

Making It Habit:



Teaching
(and Re-teaching)
Your Dog
Good Manners

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Introduction

Even when we train puppies and they grown into full-size dogs, there comes a time when nearly every dog forgets his manners. It's not difficult to reinstall the values that your dog once had: it just takes some time and repetition. Use this book to help you regain control of your dog, keeping him safer and enhancing the time you spend together.

Chasing Cars

Dogs chase cars for a variety of reasons, namely, fear, anger or the natural herding instinct gone out of control. Dogs who have been hit by cars may chase them out of pure fear and hatred. If your dog has ever been hit by a car, use ordinary desensitization to reduce his anxiety.

Determine when your dog first gets excited about approaching vehicles. Is it the sound of the car, or the sight of it that gets him going? If it is the sound, first try sound desensitization.

If your dog doesn't have a history of being hit by a car, and if the sound doesn't seem to especially bother him, if he seems upset (angry, afraid or both) use ordinary desensitization.

Ordinary Desensitization

What to bring: lots of small treats, leash and collar (on dog).

Expose your dog to the presence of cars by working with him in a place where a few cars pass by, and where you can control his movement. Ideally, you are where your dog will see and hear a passing car, but not so close that he will try to chase it. Have him on his leash, and keep your hand on the leash at all times so he can't run after the car.

When a car is coming, give your dog a treat and talk to him. As the car approaches, walk with your dog away from where the car is passing. If he is totally losing control, move him further from passing traffic to continue your work.

Every time a car passes, give your dog another bite of treat, and walk him away from the car. Your goal is to pair the car with something yummy, which pleases and distracts your dog.

Over time, start moving closer to passing cars while you work with your dog. Take your time with this step! And never take chances: keep your hand on the leash and your attention on your dog.

Once you feel your dog is calm with traffic passing, stop giving him the treat as the car approaches. Hold it where he can see it, then give it to him after the car passes you. By holding off a few seconds more, you're helping your dog learn to tolerate the whole experience of a car driving by. Keep practicing until you are confident that, when a car comes along, your dog will be looking at you and waiting for his treat.

Try to practice with your dog every day for ten minutes, or twice a day if you can. Be patient: car-chasing is a hard habit to break, and it's so dangerous, that it's well worth your effort. Expect to see some results in a week (with daily practice), and to have the problem solved in four to six weeks. With frequent exposure to cars, he should eventually be able to maintain a calm manner in the midst of traffic. But, even once your dog seems "cured", take time every week to make sure the habit holds. Incorporate desensitization exercises into your walks and play. Don't get over-confident: keep your dog on his leash, and be very careful with him around cars.

Sound Desensitization

What to bring: portable tape recorder, tape, leash, small treats.

If you think that part of your dog's problem has to do with being bothered by the sound of tires or engines, you may decide to work with your dog to reduce his sensitivity to the noise. We can't hear as acutely as dogs do, or over nearly the same range. Your dog's ears may hurt at the sound of tires singing on pavement; some dogs hate the sound of cars starting; others start to bark when they hear car doors slam.

Make a tape! Go to an outdoor coffeehouse or set the player on your front porch, or anywhere else cars frequently pass. Fill up the tape a half-hour or an hour of traffic noises. Bring the tape inside, and play it with the volume turned down low, for your dog. Watch his reaction: does he growl, bark, or act uneasy? Does he try to approach the noise, or to get away from it? If he ignores it totally, turn the volume up a bit. If the sound has no effect on him, go back to Ordinary Desensitization.

If the sound does appear to bother him, you can work with him in the house first. Start with the tape playing fairly low, at a volume your dog barely notices. When the tape is done, rewind, turn it up a little, and play it again. Whenever the tape finishes, turn it up a bit more. You can take this one of two ways. Some dogs will get used to the sound just by hearing it over and over, and a little louder each time. Don't let it get too loud: if it seems loud to you, it's plenty loud for your dog. It doesn't have to be extremely noisy to get the job done, just about as loud as an actual car driving down the street.

