Behavior Plan

Frank

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Summary

Frank has been refusing to come inside at night after his last potty break. By switching the routine & consequences, we can motivate him to come back in when it's time.

Assessment

What's the issue?

Frank will come in and out of the house throughout the day and in the early evening, but right before bedtime he has started hanging around outside instead of coming in. He can be brought in through the front door, and if the back door is left open, he'll eventually sneak in to grab his bone and peanut butter. However it is getting hard to lure him in, and the problem is getting worse and causing a lot of frustration.

Why?

At this time, we're working under the hypothesis that this is a learned behavior. His return indoors may have been inadvertently punished by his owner leaving to go to bed every time he comes in. Trainers commonly use withdrawal of social attention to decrease problem behavior because, well, it works! This may have happened by accident in this case.

Or...?

Since we can't speak to Frank, this is only a hypothesis. There are other potential rule-outs, such as a bad association with coming in the door or on the far end of possibility, this could be a sign of early cognitive dysfunction (see a good article on this here: **https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/behavior-counseling-senior-pet-cognitive-dysfunction**)

How do we know?

The easiest way to figure this out is by starting with the most efficient, easiest solution and giving it a try. If Frank's behavior starts to change, the issue is most likely behavioral, and you'll continue until the behavior is completely resolved. If there is *no change* over the course of the intervention, we need to re-assess.

Assessment

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Behavior Plan

Step 1: Leash

Rebuild the Habit

For one week, take Frank out and in on leash for his last evening walk. Bring him back in as soon as he potties. Before you bring him in, say a specific phrase like "Time to go in!" or whatever feels natural. You'll keep using this phrase once he is off leash again.

Hopefully, this step will get him back to practicing the behavior we want - going right inside - even if it takes a little prompting and encouragement. If he absolutely plants and won't go in, or pulls out of his collar when you try leading him in, please let me know. We don't want to drag him through!

Step 2: Turkey

Coming Inside = Awesome

Next, we'll make sure the immediate consequence of coming inside is as amazing as possible. **No luring!** Either walk Frank in or wait for him to come in on his own (if the leashing doesn't go well), then start praising him, walk to the fridge, open it, and feed him turkey. A lot of turkey.

Step 3: Patience

Coming Inside Doesn't Make Mommy Disappear

We need to switch up the routine. The most important part is to delay the "bad" consequence so that it's not directly related to Frank coming inside. The most important part: after Frank comes in, wait between 10-60 minutes before going to bed.

Side Missions

Frank, being clever, may do even better if you mix things up even more. While you're hanging out, you can walk in and out of your room intermittently, and if the leash walks are going really well, you could even take Frank back out and in a couple more times, or take him out for a walk, etc. The goal is to make the bedtime routine NOT a routine, so he doesn't predict that coming inside is leading up to the inevitable Bedtime.

Recommendations

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Step 4: Testing

1-2-3...

For the **two weeks** after the leashed walks, you will go back to letting Frank out and then calling him back in using your "Let's go inside!" phrase. After you say it, go in and wait for him. Time how long it takes Frank to come back in every night and make sure not to lure, prompt or beg him, but DO go get his turkey and reward/praise no matter how long it takes him.

Step 5: Data

Did We Get it Right?

The only way to know if a behavioral intervention is working is to track data. We don't have to completely fix it to know if our hypothesis is correct - we just need to see improvement.

After 2 weeks, you can see if the average is lower the second week, and we can plot a trend. I am also including another 2 weeks if it IS working and you want to keep following his rate of improvement.

Time in Minutes	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly Avg
Week 1								
Week 2								
Week 3								
Week 4								

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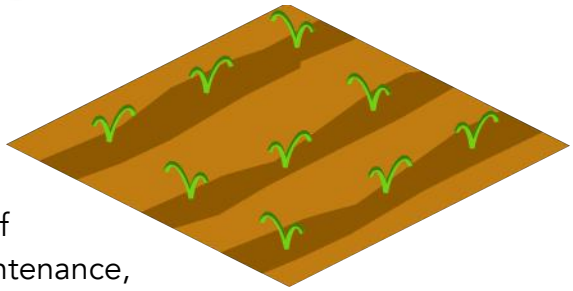
Step 6: Evaluation

Get in touch at the end of each week and let me know any behavior observations and what the data looks like. We will set up Frank's follow-up for after the end of the initial intervention.

The detective work wraps up after our initial intervention is complete. We can then decide if you want to keep going with the current plan, or if Frank needs to be re-assessed.

Step 7: Upkeep



If the plan does work and Frank improves to a satisfactory level, you may be able to bump down the level of reward over time. However, you'll need to maintain the bit of unpredictability in the routine to avoid the unwanted learning re-occurring. Think of behavior change like gardening…you'll have to keep doing maintenance, but the payoff is worth the effort.

Frank's Other Stuff

We also talked about Frank being a little anxious when you go to bed. Let's focus on this plan first, but I'll have more info on how we address separation distress at Frank's follow up.

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Real Life Rumble Strips

The best plan in the world will only work if it works for **you**. Now is the time to come up with any and all objections. Yes, we *want* you to get any doubts, technical issues, time or logistical constraints, and other obstacles out of your head and onto the plan. Then, we can figure out the best way to conquer these obstacles and build you a smooth-running behavior change plan.

Problems	Solutions
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____
6. _____	6. _____
7. _____	7. _____
8. _____	8. _____
9. _____	9. _____
10. _____	10. _____

Behavior consulting is a collaborative process and a series of negotiations between everyone (including the dog!). Write down any concerns, fears, problems, unaddressed needs, or objections you have, email us the list, and we'll brainstorm ways to overcome them (bonus points if you've already tried!)

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