Mastering The Loose Leash

As are several other topics in this eBook, teaching your dog to STOP pulling on his leash is MUCH more important than just having your dog be less annoying while you’re out walking or running with him.

Getting your dog to stop pulling is really about teaching your dog who is in control of the situation. It’s about your dog learning that YOU are the one who sets the rules and HE is the one who’s supposed to follow them.

If you’re a parent, you either know first hand, or you at least have heard how important it is for you to set boundaries for your kids. Kids feel more comfortable when they know exactly how they’re supposed to behave, when they’re supposed to come home, and what they can and can’t get away with.

It seems counterintuitive, but it’s true, and every parenting expert out there will confirm this fact, along with every parenting book.

Well, it’s no different for your dog.

You see, your dog is a distant genetic relative to wolves. And over thousands and thousands of years, wolves have survived by learning how to work together in a pack-type situation; an environment where every member of the pack has their role.

The first of which is to survive.

And the way wolves have learned to survive is by designating a leader of the pack that they all turn to for their source of protection.

I talk a GREAT deal more about this in my 8 week Advanced Dog Training program, and show you the seven different ways you can GENTLY prove to your dog you’re fit to be the leader of his pack… or said differently, the seven ways you’re PROVING to your dog you’re UNFIT to be his leader right now. And how not fixing these mistakes, will resort in having your dog take up the defensive duties that a leader of the pack is supposed to fulfill and start to be aggressive around his territory and anything he thinks is his.

And as it turns out, one of the duties of the leader of the pack is to LEAD. Meaning that the leader is supposed to walk ahead and make sure the territory is safe, and protect against any potential threat.

So guess what you’re doing when you let your dog walk out in front of you?
That’s right, you’re TELLING your dog that you are NOT the leader and that while you’re out on a walk, it is his duty to protect you both. And, this is why so many dogs, while out on a walk, will pull and bark at other people who approach them… because the dog thinks that’s what he’s supposed to do.

So, imagine what it would be if we could show your dog that walks are a privilege that has to be earned. And, that if he doesn’t follow our lead, we remove his privileges from him. Much like you’d take away a child’s ability to watch TV or play video games if they misbehaved. Dogs LOVE going on walks and there are ways that we can remove that privilege of walking from them to keep them from pulling.

Imagine the mental and psychological differences a dog would experience when on a walk where he knew that if he made one mistake the walk was over. That’s a completely different mindset from having to protect you while out on a walk isn’t it?

And what I’ve found is, that once the dog knows that I am the one who’ll do the protecting and that he just has to obey a few rules so that he can join me on our stroll… a dog will give up his aggressive, territorial tendencies not only as we walk amongst other people and their dogs, but also when we come back home.

You’ll notice that after following the guidelines that I’ll lay out for you in this chapter that by getting your dog to stop pulling on his leash, he’ll bark less at other dogs that walk by your home, or neighbor dogs in your backyard… plus you’ll notice your dog be less territorial of your home and be more calm when the doorbell rings. Because the leader of the pack does that stuff, and you’re finally proving yourself worthy of being his leader!

Of course, this depends on the level of self confidence your dog has, and will work best if you also take your dog through my 8 week Advanced Training program, but I’m just letting you know about these things to motivate you into REALLY paying attention and doing this loose leash work because it’s one of the single greatest things you can do for your dog.

Which brings me to the SECOND reason getting your dog to walk on a leash is one of the cornerstones to a well-behaved dog.

Nothing lets him experience more of the world and grow more self confident than being out on a leash interacting with an ever-changing world. You just can't replicate that inside your house; the more your dog can experience in a positive way, the happier and more self confident he’ll be on the whole, and walking on a loose leash is a HUGE part of that process.

So with that out of the way, let me give you a quick outline of what the process for teaching your dog to stop pulling on his leash looks like:
You MUST Know Why Your Dog Pulls

Before I give you the training drill that completely cures your dog of pulling on his leash in less than a week, no matter how bad a puller your dog is, you need to understand another mindset your dog has for why he’s pulling.

We’ve already talked about the first mindset which is that of a leader… but there’s a second one. And it’s the reason behind why your dog will continue to choke himself and put up with having his leash popped, or even put up with being stabbed by a prong collar.

After all, doesn’t it seem weird that a dog would willingly put himself through pain to pull on his leash? Why wouldn’t he just ease off and enjoy the walk?