If your dog becomes agitated at the tape's sound, you'll want to do more than just play the tape. Put your dog on his leash, and set the tape volume at the level where it had first seemed to bother him. Make eye contact with your dog, have your hand on his leash, and turn on the tape. As soon as the noise starts, immediately give your dog a small treat, and talk to him while the tape plays for a minute or two. When your dog seems calm, stop the tape, wait a minute or two, then turn it back on and give him another treat while talking to him. Do this for up to ten minutes at a time, at least once a day (and twice is better). You're teaching your dog to look forward to the

sound of the car, rather than dreading it. You're also teaching him a new response; rather than attacking the car, he's having a snack.

Once your dog can tolerate the tape played at a noise-level that matches what he'd hear on the street, put him on his leash, and take him outside. Now, work with him on Ordinary Desensitization (see above).

Acting Jealous

When your dog takes exception to some other person in the house, it is because he perceives his role to be second to you. Sometimes, jealousy problems arise when you bring someone new home, like a spouse or a friend. Your dog feels that the two of you are close, and feels left out and put out by being superseded by someone else. Feeling jealous and acting jealous are two different things: if your dog is acting jealous, he must also feel that he has some right to. Your job is to teach him that the pack order has changed, and that the person he is currently growling at is above him in the pack. Once he understands that his rival is actually senior to him, he'll settle down again.

(There are rare exceptions to this: if someone is afraid of dogs, dogs sense it and assume the position of dominant dog in relation to that person. In this case, the person who's afraid will need to work on his own or with a therapist to feel more comfortable with dogs in general before approaching your particular canine. If your dog is extremely sweet-natured and your friend not too afraid, you may be able to work with both of them anyway, but if your friend has a phobia, take it slow.)

Establishing seniority is a matter of supporting your friend over your dog. It's as much a function of your attitude as it is your behavior. If you've ever seriously dated someone who had children, you've had a first-hand experience of what your friend may be going through. Single parents in serious relationships indicate how serious that relationship really is by the way they treat their partners in relation to their children. Sometimes they even use their children as an excuse to end a relationship before having to commit to it, by giving the children the power to effectively veto the proposed addition to the family. They do this by not disciplining their children when they misbehave toward their partner, and by considering the kids' huffiness over the real hurt it may cause the person they're dating. In effect, they support the children in their endeavor to put a halt to this new relationship.

Although this will infuriate parents everywhere, dogs are (in this case) just like kids. If you really care about incorporating someone new into your

family “pack”, it is your responsibility to support that person and to let your dog know in no uncertain terms, who’s boss.

Start by retraining (or training) your dog with the other person present. It’s not important what you train on (come, sit, stay, lie down); what you’re doing here is reminding your dog that you are the leader of the pack. Let the other person watch, and when you are saying “good dog” to something your dog has done correctly, your partner can say “good dog” too. Because your dog is jealous, don’t put your partner in jeopardy by having him or her pet the dog just yet.

Train daily for several days, five or ten minutes at a time, once or twice a day. Use occasional treats and verbal praise and pats to reward him. (But if you’ve never trained your dog before, use the food-type treats all the time for at least a week, then every other time, then every fourth time, gradually phasing out food treats while continuing praise and petting. If you haven’t trained your dog, read the rest of this book on the specifics of training your dog to come, sit, stay, etc. before training him with your partner.) While you’re in this first phase, your dog should start becoming a bit warmer towards your partner: like all of us, it’s hard for a dog to dislike someone who says nice things to him! Take your time: start with your friend watching from the sidelines, and gradually have him or her move closer to you until over a period of several days, you are standing together.

(If no matter what you do, after several days of training together, your dog still acts hostile (growling, barking, trying to bite), your problem may be too serious for at-home remedies. Invest in a professional trainer to work with you, your dog and your partner.)

Be sure to make all your actions in the household congruent with the training. When you meet your partner, greet each other first, then greet the dog. Take turns feeding him, and don’t cave in to guilt by giving him extra treats or by letting him beg at the table. If he tries to crawl between you when you cuddle on the couch, either have him lie down beside the couch or send him to his bed (whatever’s more doable in your household). If he simply won’t obey, shut him in the bathroom or garage for five minutes, then retrieve him and tell him to lie down. If he harasses you in the bedroom, treat him as you do if he’s bothering you when you’re alone. Be consistent, don’t yell at him, but set firm limits and stick to them.

