



## Ten Rules to Great Leadership with Your Dog or Puppy

Leadership, in short, is the ability to guide, direct or influence. Nowhere in the definition does it say “dominate,” intimidate, or control, and yet over the years many dog trainers skewed and twisted the definition so out of shape a contortionist would be hard pressed to keep up. Even today with all the science to the contrary, there are popular books and videos for sale that insist on rough and harsh treatment of dogs to obtain optimum obedience.

These misshapen ideas leave many pet parents confused— and if *they* are confused, just think how the dog must feel with so many conflicting messages!

Luckily, there is so much more information about learning theory, behavior and, frankly, dogs today, that it is a breath of fresh air to finally let go of those old ideas and get back to the real meaning of leadership with our dogs.

### ***1. Leadership begins with benevolence as you teach your dog the rules***

A study published in the February 2004 issue of the British Journal of Animal Welfare found, “Not only that rewards were more effective in eliciting desired behaviors from the dogs, but that those owners who used punishment-based training had seen a variety of bad behaviors in their dogs including barking at/aggression towards people and other dogs, fearfulness, excitement, separation anxiety, and inappropriate mounting.” The dogs that were trained exclusively using positive, reward-based methods were significantly more obedient than those dogs trained using either punishment or a combination of rewards and punishment. The authors of the study suggest that “the use of punishment-based training might

create a state of anxiety or conflict in the dog that is later expressed as bad behavior.”

*Think positive, not punishment!*

### ***2. Reward, don't ignore***

Humans tend to focus on the things they do not like their dogs to do; spending way too much time saying, “No,” and expending far too much energy trying to make them stop what they are doing. It is time to start putting all of that energy into “catching” dogs doing the correct things and rewarding those behaviors. If your dog has finally settled down and is quietly chewing a bone, do not ignore that behavior— reward it. Walk by your dog and quietly drop a treat by him and move along. If you don't have a treat, a single and quiet “Good dog,” will do.

If good behaviors are ignored and unwanted behaviors are the ones that get all of the attention, your dog may very well decide that good behaviors aren't worth very much, but those “bad” ones sure do get everyone to pay attention to him.

### ***3. Manners are learned, rewards are earned***

Some people have a hard time using food rewards but are more than willing to present an entire bowl of kibble to their dogs without so much as a thought. You are going to feed your dog a couple of times of day, so why not let him earn his meals by using some of that kibble as a training reward. There are trainers and pet parents out there that do not even own food bowls for their dogs— every piece of kibble is a paycheck for a job well done.

It is not necessary to go to extreme unless you want to, but plan to use a portion of your dog's food to train, or to use it in food carrier toys such as Kongs or Buster Cubes so your dog can expend some mental energy working for his kibble each day.

Domestic dogs studied in natural settings are observed spending most of their days looking for food. When you put your dog's food in a bowl and it's gone in 30 seconds, your dog has little to look forward to the rest of the day. This is why some dogs walk the path of destruction—they are bored!

Training and the use of food carrier toys exercise the mind, not to mention that in other studies, dogs preferred to earn their food rather than have it delivered in a bowl.

#### **4. Love your dog- limit your dog**

Like children, dogs appreciate and live very well with rules and limits. There is always time to relax rules after your dog learns them, but much more difficult to go back and put rules in place when your dog has not had structure in his life.

Training is one of the best ways to limit your dog. It should always be fun, but the reason for training is to give your dog some life skills that help him to resolve conflict and live peaceably with humans.

Teach your dog how to love his crate, be left alone and relax when he is not sure what to do so if he is ever in doubt, he will know to relax, rest and/or



kickback, rather than become frantic with panic or wild with excitement.

Manage your dog's environment if you do not have time, or are not sure how to train something— prevent the behavior from happening until you can teach your dog something else. Use his crate, baby gates or leashes to prevent him from practicing unwanted behaviors which only allows him to get better and better at it.

#### **5. Mental and physical exercise**

It is easy to exercise your dog's body, but many people neglect exercising their dog's minds. Do not be one of those people! Get creative and find things that will challenge your dog's wonderful mental capacity. Hide and seek with his favorite

toy, clicker training, food puzzles, digging pits, shredding toys, trick training, doggie trash cans, are all good ways to stimulate your dog's mind. Be willing to let your dog make a few messes here and there—better a mess of organized play than one where you dog digs up the yard, or shreds your pillow.

#### **6. Let your dog be your teacher**

Learn about dogs. Read, get on the internet, go to workshops and seminars (always with an open mind since some of these might not be the correct direction to head with your dog) and then learn to watch your dog. Your dog always knows what he needs. Dogs are great teachers if you are willing to be the student. They are the masters of body language and have beautiful etiquette if allowed to express it. Learn what your dog is "saying," and your relationship will grow.

#### **7. Respect your dog's boundaries**

You expect your dog to respect your space and boundaries; in return, you should do the same. If your dog just settled down to



rest by your feet, it is not an invitation to reach down and touch him. In fact, this can quickly teach your dog never to relax in your presence.

If your dog shows his belly to you or another person, it is not always an invitation for a belly rub; it might be his way to say he is worried or concerned. If you watch how dogs interact with one another you would not see a dog start to pat or pound on a submissive dog's belly. He would simply sniff and move away—anything else would be considered rude in the dog world.

If you personally, would not like something done to you in the context of what you might be doing to your dog, respect your dog and back off. Body pounding, constant patting on the head, strangers grabbing his face, are all good examples of how a human might invade a dog's personal space, and

while he might tolerate it from you, that does not mean he enjoys it, especially from people outside of his comfort zone.

### **8. Lead by example**

Your calmness will teach your dog to be calm. Learn to breathe and smile at your dog. The more you display calmness, the calmer your dog will be when he needs it the most.

### **9. Believe your dog**

If you have heard yourself say, “My dog is stubborn. He “*knows*” how to sit (come, heel, etc.) but he won’t do it if we go anywhere outside of our neighborhood,” your dog is trying to tell you something. He is not stubborn; he might be nervous, fearful, overly excited, or the behavior has not been trained to fluency in different environments—but certainly not stubborn. The same goes for behaviors like reactivity toward other dogs or humans; your dog is trying to express how he feels about the situation. Whatever the reasons, your dog is communicating that he needs some help, not criticism.

### **10. Laugh with your dog**

Dogs are truly the comics of the world. Enjoy your dog for what he is—a dog! There is poetry, music, and laughter in every moment of living with dogs (some messier than others) but dogs offer life lessons to each and every human that will take the time to look and not judge them for being dogs, but respect them for being so tolerant of living with us.

