

## Your Smart Dog Leadership 101: How to Be A Good Leader July 2008

**D**ogs have the mental capacity of a three year old child. I'm guessing that not many of us would allow a three year old child to make many decisions for us. Children that young don't have the skills needed to make well-informed, intelligent decisions – neither do our dogs. **So make it easy on yourself – and your dog – and assume the position of leader.**

Leadership has nothing to do with who eats first, who goes through the door first, who has furniture privileges, or who is physically higher.

### Becoming Leader

**So how, exactly, does one become a leader? And what, specifically, does it mean to be a leader?** Let's start by what leadership is *not*. Leadership is not:

- Physical
- Intimidating
- Controlling
- Reprimanding
- Dominating

**Leadership has nothing to do with who eats first, who goes through the door first, who has furniture privileges, or who is physically higher.** What if it's more convenient for the dog to eat before you? Are you really going to – and *should you* – rearrange your schedule so the dog *must* eat after you do? If it's easier for the dog to go through the door first, let him go! You can let your dog enjoy a snuggle on the couch with you – it won't mean

he's in charge. And yes, you *can* lay on the floor with your dog without worry that he's plotting to take over the household.

Here's how...

**An effective leader (you) gives his followers (your dog) the tools he needs to be successful (a well-mannered dog).** This can be as simple as teaching your dog a couple of behaviors, putting them on cue, and then asking for those behaviors before letting your dog outside, inviting him up on the couch, giving him his dinner, or starting a game of tug-of-war.

For example, you've taught your dog to sit. Now, simply ask him to sit before he gets anything he likes: petting, couch-time, play-time, dinner, going for a walk, the list goes on. **It really is that simple!**

Think of sitting (or laying down, or giving you eye contact) as the way your dog says "Please." **A well-mannered dog "says please" before he gets anything good.** All you have to do is ask your dog for that simple behavior (sit, down, watch me, etc.) before starting something fun, and when your dog complies, he gets the good stuff (walks, play, snuggles, etc.).

A well mannered dog "says please" before he gets anything good.

**Here's the important part: If your dog doesn't sit, he doesn't get the good stuff.** *Simply walk away from him; don't beg, threaten, plead, or ask again. Just turn and walk away.*



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Come back in a few minutes and ask again. If he's not able to comply, you may want to re-train the behavior (sit, down, watch me, etc.) a little more thoroughly before asking your dog to do it again.

### **Demanding Dogs**

Does your dog bark for attention? Nip at your heels? Nudge your arm to be petted? If, in the past, this has netted your dog attention (*any* kind of attention – either good or bad), you'll have to change your reaction to this behavior. **From this point on, nothing but a sit (or down, or attention) will get your dog praise, attention, or affection.** The first bark out of your dog's mouth results in your turning your back. The first nudge under your arm makes you get up and move away from your dog. In other words, **the demands your dog makes result in attention being taken away from the dog.** He turns into Invisible Dog every time he demands something.

**The moment he's quiet, stops nudging or nipping, he suddenly becomes Visible Dog and you will then ask him to sit (or down, or look at you).** When he complies, he then gets attention. Your dog will quickly learn that badgering you for attention only leads to being ignored. And he'll also learn that the way to get your attention is to be attentive and comply with your requests.

**If your dog is really pushy or demanding, you may spend much of your time together asking for sits (or downs, or attention).** You'll ask this of your dog *anytime he wants something. Anything.*

### **Real-Life Examples**

Here are some practical applications of the leadership exercises:

Ask your dog to sit (or down, or attention) before:

1. putting the leash on to go for a walk
2. going outside
3. feeding meals
4. giving a treat

5. going into our out of the crate
6. getting up on the couch and bed
7. playing a game
8. tossing the ball
9. greeting a visitor
10. coming inside
11. getting in and out of the car
12. taking the leash off after a walk
13. belly rubs
14. kisses or affection

**There are plenty more opportunities during your day.** Take a moment to identify the things your dog looks forward to and make a list of them. Post the list on the refrigerator or another prominent location in the house. Start asking your dog to "say please" before any of the things he enjoys or looks forward to and you'll see a change in his behavior and attitude before you know it!

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