If your dog has been used to sleeping on the bed with you, his feelings may be really hurt when there’s not enough room for him anymore. If your partner really doesn’t mind sharing (and I mean really), buy a king-sized bed and make room for three. But bear in mind that many people don’t want to sleep with their sweetheart’s dog! Make a new bed for your dog that’s beside your side of the bed, and encourage him to climb into it at night when you climb into yours. Lock him out of the bedroom when you make love; it’s too

weird to have someone's pet watching you do it, and besides, the dog may get the idea that your partner is hurting you, provoking an attack. Keeping the dog away from your partner during times you want to be close is as considerate as having clean sheets on the bed. Don't even consider asking your partner whether you should, just do it.

Your partner shouldn't attempt to control or discipline your dog until they have trained together and reached beyond the stage of feeling comfortable with the training scenario. As the first alpha in the pack, it's your duty to protect your partner from your dog, so be considerate and go out of your way to make sure the dog doesn't bully or inconvenience your partner.

Once you've trained with your partner observing and offering verbal praise, you start observing and let your friend do the training. The purpose of this is to let your dog know that your partner shares the leadership position with you. When you let your partner work with your dog, you're in effect handing over the keys. This has two effects; you are helping your partner build confidence in starting out right with your dog, and you are building your dog's trust in your partner as co-leader of the pack.

Your friend should start training by using commands you and your dog have already covered, and by using the same words for each command (e.g., if you've been using "quiet", your partner shouldn't say "hush".) This time, you observe and chime in with verbal praise, but your partner should be the one handing out treats. Keep training twice daily in five or ten-minute sessions until your dog is used to taking commands from your partner. Once both people feel confident that the dog will not be aggressive towards your partner, you should remove yourself from the scene. Go into the next room and let your partner work with the dog alone for several more days.

By this time, your partner should be used to asserting authority and your dog should be getting used to his new place in the pack. He should not be growling or snapping at your partner, and you should have instituted rules that keep him from performing other little doggie tricks like sitting on the couch just when your partner's about to sit there or jostling between the two of you when you hug. At this point, you should both be in charge, and Dog should understand that.

I wrote the paragraphs above assuming that the relationship is between two adults, but sometimes your dog takes a dislike to the babysitter or to a child in the family. You can follow the training scenarios above with a child or teenager. (Be extra careful with small children. Kids under five probably don't have the attention span needed for training, but you can try. Most dogs understand that small children need protection and won't try to harm them but will protect them. If your dog acts threatening toward your child, call a reputable professional trainer right away. The more likely scenario is that your dog will be overprotective of your child, menacing other adults.)

When Your Dog Ignores Commands

Your dog doesn't ignore your commands because he forgot how to do them. You can prove that to yourself by giving him a command after showing him his favorite treat. If he still ignores what you ask him to do, take him to the vet and have his hearing checked! (Seriously, older dogs may develop hearing and vision problems or even neurological problems that interfere with memory or understanding. If your dog doesn't respond to a favorite treat, check out any possible physical problems before starting to retrain.)

Usually dogs who stop acting on commands have grown lazy because their owners have grown lazy. Either they aren't really expecting their dog to respond, or they aren't really paying attention. Dogs sense this as immediately as children do, and act accordingly. The best way to get your dog to start acting like your commands matter is to show that they matter to you!

People are busy, and dogs sometimes get left out. If your dog has been feeling ignored or taken for granted, he may be ignoring you in hopes of getting your attention. While this may get him the wrong kind of attention, it's still better than nothing. The most powerful remedy for this situation is for you to pay attention to your dog by working with him.

Set aside uninterrupted time for training. Ignore phone calls and just work with your dog. Work together daily, even if it's just for a few minutes.

1. Focus your attention.
2. Get his attention.
3. Look him in the eye.
4. Give the command, and mean it.

Reward him every time he obeys, including petting and praise whether or not you are using food too. You want your dog to feel good about achieving his training goals, but you shouldn't have to plan on carrying beef bits

around in your purse either! Although training works best when you start out with food bribes, the idea is that over time you'll taper off the edible treat, only using them when it's convenient. But since you don't want your dog only listening to you when it's convenient for him, teach him that verbal praise and pats are also rewards.

