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My Favorite Leadership Tips

There are lots of tips out there on leadership written by nationally acclaimed trainers and applied animal behaviorists. The tips I use and recommend are ones that set rules and boundaries without the use of force, intimidation, or physical abuse. What works for your dog will depend on his temperament and how easy it is for you, the dog owner, to administer in your daily routine. If you show good leadership to your dog they will respect and listen to you better, and they will feel more relaxed and confident. You will too.

Below I have compiled a list of leadership tips that I feel have the most “bang for their buck”

1. **Hand feed your dog.** Hand feeding establishes leadership and a strong bond and relationship between you and your dog. The dog learns you have control of the food and how much he gets. You are controlling what he believes is his most important resource. You don't have to hand feed the entire meal. A technique I like is to hand feed a portion and then the rest goes into a pouch or bait bag that he earns by doing things for you. For example, at dinner, hand feed him about half his normal portion, and then for the rest of the evening, he gets the rest of his meal by doing what you ask, or by volunteering behaviors you like.

To introduce a dog to this technique, I would do this everyday for several weeks and then transition into once a week to maintain this leadership lesson. If your dog has shown aggression I would have the bowl up high so the two of you aren't competing for the bowl and you should see a trainer who has experience in aggression.

2. **Nothing in Life is For Free.** Everything your dog wants he has to earn. If he wants to be petted, he must sit. He wants dinner? He must do a down/stay and patiently wait for it. He wants out? He must stay until you release him. He wants his leash put on for a walk? He must do some obedience commands first and sit still while his collar is put on. He wants his ball thrown? He must do some obedience commands first. Always ignore pushy behavior. Your dog demands to be petted? Don't pet them. When they go away, you call them back and pet them. Your dog wants out? Wait a few minutes and then let them out. Same goes for coming back in. They demand dinner? Wait until they are relaxed

and not demanding before feeding. *Think of it this way, leaders initiate, and subordinates react. Make sure you are initiating, not reacting.*

3. **No free treats.** Don't give out free treats. Dog must earn them.
4. **Rules on furniture.** Height is status. If dogs are allowed to be at your height they feel more like equals. Many of my clients have a hard time abiding by this (and truth be told, so do I). In my household the dogs are allowed on some furniture but not others. If you like your dog on furniture the best way to handle it is to only allow them up when you invite them.
5. **Consistency in training.** Make sure the rules you establish are enforced 100% of the time. This is no different than with our kids. For some dogs, if you give them some slack even once, they will remember and try to push- push- push to get that one rule to changed permanently in their favor. If your rule is they should not be allowed by the table when you eat, don't let them there even just once.
6. **Wait at the door.** All leaders go out the door first. Practice this at all doors leading outside, the gate from your back to front yard, and the car door. This is a safety cue to keep your dog safe.
7. **Dragging an indoor leash.** When you first get a new dog or puppy, or your dog is going through a spell of not listening to you, have them drag a leash around the house. I prefer a 10 footer. If you call them to you and they don't listen, step on the leash. This shows you are in control.
8. **Play games where you set the pace and rules.** First off, you decide when the game starts, so if your dog brings you the toy, tell them "not now" and put the toy away. Then later, bring it back out. You decide when the game ends. If your dog demands you keep playing you tell them "game over" and put the toy away. Insert obedience breaks to show you are setting the pace. Keep the games even keeled and don't get dogs too aroused. Teach your dog self-control through games played.
9. **Teach good leash manners.** Dogs need to be walking beside you not ahead of you. Dogs that drag you to everything they want to do and see are not showing good respect for your leadership.
10. **Training shows leadership.** Take your dog to a training class and keep training on-going through classes and on your own. Even if you have been to an intermediate or advanced class, there is no reason not to repeat it. Go to different trainers for different ideas. Go to classes that are fun. Learning should be fun for you and your dog. Do 5-10 minute training sessions a day. Even your 10 year old dog can benefit from training. Check out my article and video on Obedience During the Day to help you fit training into your schedule.

11. **Exercise!!** Exercise releases endorphins which help a dog feel happy, relaxed, and relieved of stress, just like for humans. Get exercise with your dog so you both come home feeling calm, relaxed and ready to take on the world.

These guidelines will provide your dog comfort, security, and confidence. It will build your relationship with your dog so that he sees you as the center of his universe.

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