing games of fetch. Who wouldn't be excited?

Returning home through door number two is a different story. The dogs have been exercised, are tired and can more quietly go inside.

The other doors in the house lead to different sets of circumstances. There's one that only affords access to the deck. There's some excitement here, but nothing like door number two. My friend can more easily manage the energy at the "deck door" (number one).

Here's what she's been working on to gain control of the "Three Musketeers" charging door number two. First of all, she is practicing keeping her voice and body language calm. And, most important of all, she practices when she's not going anywhere. Nothing can sabotage a training scenario more quickly than putting yourself on a time frame that causes you to be anxious and checking your watch.

Each dog has been learning to respond quickly by looking at her when she calls their name. Each name means only, "look at me". She requests a dog to come forward while directing the other two to stay where they are. This is very effective in teaching impulse control. The dogs are learning to respond as individuals rather than react as a pack. The ones that stay back are given a food treat. Getting to go out of the door is its own reward.

My friend is practicing mixing up the order of which dog gets to go through door number two first, second and last. And, when they are all outside, they might just be asked to come right back inside instead of going all the way out to the car. This strategy really slows down the pushing and shoving.

With a plan in place and practice, I am picturing three dogs learning to wait their turn to go out the door. They know what to do at door number two.

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