

Leadership

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(785) 820-0011

Why leadership is important

Leader status is crucial in a well-balanced human / canine relationship. There are many behavior issues linked to loosing or lack of obtaining your leadership status.

Dogs are pack animals. When you bring a dog into your family you become their pack. Even one person with one dog is a pack. It's important that the human members retain a higher status than the canine members. Leaders set rules, enforce rules and keep things running smoothly. A leader need not be mean, aggressive or physical. A leader must be consistent, kind and guiding.

Confusion about leadership roles can lead to undesirable, and possibly dangerous behavior. When a dog enters your family, whether it's a puppy or adult, it needs to know where he stands in the pack structure. Dogs go for the highest status they can achieve and feel comfortable at. Some dogs fit easily into the lower levels of the pecking order and don't challenge authority, or question your rules. Then there are dogs that want to be somewhere in the middle and then there are natural born leaders (top-dogs so to speak) and social climbers-always testing to see how high they can climb. These are not bad dogs they are natural leaders and are following their natural instincts. If you fall short and there is a void they will fill it.

If your dog approaches you barking, nudging and pawing. Do you jump up and play, or pet your dog? Get him the cookie he is looking for? If so you are doing what he tells you. Leaders DO NOT do what lower pack members tell them to do. Leaders make the rules. Leaders decide when, what, where, how. It's that easy, for most dogs. All decisions concerning you and your dog are made by you. Asking your dog for a simple sit before a highly valued activity is very helpful with good behavior.

Leadership is even important for a shy dog. The lack of consistent leadership is stressful to a shy dog. The leader of a pack communicates a sense of safety and trust. A leader makes it clear to the dog that things are under control-that the leader will make decisions for the pack and keep them secure.

How to attain and retain it

First how NOT to attain leadership. Physical confrontational methods can be dangerous and make things worse. The old fashioned way was to dominate the animal by doing scruff shakes and alpha rolls. If used your dog might learn not to challenge one person but might retaliate against another family member. Physical methods can result in fear-based problems and will damage your relationship with your dog. I even see dogs get worse, and develop more problems because of the negative confrontational methods.

On the other hand, non-confrontational methods can actually enhance your relationship with your dog.

To be a good leader, you must gain your dog's trust. Your dog will need to know what to expect from you every time it behaves a certain way.

For the dog that is looking to have leader status, you need to be more consistent and strict. You cannot give your dog any attention unless they do something for you. This does not mean that you cannot give your dog lots of attention and other good stuff – it just means you will do it on

your terms and ask the dog to do something for you first. Good behavior receives attention. Pushy behavior is ignored. Ignored because even negative attention is attention.

Leaders control space. Space is an important resource to dogs. Teach your dog to wait at the door instead of barging through. Also train your dog to move out of your way as you walk about the house and yard.

Leaders control resting places. If your dog sleeps with you, at least make sure you give permission for your dog to get on the bed, and will get off the bed if you say so. If your dog is not willing to do these things, it's better to have him sleep in a crate.

Keep toys put away. You decide when it's playtime. The leader decides when it's playtime and when playtime ends. Make sure you gain control of the toy, even if you need to trade a treat for the toy.

Leaders control the food. For some dogs feeding on an ever-changing schedule will keep him from becoming too demanding at feeding time. Free fed dogs have total control over food. It's better if you control the food. Have your dog sit before you feed him, and pick up his bowl after 15-20 minutes. This will help establish leadership. A dog is more likely to respect and listen to someone who controls the food. When your dog knows a sit-stay, use that. You give permission to eat – a very powerful thing.

A leader can handle the dog's body anywhere, anytime. This can be accomplished without the use of force.

Leaders control greetings. If you have a pushy dog, you may want to ignore him for a few minutes when you come home. If he is demanding attention have him sit, and pet him only while he is sitting.

Remind your dog that he works for his living by doing some basic obedience, for 5-10 minutes each day. This will give you a means to communicate your wishes to your dog. Otherwise you will have to fall back on physical control. If you have a big dog-physical control may be out of the question. By rewarding good behavior with treats and praise, a dog will offer it more often.

Respect your dog; offer guidance, kindness and praise. Create a close bond by spending time and leading your dog. Training and education helps your dog to understand this human world they live in. Step back and try to look at things through your dog's eyes. Be a kind and fairleader. Have rules and stick to them. Everyone in the family must agree and abide by the rules. Don't be wishy-washy.

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