

How to Leash Train a Dog | MeatEater Hunting

Tony J. Peterson

Last summer, while running a familiar route near my house I noticed a couple walking [a black Lab](#). They were headed my way, so I crossed the street to run past them. I don't know what the dog saw or heard that caught its attention, but when that Lab took off the woman holding the leash buckled down for a split second before she caught air.

I had never seen someone go full Superman from a dog, but she did. She obviously lost her grip on the leash and from the looks of it, a little bit of her will to live. If you spend any time in community parks, at softball tournaments, or anywhere outside where people gather, it's not uncommon to see plenty of examples of folks who just don't have a handle on their dogs leash-wise.

Mostly, the people I see who don't have control are the ones who lean against their dogs' pulling as hard as they can. They often have a frustrated look on their face and just-under-their-breath cussing emanating from their mouths.

Something that should be so simple—walking a dog on a leash—often isn't. It is, however, pretty easy to teach and is a requirement for anyone who wants a well-behaved dog. If you own a [sporting or working breed](#), it's probably even more of a necessity.

You Pull, They Pull

Jennifer Broome owns [QK Dogs](#), based out of Canterbury, Connecticut. Broome is an extremely accomplished dog trainer, as well as an avid upland hunter, who admits that leash training is one of her strengths. This comes not only from her experience working with all types of dog breeds, but horses as well.

“The idea behind leash training dogs,” Broome said, “is just like it is with horses. You have to teach them to earn the release from the pressure. You don't give them a choice but to walk with you, and if they want to release the pressure, they have to stick with you at your pace.”

This seems intuitive enough, but most people only know the experience of a dog pulling hard on a leash. It causes them to wrap the leash tighter around their wrist and pull harder in response. You can guess what this signals to the dog—the negative feedback loop is no good for us or our dogs. It's far better to work with them to understand how to walk with us.

Pull A 180 On Them

“When I’m teaching a dog to walk on a leash, I watch the dog,” Broome said. “As soon as it gets out ahead of me, I turn 180 degrees, tug on the leash, and start walking the new direction. It often only takes a little bit of this before they naturally fall back [into the heel position](#).”

This is where you want them, right at your side and matching your pace. In this way, the leash should be hanging with a droop in it, because it’s no longer tight. Some people teach this with [treat training](#), mostly to get a young dog to always pay attention to them and look them in the eyes, but it’s unnecessary.

Broome’s method of turning and tugging the moment the dog gets out ahead teaches them to be aware of where they are at when you’re walking. You can almost look at it like teaching them to ride in a metaphorical sidecar hanging off your hip. This is best accomplished, at first, with as little distraction as possible. You want the dog tuned into you and not other people, cars, animals, or whatever.

Other Options

You might be thinking, well I tried a similar approach and my dog didn’t get it. Now I’m going to buy a harness or some type of leader designed to force a dog not to pull. This is just a way to mask the problem instead of fixing it.

There are [products out there for dogs](#), like DeadFowl Trainer dummies, that train dogs to elicit certain behaviors. But a harness or a leader that forces a dog to walk a certain way isn’t one of them. A better bet is to address the problem and fix it through training that allows the dog to make a better choice.

This is what Broome’s method of leash training does. It also should be noted that the earlier in a dog’s life you work on this, the more automatic it becomes. It will take some work if you have a high-drive dog that has been a hard puller for four years. On the other hand, a six-month-old pup will pick this up pretty quickly because they haven’t had time to solidify all of their bad habits.

If you have a new pup on the way or you find yourself embarrassed to take your current dog for a walk, the solution to lousy leash behavior is straightforward. It just takes a little work.