Here’s why dogs do this, and why I’m not a big fan of using force to fix leash pulling anymore.

Because from your dog’s point of view, walks are very often the most rewarding thing in the world. Just taking one step forward is HIGHLY rewarding to a dog. If you take your dog for walks often, you already know this, but might not have realized it before. Just think about how your dog reacts when you grab his leash. For many dogs it’s more exciting then when you go to feed them.

So because it’s such a highly rewarding behavior, we run into a problem. Whatever we do right before our dog takes a step is going to automatically be rewarded… because the walking will self reinforce what we do.

If we are ALWAYS pulling, the dog learns that putting up with the pulling gets rewarded by walking. I bet you never realized that by pulling you were rewarding your dog, and thus, making it even more likely for him to pull the next time, did you?

So by understanding this mindset, we quickly realize that the only way to stop the pulling is, we have to stop REWARDING the behavior of pulling. And, since the reward is walking forward, it’s the allowing of our dog to walk forward that we have to stop. This means that, from this day forward, if you stop walking every time your dog’s leash goes tight, and continue walking when the leash goes slack you should be able to fix his problem. (And I’ve never run into a case yet that this didn’t fix.)

In effect, we change the behavior from “if you pull all the time I’ll reward you with walking” into “as long as the leash has slack in it you can keep walking, but if it goes tight the walk is over!”

Another simplified way to think about training your dog to walk on a leash without pulling is to pretend that the ONLY thing your dog is paying attention to is the
tension on his leash. Pretend he’s not listening to you, pretend he’s not watching you and just have the mindset that your only method of communication is via how much tension is on his leash.

Because TRUTHFULLY, that’s all your dog really is paying any attention to anyway.

The Loose Leash Training Process:
1. Get a Head Halter to more easily control your dog
2. Have a 6-ft. leash
3. Have a HI-value reward for your dog on hand
4. Find a park or empty street with low distractions to practice at
5. Place Hi-Value Reward 15-ft. in front of dog
6. Walk towards reward
7. Take one step back every time leash goes tight
8. Resume walking towards item when leash slackens
9. Let dog have reward when he reaches it on a loose leash
10. Repeat for 4-7 days

Why I Recommend Using a Head Halter

If you’re looking for the most gentle way to control even the largest of dogs and keep them from pulling, in a way that doesn’t choke him and doesn’t hurt him, you’ll want to use a head halter.

It is a law of nature that wherever the head is pointed is where the animal will go. And this concept controls even the largest of animals… heck, it was invented for horses in the first place, and works off the same concept.

If your dog pulls forward, with a head halter his head is automatically pulled to the side, which is uncomfortable, and teaches dogs that the only way to avoid this annoying sideways pulling action is to stop pulling. It’s a great quick fix.

We stock these head halters in our warehouse and if you’d like to buy one you can order one by clicking here.

These head halters are NOT muzzles, they still let the dog fully open his mouth, they are purely for preventing leash pulling. In fact, I can play fetch with my dog while he wears his.

When you get your head halter you’ll have to probably spend a few days getting your dog used to the device. The worse of a puller your dog is, the more of a fit he’ll throw for putting it on him. This is the same thing that happens with many dogs when they put a collar on for the first time or wear a leash for the first time. They spend a few days, hours or minutes throwing a fit, and then they get used to it.
If you’d like your dog to get more used to it, what I’d recommend is taking two days where several times you put the halter on your dog and then do something your dog REALLY loves for five minutes, then remove the halter when you’re done doing that fun thing.

To get my dog used to the halter, I made him put it on right before we went to the park to play fetch for two days. My dog loves playing fetch so much that even though he doesn’t enjoy wearing the halter, he actually started getting excited when I’d go to put it on him, because he knew something fun was about to happen. Using this strategy will shorten the time it takes you to get your dog used to the halter.

**The Loose Leash Training Exercise**

Once your dog is wearing his leash, place something he REALLY, REALLY loves about 15 feet out in front of him.

Hold his leash so that he can only have about six inches of slack, and creep towards the reward at a SUPER slow pace… like you’re stalking the item.

Your dog WILL very quickly start to pull, maybe even before you take your first step. It is critical that you INSTANTLY stop the second that leash goes tight. This is why I recommend walking at a very slow pace when you start off, because you’re instantly able to stop rewarding your dog by stopping.

