



## Follow the Leader

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The purpose of this exercise is to lay the foundation for dependability, gaining your dog's attention not only during training sessions but during periods of distraction when you will need his attention the most. You are going to provide your dog many clear examples of when you "the Leader" expect your dog "to Follow". We are going to do this exercise silently, not communicating verbally, but using our body language, a language our dogs' are quite adept at reading. A leashed dog may follow your change of direction by listening to your voice or an inadvertent tight leash. Eliminate these and he will be left with the option of having to keep an eye on you to discover what direction you may be heading off to. During the following training sessions your dog will discover that you change your mind and direction quite often and lest he get left behind, he will learn to watch and be attentive to your changes of direction.

You may find it beneficial to work with your dog after a period of confinement, say after your dog has been crated while you were at work or if you're able to be at home more often, a confinement of 30 minutes. It may help to build anticipation of doing something interesting with you.

Plan where you are going to train your dog and what points of interest you may decide to walk confidently towards (tree in the distance, bench in a park setting, neighbors driveway or corner of your own yard) not more than 30 ft or so away. Your dog will have his training collar on and your 15' long line attached securely to it. Remember your leash grip; loop over your right thumb, make a fist with the same hand and position it where your belt buckle would be close to your body, placing your left hand over the right, anchoring both hands to your body. If you have a smaller dog, lower your hand position about 6". Be purposeful as you walk quickly, as if you are late for an appointment. Expect your dog to follow, do not signal verbally or stomp your feet, do not stop to untangle the leash (unless he is truly hog tied), he will quickly learn that it is his responsibility and also more comfortable to keep a close watch on you.

If your dog decides to take the Lead and move out in front of you, step on the line as he passes and turn in the opposite direction. The tug and release of his training collar will get his attention, as he turns to see what has stopped his forward motion, he will see your back as you are leaving. If your dog stops to see where you are heading, continue toward your chosen destination, as he runs out of leash, the tug on his collar will indicate you are still going and he will follow. Stop for a moment at your destination, should your dog choose to sit next to you or look up at you, mark the moment with a single word "Good". Allow a few moments for your dog to lose interest in you and head out toward your next planned destination. Continue to change direction as your dog tries to take the lead or if he decides there is an irresistible smell off to the left, take an abrupt, quick right turn continuing on to a new chosen destination. Again allow some time for your dog to lose interest in you and head out toward a new destination. Remember to mark the moment your dog gives you his attention with a verbal "Good".



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Once your dog is convinced that following you in a relatively quiet area is a good thing, it is time to bring known triggers into the picture. You should have a good feel for distractions your dog may not be able to resist. It may be another dog barking in the neighbors' yard or passing in the street, a squirrel, children on bikes or skateboards, a smell distraction you have planted such as parmesan cheese or water from the tuna you had drained for lunch. Use these distractions to present clearly what your dog is to do when he comes across them. Start with mild distractions further away from your dog. Head towards your distraction, if your dog takes the lead, say nothing and quickly turn in the opposite direction (do not to allow your dog to reach the distraction). If your dog is attentive, he will have caught up to you and you will be marking his presence at your side with the verbal marker "Good". If he has continued toward the distraction, he will soon run out of leash and experience the tug and release of the training collar, turning his attention toward your retreating figure. When he catches up to you, mark the moment with a verbal "Good". As your dog becomes confident in his ability to keep an eye on you, increase the level of distraction. Praise for success. If he is having a difficult time ignoring the distraction, take a step back and work further away.

After your Follow the Leader training session, allow your dog to drag the 15' leash for a cool down period of at least 5 minutes, always being close enough to step on the leash if your dog needs guidance. This allows the lesson to sink in as he mulls over the consequences of his behavior. I wouldn't be surprised if he kept track of you by occasionally checking to see where you were in relation to him.

Practice on the 15' long line 2x daily for 7 days, then trade the 15' line for your 6' leash. Repeating the exercise on the shorter leash allows less reaction time for your dog, he will have to keep a close eye on you to remain comfortable. By now your dog is paying closer attention to you. Encourage your dog to walk on a loose 6' leash by using what you have learned during the "Follow the Leader" exercise. If he get's distracted, travel in the opposite direction he is, marking the moment when he catches up to you with the verbal marker "Good".