

What your dog sees and hears can hurt or help your training and communications

Believe it or not, your body is a great communication tool for training your dog. The way you stand, the way you move, as well as your stride can “tell” your dog to come closer, move away, turn or leave the scene.

Dogs communicate with one another using their bodies, vocalizations and some marking behaviors, so it is easy to understand that our companion dogs are also trying to communicate with us in the only ways they know how. Unfortunately, for all their effort to “explain” themselves, no one gave our dogs the Canine-Human Language Conversion Dictionary, and a lot of information is lost in the translation from species to species.

Some of the most important pieces to loose leash walking are how you hold your leash, how you stand, and how you present food rewards. Dogs, watch our shoulders (like they watch the shoulders of fellow canines) as a clue to which direction we would like them to go.

Facing forward, with the dog's shoulders aligned with our legs at one side or the other, tells the dog you are going to move forward. Clear enough, but if you have the dog on your left side, and your food reward in your right hand, as you lean over to feed the dog, your shoulders now tell him to turn left, or at least step away from you. It's no wonder dogs choose to be out in front all the time; they are confused by all of our mixed messages.

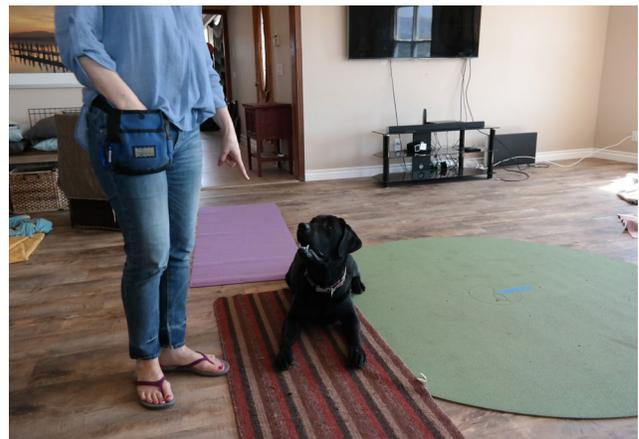
If you think that's confusing, just think what it must be like for the dog when we face them while calling them to us! We are “telling” them to go

away with our shoulders, but calling them with our voices! Way weird!

To help your dog understand what it is you would like them to do, practice standing tall with your leash in the hand opposite of the dog, then drape your arm across your midline area. That will leave the hand closest to the dog free to feed the food reward right in line with your leg- exactly where you want the dog to be when walking with you.

It will also help your dog if you only take one step at a time, feed, take another step, feed, and so on. If your dog pulls on leash like he is a sled dog that means his reinforcement history is weighted very heavily toward pulling. And, since pulling on leash has worked very well in the past, it will take a dedicated effort to no longer move forward if your dog is pulling.

Instead, teach your dog that he will be highly reinforced for staying with you which sometimes means going, one step at a time, sometimes it will mean walking backwards, and sometimes it will mean teaching your dog to just stand still with you.



Use the S.T.O.P. program if your dog pulls:

Stop when your dog pulls

Take time to assess why he is pulling and what you should do

Opt for a different route if going forward in the same direction is too difficult

Pay off with lots of rewards when he gets it right!

Your voice is a powerful thing to waste

Most dogs that are having a tough time walking nicely on leash fall into the categories of loving to hear your voice, or having learned to ignore it over time. Going forward, it's important that you learn to use your voice at the right time so you can really help your dog learn English as a 2nd language.

The dogs that love the sound of our voices do so because it is often connected with things that dogs enjoy most, such as, "Want a cookie?"

Those that have learned to ignore us have probably heard the same old thing, over and over again, "Rex, Rex, Rex, heel, right here. Heel, heel, heel Rex!" All the while Rex is busy pulling to the nearest dog park to hook up with his buddies and wondering what the heck you are babbling about back there at the other end of the leash.

Whichever category your dog falls into, rest assured your voice has meaning him, so be sure to use it wisely.

Luckily it's a pretty simple formula:

If you want your dog to continue to do something, be sure to talk to him/her. Of course, this is also true of the things that you might not like, such as pulling on leash. If you are talking to him while he is pulling, you are pretty much telling your dog to keep doing what he is doing, "I'm right behind

you!" Even using your dog's name when he is doing something you don't want repeated can reinforce that very behavior!

On the flip side, if you don't want your dog to do something, be silent. And, like talking, this can also have its downside, such as when your dog has done something wonderful and you don't communicate that to him. If a behavior doesn't get reinforced, your dog is likely to "skip" that one for behaviors that do work to get attention.

To sum it all up: Learn to watch for opportunities that you can reward with your voice, and think about what you might be reinforcing if you are talking to your dog.

