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Train an Irish Wolfhound? They're giant predators who think for themselves. You're a silly human making funny hand gestures and jabbering sternly at them. And you think your Irish Wolfhound is going to mindlessly obey you just because your other dogs did?

The truth is you actually *can* train an Irish Wolfhound. No, *really*. They're regularly trained for therapy work, the show ring, lure coursing and even obedience trials. Sure, I've written

jokingly about the wolfhound's notorious stubborn streak and the cool, deadpan looks they give you when you ask them to do things they just have no interest in doing. But they love you. They actually *do* want to please you.

Within reason.

And that's the key to working with your hound, reason and respect. Because you're not going to force a wolfhound to do anything. They know their size. Not only can you not lift one, you'll cause them to shut down if you speak to them harshly or resort to rough handling. Veteran wolfhound owners know this but newcomers to the breed may not realize how sensitive and tenderhearted these giants actually are.

An Irish Wolfhound will open up and pour out his heart to you like no other breed I know. But only if he trusts you. It's not easy to win someone's trust if you're domineering and being absurd.

I'm a strong believer in positive training. I see no reason to ever hurt or threaten *any* dog trying to teach it your rules. So shock collars and choke chains are strictly out as far as I'm concerned. But especially with Irish Wolfhounds. Because the bond we have with them is unlike anything most of us have ever experienced. Is it worth damaging something so precious so you can feel like you're the boss?

We say they're practically human. They are. So keep that approach in mind as you begin training. Show them what you want, do it with love and respect, make it worth their while and they'll respond. Because you're your wolfhound's human. Nothing in the world means more to them than you. You

wouldn't tell any other loved one, "Sit!" and then zap them with an electronic device or jerk on a choke chain until they mind, right? You don't need to with your Irish Wolfhound, either.

Training my Oisín to use a car ramp was the trickiest training I've tried. He was eight months old, easily topping 100 pounds, and I could no longer lift him without a very quick trip to the chiropractor. But he needed to continue his daily socialization in town. His growth plates hadn't closed yet so he couldn't just jump down from our SUV once I got him there. He needed that ramp.

Oisín trusted me. I'd worked with him every day on behaviors like "sit," "stay" and "touch" with a hand signal. But he was pretty sure that ramp was a medieval torture device. I set it up. Oona, his aunt, sashayed right up it because she knew she was going for a ride. I indicated it was Oisín's turn. He stood there looking away, embarrassed. He wanted nothing to do with thing.

So I worked with him at his comfort level, placing the ramp flat in the backyard and asking if he'd put a foot on it for a piece of cheese. I let Oisín decide. He touched it, got his cheese, and walked off. We did it again and again for five minutes. I let my boy decide which he liked better, walking around sniffing the grass or slapping a paw down and getting cheese. You can guess his choice.

We kept all the sessions no longer than five minutes.

Wolfhounds are highly intelligent. They *get* what you want. It's just a matter of gently persuading them to do it. They just don't see the point of endless repetitions for something they already know. So, keep it short. Make it fun by showing enthusiasm and

make it worth their time.

Within a day, I couldn't put the ramp down fast enough before he was slapping it with his foot for cheese. Then we worked on him crossing it. Then on him going up it when it was slightly elevated on a stump. We kept the sessions short, he got cheese as a reward and he couldn't get enough of it. He was excited to see the ramp come out.

We hit a bobble when I moved the ramp to the car. He balked again. Going up that contraption and into the dark, little boxy back end of our SUV just did not look at all appealing to him. So I upped the incentive. Little pieces of hot dog got him on the ramp, but not up it. So I broke out the heavy guns, rotisserie chicken. It was warm, savory, dripping with juices. I wanted to stop and eat some myself.

I let him get a taste of the chicken, then set the dish in the back of the SUV. He knew what was expected. I asked him if he'd go up. He overcame his suspicions and went right on in. Face down into the chicken. We practiced going back down the ramp and back up. We did this for a few days and then took it on the road. He was getting to ride to exciting places and snack on tasty treats. And I was saving my back. Mission accomplished.

It only took a month and a half. But he learned how, he was doing it eagerly and we were still best buds.

And then one day he used a wolfhound's prerogative and decided just he'd do it his own way instead. As much as rotisserie chicken made his mouth water, that ramp was just still too sketchy to my sensitive juvenile. Oisín was 34 inches at the shoulder by now. He decided he'd just sidestep the ramp and do

a gentle bunny hop into the back end. And it turns out his legs were long enough by now that when we got home, he could just step down to get out. No jolts to those joints. Just an easy step. So from then on I respected his decision and we did it his way.

I listen to my wolfhounds. Training is a conversation, a way of improving understanding and communication. They get a better handle on what I want. I learn their fears and reservations. We work together to get around them.

I also use a lot of cheese. Some would call this bribery. That's okay. But are you willing to do work you're not really enthusiastic about without a paycheck? Neither is your hound. We negotiate. Eventually the price is right.

You can train your hound this way to do just about anything that's physically possible for them to do — and as long as they see a reason for doing it. More often than not, that reason is simply because they love you. So show them, ask them, say please and reward them.

It's not an approach that appeals to those who thrill to commanding someone to do their bidding. "Love" and "respect" may be foreign concepts to such trainers. The shame of it is, those people will never win and keep the love and respect of their Irish Wolfhound. Or any other dog for that matter. Their dog may snap to and obey out of fear of repercussions, but they'll never completely trust or open up to their humans, Which raises the question, why get a dog in the first place if its not to have a close friend?