

Working with Multiple dogs

On Debarking, Entrance, and Exit behaviors

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To start “debarking” a group and beginning to shape both eye contact as well as to sit at the kennel door why not use the old dolphin system - just click the first dog that comes up to the fence, treat through the fence. Click him for eye contact (never while barking). As the other dogs come over, withhold clicks until you have two dogs, nose to the fence and eyes on you, then click and treat both through the fence (feed, don't toss). It might help to have a helper feeding. The dogs catch on quickly (cause “dogs do what works”). And soon you should have four dogs sitting staring at you waiting for clicks. Don't feed anyone who is scrambling for treats – don't reward chaos.

This works well as long as you want all the dogs to do the same thing at the same time. But you will want to move to the point where you can click one, then two, then more, for backing away from the gate and sitting until clicked--to facilitate the next step which is to toss the treat to the dog where it is sitting away from the gate, Very quickly, often within two or three sessions, you should be able to see the dogs developing feeding stations, i.e. "This is my lucky spot, if I'm here after the click I get tossed a treat." Once the dogs at sting back you can then ask one to come forward so you can take it out of the pen, one at a time, and train separately.

That's how it is done with dolphins when working a big group, they throw treats ahead of the animals, but in different directions (so they don't fight and steal). In next to no time they all teach themselves to do the jump or whatever was cued and then scatter to their 'stations' and wait for the tossed treat.

It's important to stay very 'clicker' throughout this. NO TREATS unless the clicker has sounded. As soon as you introduce food rewards without a preceding click the animals will start trying to guess which piece of the food is for them, which leads to fighting.

If you do develop a thief, and it can happen, take heart, the victim becomes VERY motivated to do the behavior again and get another chance.