Use treats to remind him of why it's fun to work together. Plan to start out using food treats for every command your dog obeys, in addition to petting and verbal praise. After he starts obeying you on a regular basis, you can fine-tune by only giving him a treat when he obeys within five seconds, and then after a dozen repetitions or more at five seconds, taper down to only rewarding him when he obeys immediately.

These are the basic commands your dog should know and obey.

1. Sit
2. Lie Down
3. Stay
4. Come
5. Fetch
6. Stop

Training Your Dog to "Stop"

Some people don't know about "stop". The idea here is that no matter what your dog is doing, he will stop and stay where he is. This is ideal for when he's about to get in trouble, and shouting his name may make him come running towards you. Sometimes you want him to stop and then come, but if you teach him that "Stop" means "and stay put", you can keep him from dashing across the street when doing so might put him in danger.

You can train your dog to stop by playing Fetch, modifying the game so that instead of returning the stick or ball or whatever right to you, once he reaches the object and picks it up, you tell him to "stop". His part in the game is to then drop the object and stand waiting for you. If he starts towards you, tell him to "stay" and keep that in the game until he learns that stop is always followed by stay if he tried to move. At that time, you can probably drop the "stay" and he'll stay put on the command "stop". You walk over to him, reward him, then release him with "okay", at which point you can restart Fetch by throwing the object again.

If you have trouble teaching your dog "stop" alone, two people can work with the dog by having Fetch take place with one of you throwing the object next to the other person. When the dog reaches the object and picks it up, the person further away calls out "stop" and nearest person encourages (or helps) the dog to drop the object. At this point, the dog's attention will probably be with the closest person in the game, who can keep eye contact with him until the further person walks up to both of them. At this point, both people praise and pet the dog. Take turns being the closer person so that your dog doesn't come to expect anyone to take one particular spot, and so that when the time comes, either one of you can call out "stop" and the dog will be used to obeying. Also take turns with the food treat: let whoever is further away bring the treat to the dog while he waits, copying the usual "stop" situation when only one person is with the dog.

When Your Dog Won't Stay in a "Stay" or "Lie Down"

There's no big mystery to retraining your dog to stay or lie down and remain that way until released: it's a matter of practicing and drilling until he decides that it's more trouble than it's worth to disobey, because it just results in more practicing and drilling. The reason many people don't train their dogs in the first place, and the main reason that good behavior somehow slips away from dogs over time, is that we fail to reinforce and practice it. Even machinery gets out of tune and needs maintenance and readjusting; dogs need attention and reinforcement and training to stay sharp and well-behaved. And people need practice to keep their dogs well-behaved too.

When your dog no longer stays as long as you want him too, your job is to practice with him. Five or ten minutes a day, every day, lets him know that you're serious and are making an investment to make sure he's doing his job right. You won't have to practice every command for every day for the rest of your dog's life with you, but when you're correcting sloppy or bad behavior, plan to work on it every day for as long as it takes, and then incorporate some kind of follow-up in your daily life. Give your dog daily tasks to do around the house, make sure to ask him to do them, and always give him some sort of reward in the form of petting and verbal attaboys. Teach him to fetch the kids' sneakers in the morning, or a soda from the fridge, or the paper from the yard. Practice having him stay or lie down while you're loading the dishwasher or putting stuff in the clothes dryer. Teach him to sit and offer a paw to people who visit your house.

When you work with your dog on "stay", you may need to show him that you mean it. Make sure he's wearing his collar, and if he has gotten into the habit of running off when you want him to stay, work with him in a smaller space. That way you won't be chasing him around the north forty, unwittingly reinforcing his bad behavior by playing a doggie game called "catch me if you can".

Tell him to stay, and if he starts to wander off before you've given the release command, hold his collar to prevent him from leaving and repeat the

command “stay”. Once you feel his pull on the collar relax, reward him, but don’t act delighted or effusive: he knows he didn’t really do it right. But he’s getting closer to what you want, so you will want to reward every baby step he makes. This is called “successive approximation” or “behavior shaping”, and it’s a good way to turn waywardness into obedience over time.

