



Top 10 Leadership Qualities For Dog Owners

"You do not lead by hitting people over the head - that's assault, not leadership."

Dwight David Eisenhower

Leadership is one of the most often misunderstood aspects of dog ownership. Often people think in terms of 'dominance', 'alpha' or 'top dog' status. I profess that if you need to dominate something or someone in order to establish control then you ultimately had no control in the first place. The hallmark of a great leader is the ability to control without force. Great leaders inspire people to follow them rather than menace people into obeying them.

Dominance based on intimidation and fear tactics may gain momentary subservient capitulation in much the same way as a man with a gun held to his head would comply with his captor's wishes. Eventually the man's fear may be overcome and a violent result is likely, the man may also be emotionally scarred for life. Additionally, dominance training methods in dogs can result in permanent damage to your dogs psyche or physical injury to the dog, especially when applied incorrectly.

It is far better and more productive to teach your dog to comply with your wishes willingly, even enthusiastically. However, this is contingent upon establishing a devotional bond based on mutual respect and trust.

It is not enough to want to be a leader to your dog; you need to act like a leader. This is where many people falter. Below are some tips to get you started on the path to good leadership:



TOP TEN LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

1. Leaders Control Resources

- i) **Food is a resource** - do not give it away freely use it as rewards for desired behaviour or as a source of environmental enrichment (i.e. make your dog work for it from a Kong or Treat Ball). Do not leave food lying around for your dog to if and when he feels like it. This puts him in control of the most important resource and is likely to turn him into a finicky eater at best.



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- ii) **Toys are a resource** – do not leave interactive toys (balls, tug ropes etc) hanging around, these are your toys that you allow your dog to play with when you initiate play. You can allow your dog to have unrestricted access to toys that you do not play with (Kongs, Chew Toys etc).
- iii) **Attention is a resource** – do not allow your dog to order you into giving him attention. Make him earn your attention. Ignore attention seeking behaviours and initiate contact on your terms.
- iv) **Access to other dogs is a resource** – do not allow your dog immediate and indiscriminate access to other dogs. If he pulls on lead to get to another dog do not allow him to get there!
- v) Anything your dog loves is a resource – some dogs adore car rides, therefore car rides become a resource – some dogs adore trips to the vet, others baths etc. Be sure to control what your dog holds dear.

2. Leaders Control Sleeping and Resting Places

If you allow your dog on the furniture and/or bed ensure that access to this important resource is controlled by you. Do not allow your dog on the couch or bed until he has asked politely (perhaps you can request a 'Sit') and has been granted permission. It is also important that your dog move over or get off the furniture immediately when requested.

3. Leaders Control Games

Games must have rules! You should initiate most games or at least request a couple of commands ('Sit', 'Drop', 'Roll Over') before commencing play. You decide when the game ends. If your dog will not 'Give' or 'Out' a tug toy or ball, cease playing immediately and teach your dog to 'Give'. If his teeth touch your hand during a game of tug end the game immediately.

4. Leaders Have the Right to Handle the Dog

As a leader you should have the right to handle your dog's body anywhere, whether for grooming or petting, without incident. If your dog snaps, growls or otherwise objects to being handled seek help from a trainer or behaviourist immediately. If you accidentally hurt your dog he should yelp, not growl snap or bite.

5. Leaders Control Space

Dogs understand the importance of personal space, especially herding breeds. Most canine communication signals are about increasing or decreasing personal space. Do not allow your dog to control the space around you. Insist that your dog 'give way' to you by moving out of your way when you are going through a narrow space such as a hallway or door. Never step over your dog or walk around, to do this is to concede space to your dog. If your dog moves into your seat on the couch when you go to the kitchen for a drink, insist that he move out of your spot upon your return.

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6. Leaders Control Walks

When you are out walking with your dog and he pulls on lead if you follow behind him you are obeying him. He learns that he commands and you follow. In reality, this is your walk that you have allowed your dog to accompany you on, therefore you should control speed, direction and duration. If you are experiencing trouble walking your dog seek help with a trainer.

7. Leaders Set their Dogs Up for Success

A good leader will not issue a command that he/she knows will not be obeyed or cannot be enforced. To do so teaches your dog that commands are optional and that non-compliance yields rewards. For example, you ask your dog to 'Come' and he ignores you. He learns that not only is 'Come' optional but that you cannot enforce it and gets to remain at large. Good leaders set their dogs up for success by teaching them to 'Come' by attaching a long line, that way if he refuses to 'Come' the command can be enforced by gently reeling him in. Similarly with jumping up, a dog cannot jump up if his lead is attached and you are standing on the lead so that he can sit or stand comfortably but not jump up. Manage a problem until you can train an alternative.

8. Good Leaders are Always Confident, Calm and Emotionally Consistent

Good leaders do not need to bellow commands or get angry nor do they beg or grovel to their dog. They remain confident, calm and emotionally consistent at all times. They enforce commands with quiet insistence and do not give up until the command has been complied with. They are resolute in their requirements and adhere strictly to them. They have rules and boundaries that are clear and consistent. Their body language and everything about them oozes confidence to their dog.

9. Good Leaders are Good Communicators and Teachers

They understand that dogs need to be taught in order to learn. They willingly and patiently train their dogs. They strive continually for improvements in communication because they know that communication is the cornerstone of leadership. In order to become a good teacher it is necessary not to rest on one's laurels, even teachers need to learn. Constantly striving for improvement makes for better teachers!

10. Good Leaders Recognise Stress and React Appropriately

Because they are so good at communicating with their dog, good leaders learn to recognise signs of stress in their dog and react appropriately. They do not coddle or soothe a frightened dog because to do so would reinforce the dog's fear. They do not get angry or impatient with the dog because to do so would increase stress upon the dog. Rather, they support or distract the dog in times of stress.

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They learn to anticipate stressful situations for their dog and either avoid them or train the dog to cope well with them.

If you are having trouble becoming a good leader to your dog, contact us or enrol in one of classes today!



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