

LEADING THE DANCE –

Building A Better Relationship

Leading The Dance is designed as a problem-solving tool. Some of the items will be used for the rest of the dog's life - we particularly suggest the feeding regimen, possession, and the roadwork. Other items will be done only until the dog understands his position in society. When he graduates, release him from the items one at a time over a period of several weeks, watching for him to go back to his old ways. Many people do Leading The Dance one month in six as a preventative measure. If there is any part of Leading The Dance that is liable to get you bitten while you're doing it, DON'T DO IT and GET HELP from a competent trainer!

1. Umbilical cord - As much as possible when you are at home, keep the dog on leash and with you. Put a 6 foot leash on the dog, and attach the other end of the leash to a sturdy belt around your waist. Ignore the dog and go about your business. Having to constantly watch what you do and where you go will not only bond the dog to you, but will help make you important in his eyes.
2. Eye contact x 2 - twice a day, sit down with the dog sitting between your knees, and use a command such as Watch Me, or make funny noises, or tap the dog's nose and then your own, or whatever you have to do to get eye contact.
3. Obedience x 2 - Twice a day, run quickly through an obedience session using whatever the dog knows how to do, Sit, Down, Come, Stay, Heel, repeat as needed. Train for a couple of minutes each session. Do NOT touch the dog to praise him.
4. Feed x 2 - When food is left down for the dog to eat ad lib, the dog owns the food. Ownership is what dominance is all about, so we must take possession of the food. Feed the dog twice a day, in a confined area such as a crate or the bathroom. Use a Feeding Ritual. Ask him if he's hungry, ask him to help find his dish, to help find the food, ask him again if he's hungry, tell him to go to his area or get in his crate, give him the food. As soon as he's finished, or as soon as he turns away from his food, or if he doesn't begin eating immediately, take the dish away, throw away the food, and clean the dish. If the dog is not successful at eating (doesn't eat his whole meal), give him half the regular amount at his next meal, until he is cleaning the bottom of the dish. A successful meal means he gets more at his next meal, until he is eating the amount that will keep him in optimum condition. The food must be high-quality and low-bulk. Water should be freely available all day. Give no treats in the food or by hand. Dogs love rituals and you are teaching his body to get ready to eat when he hears the beginning of the ritual.
5. Possession is 9/10 of the Law - At least once a day, handle the dog. Repeat the words These are my ears! This is my paw! This is my muzzle! This is my tail! as you handle him. If he fusses, go slower. It's important that the dog has a positive experience - that he comes to see that you will be handling him and it's of no concern to him. When he is completely relaxed and accepts your ownership, say OK and release him. If your dog will not allow you to handle him like this without getting angry or getting away, DO NOT do this exercise. Do the rest of the exercises and use the clicker to teach the dog to allow this handling later.

6. Long Down-Stay - Do one 30-minute Down-Stay every day. You can watch TV but the dog must be in plain sight and you must be aware of him. He can roll over, go to sleep, and look annoyed or bored, but he cannot get up or walk away.

7. I'm-The-Mommy Down - At least once a day, just because you felt like it, tell the dog to lie down. When he does, use your voice only to tell him he did a good job, say Okay, and walk away.

8. Bosshood Is In The Eye Of The Beholder - Consider life from the dog's point of view. He sleeps where he wants, he eats when he wants, he leads you around. Any wonder he gets the impression that he's the Boss? Don't allow him to go through doors ahead of you. Don't allow him to go up or down stairs ahead of you. Don't allow him to lead you down hallways. Always position him or yourself so you are leading and he is following. If he's lying down, don't walk around him. Put your feet on the floor and shuffle right through him (note you don't kick the dog, merely push him gently out of the way) - make him think about where you are and what you're doing. When he orders you to let him out, take charge of going outside. Build a ritual around the door. Focus his attention on you: Do you want to go out? Sit! When he sits, you go to the door. Want to go out? Sit. Down. Sit. Stay. Then open the door and order him out: Okay, go outside! You change the situation so you are in charge of it. Keep the dog on the floor. Not on the couch, not on the chair, not halfway up the stairs surveying his domain, not in your lap, not on the car seat. On the floor. Don't leave the dog loose in the house or yard when you're not home. Free run of the house when the Boss isn't home allows the dog to feel powerful and in charge. Don't allow the dog to sleep on your bed, or on a child's bed. Dogs recognize the bed as a throne for the Boss. If he sleeps away from you, however, he will think that you own the bedroom, but he owns the rest of the house. The dog should sleep in your bedroom. If you can't have him sleeping in your bedroom (allergies, for instance), confine him to his crate.

9. Work Off Energy - Roadwork the dog 4 days a week. Start small, but work up to a mile for small dogs, 2 miles for medium dogs, and 3 miles for large dogs. Many problems will disappear with no more effort than roadworking. You can jog with the dog, or ride a bike, or longe him with a Flexilead, or use a motorised trike, or lend him to a jogger who's afraid of being mugged.

10. Busy Hands Are Happy Hands - If you want to pet the dog, he must first do pushups -Sit, Down, Sit, Down, Sit, Down, Sit, Down - then you can pet him for a count of 5 only. He never gets petted because he wants to be or because he demands it, only because you want to and he earns it. Then you pet him for only a moment, and turn away with him wanting more.

11. My Game, My Rules - Give the dog only one toy. If he wants to chase the toy, bring it to you and let you have it, throw it again. If he won't chase it, or won't give it to you, turn your back and walk away. He has two choices, he can play with you and the toy, or he can play with the toy alone. Do not, under any circumstances, play tug-of-war. When you can get the toy without chasing him or playing tug, pick it up and put it away.

12. Eliminate Hormones - Have problem dogs neutered. Some problems will solve themselves with no more effort than this. Not only will the dog be healthier and easier to live with, but your life will be made simpler.

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