Your dog may be resistant, especially if his behavior has never been addressed before. He’s used to doing things his way and has forgotten the enjoyment and pride that goes along with doing things right. You may get frustrated. Don’t shout; don’t be rough; that’s unnecessary. It raises your blood pressure, stresses the dog and doesn’t especially make him want to do what you ask. Try this again and again with your hand on the collar or near enough to reach it if he walks off. If he starts to move away, hold the collar and remind him to stay. Work with him until when you say “stay” he doesn’t move away. At this point, start working again without holding the collar and see how that goes. Work for five or ten minutes at a time, once or twice a day, until your dog stays without resisting, until he stays until released. At this point, start working with him staying while you walk away, a little further every day. Practice having him stay in one room while you walk into another and stay gone five minutes or even ten. Work your way up gradually.

“Lie down” works the same way as “stay”, but you may have to remind your dog to lie down by touching him on the hindquarters and legs. If he gets up before you’ve released him, have him lie down again. You may have to stay close to him at first. Keep your eye on him; keep your attention focused and expect him to do the same.

Practice having him lie down and wait: release him after thirty seconds and reward him. After a few repetitions at thirty seconds, have him wait forty-five. Repeat the lie down and release sequence between five and ten times each, increasing the wait time by fifteen seconds, then thirty seconds, then a minute at a time until your dog will lie down for twenty minutes or more until released.

When Your Dog Forgets "Come"

He hasn't forgotten; he just thinks you have! If your dog is obstinate and tends to walk in the opposite direction when you ask him to come, put him on a leash. (If your dog thinks the leash automatically means you're taking a walk together, you may have a hard time getting him to wait until you call. Try using a length of rope or clothesline that serves the purpose of keeping you attached but doesn't have the exact same association as the leash.) Walk backwards from your dog, paying out the leash as you go rather than pulling it. When you are six feet away, stop, and say, "Come", or add your dog's name, "Come, Teddy". As you give the command, hold up a food treat where he can see it. Only give the command once, and if your dog comes, reward him right away with treats and praise. If he doesn't come right away, tug gently on the leash and then repeat, "Come". Practice this over and over until your dog realizes that when he comes, he gets presents, at which time he'll start doing his share. Once he comes without physical prompting from you, start working on getting his timing right. First, reward and praise him for obeying at all, then reward him when he comes to you within a few seconds. After working at that level, keep decreasing the time that you expect him to arrive by, so that after some days of consistently working on this command, he comes promptly, then immediately when you call. This means that, when he waits too long, he no longer gets treats and praise: you just try the command again from a new starting point. When he comes right away, he gets the reward.

Sometime after you no longer have to tug on the leash and before you expect him to come immediately when called, you can start working with distances. Gradually increase the distance you walk from your dog before calling him, until at last you can be out of sight (but not hearing) and have him come when you call.

Use mealtimes and playtimes as opportunities to practice the come command in addition to (not instead of) training. Meals are a natural for this one, unless your dog is already underfoot while you're dishing up the kibble. (If he is underfoot, read the section on begging!)

When Your Dog Jumps on People

Dogs who jump up on people can vary from being annoying to being dangerous, depending on the size and frailty of the person jumped on. Dogs tend to jump when people are just entering the house or yard, so a good way to deal with this behavior is to give your dog something else to do. Replacing an undesirable behavior with an appropriate one is simpler than trying to obliterate the bad behavior without putting anything else in its place. In this case, teach your dog to sit and offer a paw when someone enters his territory.

If you have two people, attach the leash to the dog's collar and one person can hold the leash fairly close to the dog's collar. The second person enters the room, the dog tries to jump, but the person holding the leash can prevent the dog from moving forward. If you are the person entering the room, move just out of your dog's reach and tell him to "sit and say hello". The person with the leash can repeat the command while pressing lightly on the dog's hindquarters to physically remind him to sit. When the dog sits, move forward for petting and praise. If he tries to jump up on you again, move away again and repeat the command. Only move forward again once he's seated.

