

Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

Golden Rule Training



Leadership

Whether you talk about what dogs need in a dog pack, or in a domestic situation, your dog instinctively wants and needs a leader. You communicate leadership through your body language, tone of voice, mannerisms, consistency, and follow through. By being a leader you will get the kind of dog you want and your dog will get the leader it needs.

If the dog does not have a clear leader, it may take control and act out, taking advantage of situations; it could become aggressive, and generally be a dog that is training you. Depending on temperament, it could become the opposite and become anxious, fearful and unsure about you; either way, the dog needs a leader.

The best way to think of becoming the leader your dog needs is to think of a parent-child relationship. A child needs discipline, boundaries, and an understanding of appropriate behavior. Your child needs daily exercise, play time, consistent rules and ultimately love. That is what your dog needs as well, structure and no free reign over you or the household.

If you think of leadership as what the dog needs, you can educate, train and gain the respect of your dog quickly. This is what you need and what the dog wants, to live a balanced and happy life.

To clarify, the following are examples of the dog in the Leadership position:

- The dog charges ahead of you through the doorway
- You feed your dog by leaving kibble out all day (free feeding) so the dog is in control of the food supply
- The dog nudges you and you pet him.
- The dog whines for something and you give in
- The dog asks you to play with him, and you do.
- The dog pulls you on the leash when going for a walk (he tells you where you are going and how fast)
- You give your dog a cue or command, but it ignores you

These examples show the dog you are not consistent, you will give in and do what it wants (so the dog is in control) and you are not to be taken seriously.

The following are a few examples of clear leadership the dog understands:

- You go through the doorway before your dog; he waits until released
- You control the food. Be consistent and feed your dog the same time in the a.m. and p.m. Have the dog sit, start to set the food down and say "wait"; the dog does not start to eat until you give the release word. He gets 15 to 20 minutes to eat his food, and then it is taken away.
- You invite your dog to be petted, when you are ready and not when he demands its
- You initiate play with your dog when you choose; you start the game and end the game by putting the toy away. Come up with a word to use as a cue that you are done engaging, such as "go", "done", and point your finger towards his spot or bed so he understands the game is done for now.
- You walk the dog on a leash, you show the dog where to go and the dog follows and looks to you for direction.

More on leadership

As the leader you need to protect your dog against bullying dogs, teasing children and adults, including heavy-handed trainers. If something doesn't feel right to you, it feels even worse to your dog. Trust your gut feeling, be a leader and keep your dog safe.

A leader also does not yell, hit or throw things at the dog. A leader stays calm when the dog is fearful or stressed. The more reactive your dog is, the more grounded and calm you need to be. It's up to you to create the balance. If you react to your dog's unwanted behavior in any other way but calm and controlled, you deal with your dog at his level and he gets what he wants. Your goal is to guide your dog to your level; to help it remain calm as well. It's your responsibility to give your dog the structure and consistency he needs, and in return this will create a relationship of mutual trust.

Be consistent, even if you had a bad day at work. Your dog doesn't understand why you are tense and becomes confused and fearful if you are short-fused with him. Be aware of your tone of voice, try and be upbeat or at least calm. After all, your dog gives you unconditional love, you should be happy to see him at the end of the day too!

If you need to give your dog feedback for a behavior (both positive and negative), you have 3 seconds to do so; this is the span of time they are in the moment and will tie the feedback to the act. For instance, punishing well after the incident will not teach your dog a thing, he will just be confused. For your dog to trust you, you must be predictable. Dogs learn to leave things alone after MANY times catching them in the act and being interrupted or redirected. Just as it is with a young child, it takes time for them to learn what is off limits.

If the dog is ignoring or won't respond to you, put him on a leash and tether him to your side. He has to go everywhere with you, which leaves him with no independence or options to get into mischief. Please never leave a leash on unsupervised!

If he is insistent in an unwanted behavior (lumping, mouthing, body slamming, etc.) then walk into him with a stern voice say "quit it", give him a stern glare and when he stops, walk away.

Going through obedience training early and before any behavior issues appear will help you in mastering the leadership role. If you are adopting an older or rescued dog, it can be a bit more challenging; you may not know all the dog has been through in the past. If this is the case, practice, be patient and remember, no matter what the dog has been through, they need a strong leader. In fact, you are doing them a big favor by taking the pressure off them to be in charge. If you use the cues and training methods as building blocks, it will be easy to train yourself and your dog!

Remember, be a leader. Be consistent and follow through. Make time for play and exercise everyday and in return you will have a healthy happy dog that wants to please you!