



Michigan  
Humane

## Nothing in Life is Free

Does your dog...

- ...get on the furniture and refuse to get off?
- ...nudge your hand, insisting on being petted or played with?
- ...refuse to come when called?
- ...defend his food bowl or toys from you?

“*Nothing in Life is Free*” can help. “*Nothing in Life is Free*” is not a magic pill that will solve a specific behavior problem; rather it’s a way of living with your dog that will help him behave better because he trusts and accepts you as his leader and is confident knowing his place in your family.

### HOW TO PRACTICE “*NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE*”

Using positive reinforcement methods, teach your dog a few commands and/or tricks. “Sit,” “Down” and “Stay” are useful commands and “Shake,” “Speak” and “Rollover” are fun tricks to teach him.

Once he knows a few commands, you can begin to practice “*Nothing in Life is Free*.” Before you give your dog anything (food, a treat, a walk, a pat on the head) he must first perform one of the commands he has learned.

For example:

#### YOU:

- Take your dog for a walk
- Feed your dog
- Play a game of fetch after work
- Rub your dog’s belly while watching TV

#### YOUR DOG:

- Must sit until you have put the leash on him
- Must lie down and stay until you put the bowl down and say “ok”
- Must sit and shake paw each time you throw the toy
- Must lie down and roll over first

Once you have given the command, **do not give your dog what he wants until he does what you want**. If he refuses to perform the command, walk away. Come back a few minutes later and start again.

If he still refuses to obey the command, be patient and remember that eventually he will have to obey your command in order to get what he wants. Make sure he knows the command well and understands what you want before you begin practicing “*Nothing in Life is Free*.”

### THE BENEFITS OF THIS TECHNIQUE

Most dogs assume a neutral or submissive role toward people, but some dogs will challenge their owners for dominance. Requiring a dominant dog to work for everything he wants is a safe and non-confrontational way to establish control.

Dogs who may never display aggressive behavior such as growling, snarling, or snapping, may still manage to manipulate you. These dogs may display affectionate, though “pushy” behavior. Nudging your hand to be petted or “worming” his way on the furniture in order to be close to you are common behaviors. The “*Nothing in Life is Free*” technique gently reminds the “pushy” dog that he must abide by your rules.

Obedying commands helps build a fearful dog’s confidence; having a strong leader and knowing his place in the hierarchy helps to make the submissive dog feel more secure.

## **WHY THIS TECHNIQUE WORKS**

Animals that live in groups, like dogs, establish a social structure within the group. That group can be your house hold. This social structure serves to maintain order, reduce conflict and promote cooperation among pack members. For your home to be a safe and happy place for pets and people, it’s best that the humans in the household assume the position of leader of the pack. Practicing “*Nothing in Life is Free*” effectively and gently communicates to your dog that his position in the family is subordinate to yours. From your dog’s point of view, children also have a place in this social structure. Because children are small and can get down on the dog’s level to play, dogs often consider them to be playmates, rather than superiors. With the supervision of an adult, it’s a good idea to encourage children in the household (aged eight and over) to also practice “*Nothing in Life is Free*” with your dog.

For more information about pet behavior and training, please **visit our website at [michiganhumane.org](http://michiganhumane.org)**.