If you're training alone, you can still teach your dog to sit for a greeting by tying the end of the leash to a heavy piece of furniture or a tree, depending on where you're training. Move out his range when he tries to jump on you, and only move in closer to reward him when he sits. Once he sits to greet you on a regular basis (nine times out of ten), start practicing with other members of your family, with friends, and then with people you meet on the street. Practice this in the house (if your dog spends any time at all in the house), outside in the yard, and even while you're on walks together. Like other training steps, plan to spend time every day for at least a couple of weeks or until his performance is rock-solid, then every couple of days, then incorporate refresher training into the time you spend together.

Your Dog, the Beggar

Begging for food is one of the most annoying things a dog can do, and yet it is the easiest to correct. The reason so many dogs beg is that people are inconsistent with them. We want to be good and loving to our dogs and to show them we appreciate them and to make them happy. What better way than by giving them snacks, treats, bones, scraps? The trouble is, once you've fed a dog from your plate (or your hand), once you've given him a little something to nibble in the kitchen, you have taught him that if he hangs around, he could at any time receive treats like manna from heaven.

Aside from being irritating, begging can lead to other problems. For many dogs, snacking on table scraps causes upset stomachs and a lack of appetite for their own food. Many of the foods we eat are addictive, containing things that taste great but are toxic to dogs and people alike (like sugar, salt and fat). Some dogs can't digest "people food", and many will find having something different to eat every night so exciting that they will refuse their regular food in the hopes of eating yours instead.

Animals who love "people food" and have a chance of getting it will beg more than ever. They will get underfoot at the dinner table; they may have hot food spilled on them when they trip you in the kitchen. They may start digging through the trash for scraps when they never did before (although some dogs are born scavengers and will dig through any available trash no matter what you do). They may even get aggressive, demanding food or menacing people who are trying to eat. This is another place where the rules of the pack may be upset by people who really just want to be nice to their dogs. In the pack, the alphas eat first, getting the best part of the kill, and the most of it too. Your dog should not be placed in a position in your pack where he feels he has as much right to your food as you do. You are the alpha: you say when he eats, what he eats and where he eats.

The way to stop begging is to never, ever, ever give your dog unplanned, unearned treats. If you do it now, stop cold turkey. Your dog will be angry, upset even hurt. But if you stick with your plan, the begging will stop. If you deviate even once, you'll have to start all over again because you have committed that grave sin: you have intermittently reinforced your dog

for unwanted behavior. Everyone in the family and anyone who comes to dinner must agree that, no matter how cute or how sad the doggy face, they will not share their food.

Some people find it easier to feed their pets before their own meal, and others find there's less conflict if pet are fed at the same time as people are eating. Feeding your dog after you've eaten is probably unnecessary, as the smell of your food will make him hungry and sad. He may gulp his food if he's been waiting for it awhile and smelling your dinner. There's nothing like finishing your own meal in time to hear your dog throwing up his.

If you're just starting out with your dog, you may find it easier to put him in another room or in the yard while you eat. Again, if you do it consistently, your dog will have less chance of starting begging behavior, and you'll have less chance of caving in to his cute, puppy face. If you like to have your dog in the dining room (or wherever you eat), teach him to lie down by your feet during the meal.

If you want to treat your dog with a daily snack, make sure it's a dog snack (not people-food), and give it to him at the same time every day. That way he has something to look forward to, and you won't feel guilty about all the times you don't give in to begging. Our cat has a saucer with a tablespoon of milk and vitamin mix every night before bed. This was the eventual solution to an ongoing begging problem started by a too-lenient man (who shall remain nameless) in the house, as well as the fact that the Siamese tended to get hungry right before we went to sleep for the night. A once-nightly saucer of milk prevents door-slamming, howling and hours stomping around, while giving him his daily vitamins. He still begs in the kitchen (because that man still sometimes commits the sin of intermittent reinforcement, and I can't train him not to!), but he knows he'll have something before bed, and that knowledge tempers his behavior.

The only down side to a daily snack-treat is that you'd better be ready to keep up your end of the bargain! You'd better always have it on hand, and be ready to dish it out at the usual time. (It doesn't have to be on the dot of seven: dogs, as far as we know, can't tell time. But if you always give him something after your afternoon walk, or before bedtime, stick to the schedule or your dog will be expecting it all the time, thus ruining your plan for having a well-behaved pet. The difference between a random treat and a planned daily snack is huge: if your dog knows he only gets a liver treat after you brush your teeth, he will only expect it then. If he doesn't know when the treat's coming, he'll beg constantly.