If you tried doing this at a normal walking pace, it might catch you off-guard and take you 2-3 steps to stop, which doesn’t send as clear a message to your dog about the exact thing he did wrong. The closer you can get your stopping to match with the instant your dog puts ANY tension on his leash, the better.

Once you’re stopped I want you simply wait. Wait for your dog to look at you, or make some form of movement where the leash goes slack. He won’t get it at first, but after a few days he’ll realize that if he wants to go forward again he needs to quickly back up and put some slack back in his leash.

You may have to sit there for a full minute or two, that’s PERFECTLY ok.

However long it takes, wait that long, and then be sure to resume walking the instant there is slack back in the leash. This helps tell the dog that slack in the leash is rewarded by moving forward. Wait too long to start walking when he puts slack back in the leash and your progress will be slower.

It is highly likely that during the first day your dog will not be able to take more than one or two steps without pulling again. This is fine, and completely normal. Just keep stopping every time the leash is tight and creeping slowly forward.
when the leash is loose until your dog has crossed the 15 feet of space and reached his reward.

Keep in mind that that reward could be a bowl of food, special treats, cheese, or even toys. Personally, my dog wouldn’t do this drill for food. Walking was more rewarding then food, making food a worthless reward. However, by placing my dog’s tennis ball out in front of him, and when we reached the tennis ball quickly unhooking his leash and throwing the ball for him, we were able to teach him that if he wanted to play ball (his equivalent to doggy crack), we’d get there faster if he didn’t pull.

It took four days to teach him this concept, with every day moving the reward further and further away, but at four days it clicked, and I’ve never had to work on getting him to stop pulling since.

It is CRUCIAL for you to realize that you need to find a reward that your dog DOES want more than walking and use that as a reward in this process.

Helpful Tip: I ended up creating my own little variation of this technique that I call the ‘Creeping Blind Man’. I came up with this technique because I realized that I was letting my dog get away with too much. I’d see him about to start pulling on his leash during these drills and say, “well, he didn’t pull too hard, I’ll give him another try”. If you ever catch yourself doing this, you’re doing the training a disservice and you’ll likely never have a dog that walks without pulling. You need to be a true hard ass here. You have to be consistent, and you HAVE to stop EVERY time there is tension on your dog’s leash.

And that’s why I recommend the ‘Creeping Blind Man Technique’. With this technique, you do all the same things as I outlined above, only you do them with YOUR eyes closed.

Why would I suggest for you to close your eyes? Because it forces you to only communicate through the leash. You simply stop the second you feel ANY slight tension on the leash, and you don’t let your eyes trick you into giving your dog a break, you only go off of tension.

It’ll save you a lot of time, and your dog will learn much faster. Just make sure you do this in an open field where you won’t walk into anything.

When your dog has completely stopped pulling during this creeping exercise, it’s time to teach your dog how to do what I call, “matching your speed”.

We want to teach your dog how to pay attention to our speed so that even if we slow down quickly or speed up quickly the leash remains slack. To do this,
simply alter the creeping game to be a game of sprinting forward, then slowing
down, then walking faster towards the rewarding object, instead of just one
steady speed.

This will expose your dog to being in the thrill of a run, yet still realizing that when
you slow down he needs to come back down with you.

If you skip this drill, you'll notice that when you encounter stimulating things in
your environment, like other dogs or bicycles riding by, your dog will tend to get
distracted and forget that he’s still on his leash and NOT supposed to be pulling.

Don’t Make This Mistake:

The most common mistake that people make when they try this exercise
is they break the rule of “Never Take Another Step in Your Life With a
Tight Leash.” And, they break this rule by walking their dog at a place like
a park where once the dog starts to mentally give up (normally within the
first five minutes) the owner gets stuck, still being too far away from home
or their car.

This causes them to have to keep the dog on the leash as they go home,
and sets the dog up for failure. The dog, at this point, is usually mentally
fried from having to resist something that’s been so natural until now, and
isn’t used to the mental strain.

So, I like to suggest to people to make sure you train your dog in a place
that when you see your dog start to quit on his training, you can unhook
him and tell him to go in your house, or go in the car.

When your dog quits, don’t keep trying to train him, it'll be
counterproductive.

If you'll follow this formula over the next week by spending just 5-15 minutes a
day going through this sequence of drills, your dog will NOT be a puller seven
days from today.