



# GET A JOB

Did you know that dogs need a job? A lot of breeds were initially "working" dogs. They were bred to herd or protect or pull or guard or hunt. Most of them are no longer given those tasks to perform, at least not here, but they still require mental stimulus to be well adjusted. A dog with no mental stimulation is more likely to be hyper and to misbehave. The question is how to stimulate Rover's brain?

Toys can be mind stimulating. Buster® Cubes and Leo Canine Genius are treat-dispensing toys. Rover will need to use his brain to learn how to get to the treats.

Obedience training is excellent mental stimulation. Teaching Rover to sit, lie down, stay, walk nicely and come when called make him use his brain. Having him practice or "work" for attention or affection is mentally stimulating and keeps those skills finely tuned. Begin the training without distractions. As Rover becomes more proficient and responsive, add distractions. Then, really challenge him. For example, take him to the dog park and make him perform all of his commands while other dogs are running around. That's a real mental test.

Teaching Rover "tricks" is also good mental exercise. Although I don't spend a lot of time on tricks, our dog shakes with either paw, high fives, walks backwards and has learned a couple of other tricks. He enjoys "performing" these tricks for people he meets.

Dogs are lifelong learners, and they like the process of learning a new command or trick. If you start with something he already knows and then modify or add to it, the process can be fun for everyone. For example, if Rover knows how to find his favorite toy, then work on teaching him to find it, "bring" it to you, and finally "give" it to you. Working on these things together is a great way to enhance your relationship with Rover.

Hide-and-seek or find-the-treat are other excellent ways to stimulate Rover's brain. It gives him a job while using his natural olfactory abilities. It's a fun process to watch and Rover loves working this job. Scent hounds might really appreciate this job, too.

Agility, fly ball, Frisbee, tracking, obedience and other competitions are all ways to give Rover a mental workout. [See "More Stuff"](#) for links to resources on getting started with these "sports," or you can just "google" what interests you.

Not every dog will be good at every thing. Just as we each have things we naturally excel at, so does Rover. I am not good at sports, never have been and never will be, but I have other talents. Rover is a golden retriever; he's a natural at getting things and bringing them back. We use his natural tendency to play fetching and carrying games. He'll carry the laundry one item at a time from the bedroom to the laundry room. "Take it to Mom" is one of his favorite phrases. We don't do all the laundry this way, but it's fun for all of us when we do "work" together.

What are your dog's natural talents and how can you use them to stimulate his brain? Although dogs are highly intelligent, we still have to help them develop and grow. Some of these things may take a bit of work and time for Rover to become proficient while others he'll learn very quickly. Have Rover do a variety of things to keep it interesting and fun.

If you don't stimulate Rover's brain, he'll be more likely to make up his own jobs, which usually are not things we want him to do. Stealing the remote, jumping on counters, demanding attention, barking at neighbors, pulling on leash, and bolting down the street are not acceptable jobs. But these are common "job" he may take on if we don't find other ways to channel his energy.

When you help Rover use his brain, you're helping him to become the dog you want him to be. He won't be good at everything—just as we're not—but find those special talents and help him unlock his natural abilities. And make it fun. The rewards are worth the time and effort, and we all know the results. . .

*Happy Dogs = Happy Families*

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