Some people want to share snacks with their animals, and there is a technique that works for those strong enough to use it with utter consistency. Some dogs understand the words, "Not dog food" because they never, ever

get a snack after hearing those words. Some dogs can learn that they get a couple of bites and then hear "No more", at which time there won't be any more for them, not a single bite. If you set firm limits, are clear about what you will and will not share, and are absolutely consistent from now until end, amen, your dog might not beg constantly. If you have even a tiny shred of doubt in your ability (and the ability of every person who lives with you) to stick with that plan, your dog might not beg constantly, but don't count on it!

When He's Dragging You Around on the End of the Leash

If a walk with your dog is like driving a chariot in Coliseum races, you owe it to yourself to stop him from pulling on the leash. Your arms shouldn't ache after a walk! You can do this in one of a couple of ways, depending on the size and aggressiveness of your dog.

If your dog is pulling you around like a puppet because he thinks he's the boss of you, assert your position in the pack by focused training. When you put him on the leash, insist that he sit until you release him. Typically, once you've accomplished that, your dog will still bound up and away, headed for the door or gate. Stop in your tracks and let the leash stop him in his. Tell him to sit, and stay (or to stop, if he's learned that one), and walk over to him. If he's still sitting, reward him and release him, but stay where you are. If he's smart, it'll only take a time or two before he realizes that running off without you is going to end with all his force yanking him back when he reaches the end of the leash. Continue this training by letting him go to the end of the leash, telling him to sit and stay, then walking over to him and releasing him. Note that you aren't even trying to actually take a walk yet!

Eventually, he will no longer run all the way to the end of the leash, but will stop himself and look back at you. When he stops pulling forward, shorten the leash a little by winding it around your hand a few times, and continue training as before. Now when he stops himself, he'll be stopping closer and closer to you. Keep reeling him in little by little until you're working with him just a stride or two in front of you (closer than that and you'll either trip over him or have to bring him by your side and teach him to heel). By this time, your dog is learning that if anyone's going to keep some slack in the leash, it's going to have to be him. This is what you want, because now, rather than running to keep up with your dog, he'll be conscious of the fact that he'd better slow down, or he's the one who's going to get yanked around. Once he starts taking responsibility for keeping the leash comfortable for him, you can start walking him.

Once you both start moving forward, he may think that all that other stuff was just a weird game, and go back to hurling himself to the end of the leash. When he does, stop in your tracks. Now you're teaching him that you have a new style of walking, that all the training before this wasn't a fluke, and that from now on, when he rushes forward, he's going to meet with an abrupt stop, because you won't be rushing forward with him; you'll be standing still. Start walking again, and keep walking as long as your dog leaves some slack in the leash. When he forgets and starts to pull you forward, stop again and wait. Do it over and over, until he learns that for you to keep locomoting, he has to hold himself back a little.

It's always best to correct behavioral problems with behavioral interventions (training). Try training first and with dedication, and stick with it for weeks before deciding to try using tools. Once in awhile, you need extra help, and there are as many tools as there are people to sell them to you. If your dog is too strong, too opinionated or just too dumb to train this way (most dogs can be trained this way, but a few need extra help), you can go down to the local pet store and check out your options in new walking gear. Harnesses can be useful, and with slow and careful training, you can teach your dog to wear a harness/collar set-up that prevents him from straining on the leash.

A Few Final Words

Hopefully, this book will help you change your dog's behavior for the better, with minimal fuss and fury. In general, training is about being consistent, persistent and patient. In rare cases, where dogs have become beyond control and are dangerous, you should call in an expert to help and advise you right away. Most of the time, bad habits can be fixed by paying attention to the animal, focused training consistently applied, appropriately, timely rewards and day-in, day-out practice. Along the way, you may also find that in addition to correcting your dog's behavior and making him more fun to be with, you are also benefiting from spending more time (and quality time) with someone you love.