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LEARN to EARN

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From your dog's perspective, leadership is not a bad thing. It's a tough job to be in charge and take care of everyone in your pack 24 hours a day. It leaves no time to play or relax. To lift the burden of responsibility from your dog, and, in turn, to have a calmer, peaceful relationship with him, practice the "Learn to Earn" program. It has helped many dogs with problem behaviors look at their owners in a new light. Think about the great leaders that have had a positive impact on your life. An amazing teacher that helped you through a rough time, a friend that helped put you back on a positive track or a boss that became a mentor to guide you through complicated changing job climate. They helped you by remaining calm in times of stress, you could look to them for guidance if you became confused, and they helped you make correct choices to improve your life and relationship with others. Wouldn't you like to become that leader to your dog?

Simply put, in a dog's world, the leader controls everything. It's not about being mean. It is about setting boundaries, controlling resources and providing fulfillment for your dog. If from a dog's perception, his human is not providing believable leadership; unacceptable behaviors will be the norm. Is your dog bossy or demanding? Does your dog nudge you to be petted, and then nip at you when it's time to stop? Does he bark or growl if you pass too close to his food, remove him from the furniture or try to take away a prized object? Does he refuse to take direction or run away? Does he jump on people or guard the door?

So what is important to your dog? In the wild, the leaders of the pack control and direct everything. They decide what direction to hunt and who gets to go, decide who gets to eat first, decide who is allowed into the pack's territory, and decide who is invited to play and they get the best spot to rest. In our urban society this translates to exercise, food, water, toys, time, space and affection. To be fulfilled your dog needs all of these. The "Learn to Earn" program realigns your dogs place in the human pack, placing you in a believable leadership role, and the bestower of all good things.

These are simple changes to be made to your everyday interactions with your dog to put you in the driver's seat.

Exercise: Helping a dog expend his excess energy will benefit him physically; exercising his mind will tire him mentally. Tired dogs generally don't have the energy to devote to getting into mischief. Walking briskly with your dog calmly at your side several times a day is a good start. If you don't have a lot of time to devote to walking, a dog walker or perhaps several days a week at a dog day care facility may be just what your dog needs. Taking an obedience, tracking, agility, fly ball, trick training or dancing with your dog class will challenge their minds and strengthen the bond between you and your dog.



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Food: If food is available to your dog all the time, he never learns that it comes from you. In the wild a dog has to work hard for his meal. No more free feeding. Allow your dog access to his food twice daily. If at all possible, feed yourself first, even if it is just a cracker. Ask your dog to sit, down or shake paws before putting down the bowl. Release him to eat. What ever he does not finish in 15 minutes or if he wanders away from his bowl, pick it up until the next mealtime. Don't worry, he won't starve himself. When ever you give your dog anything, ask him to "earn" it by performing a task or two.

Water: Dogs need access to water, especially when it is hot or after exercise. You can have your dog "earn" that access the same as he does his food by requiring a task or two from him.

Toys: Is your house littered with your dog's toys? Does he choose a toy, toss it at your feet or nudge you with it to initiate play? That is rather demanding behavior. Pick up all his toys and put them out of his reach. You decide when it is time to play and invite your dog to join you. Play games of cooperation, like fetch or find it. Ask your dog to sit before you give him the toy. Ask him to give up his toy occasionally and the give it back. This teaches him that giving an object up doesn't mean it goes away for good.

Time: You have invited your dog to live in your house. You set the rules. You have to work to provide a home for your dog and your family. You set the timetable of activities for your dog and also for when he can lay calmly by your side. To teach him to do this successfully, attach his leash and tie it to the chair you are sitting on. Give him a chew toy or other item to keep him busy. Ignore his attempts to engage you by barking, pawing or trying to leave. Eventually he will settle quietly at your side. Practice this a few times a day while you are watching T.V., working on the computer or involved in another task of your own.

Space: Have you ever watched ballroom dancing? Each partner has his/her defined space, retreating or advancing as the dance progresses. The space in your house belongs to you. Teach your dog to move out of your space or "yield" by moving through the space your dog is occupying if he is in your path. Do not go around or step over him (if he's large he may stand up and unbalance you or if he's small he may tangle up in your feet). Shuffle quietly and assertively through his space having him move out of your way. A vast majority of dogs allowed to sleep in their owner's beds display problem behaviors. This sends the message your dog is of equal status. This is your space. Close the door to the bedroom or crate your dog in another part of the house. If your dog growls when told to get off the bed or furniture have him drag an 8' leash when supervised in the house. This allows you to take the end of the leash (say nothing, do not look at your dog), turn and walk away, very impersonally removing him from the furniture. Be persistent. In hallways or on stairs insist on your dog following, using your body to block his from getting in front of you. Teach him to wait for permission to go through doorways (this also will help with dogs that bolt out exit doors).

Crate Training: This is also about controlling space. If you come from a large family and have ever had to share your room, you know how comforting having your own space is. As



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well as simplifying house training, having a quiet place to go to when things get hectic or a familiar place to go to when traveling is a boon to your dog. A crate will keep your dog safe and not allow him to practice undesirable behaviors in your absence. Teach your dog to enjoy time in his crate. Sometimes feeding him his meals or tossing a treat in his crate for him to enjoy. A dog that quietly and calmly accepts being crated respects your leadership.

Affection: This is probably harder on the owner than the dog. You may give all the affection you want to your dog as long as it is on your terms. Call your dog to come. Reward him with affection. Place your dog in a down position. Reward him with belly rubs. When coming home from work or other separations of more than 30 minutes, do not acknowledge your dog for at least 5 minutes. That means no looking at, touching, speaking to or petting your dog. Take your coat off, use the restroom, make yourself a cup of tea, and then when you are ready, call your dog to you to acknowledge him. Leaders come and go as they please with no need to explain to the other members of the pack. No one rushes up to them barking or jumping up on them questioning where they have been.

Through the transition period from bossy to follower remember to practice and project the 3 C's, Calm demeanor, Confident attitude and Consistent expectations. This program can help you become a believable leader in your dog's eyes. As your dog's behavior improves, additional freedoms can be meted out on an earned basis. If your dog has ever bitten you, another person, dog or has displayed any other aggressive behavior, contact a professional dog trainer for specific solutions to these problems. True aggression is dangerous and requires the help of a professional dog trainer familiar with dealing with aggressive situations.