

When dog walking is a tug of war

Written by By Sam Mazzota King Syndicate
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DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My dog Trey is a 3-year-old mixed breed, mostly Lab, who pulls at his leash every time we go out for a walk. I don't want to use a choke collar, because it seems painful and counterproductive to punish him every time he tries to pull ahead. How can I get Trey to walk next to me and not tug all the time? — Bill in New Orleans

DEAR BILL: Dogs love being outside and exploring. That's a big reason why Trey is tugging at his leash — he wants to run and explore everything in the world. But that's not possible in the city. And for the sake of your leash-holding arm, getting Trey to relax is a big deal.

You're probably saying, "Oh, this is where Sam tells us to reinforce basic obedience training." And you're right. It's important for Trey to follow your commands, especially if he pulls the leash out of your hand. But that's just one element to leash training a dog.

When you pull on the leash to slow Trey down, he will automatically pull in the opposite direction. This is a reflex action. The more you pull, the more they dig in.

So instead, try a misdirection-reward strategy. Give the command "heel" and have Trey walk calmly beside you, with the leash slack. Whenever he gets ahead of you (before the tug of war starts), stop and change direction. He'll turn to go in the direction you're heading, and when he does, give him lots of praise and maybe (at first) a little treat. Do this every time he tries to move ahead of you.

If Trey tends to pull really hard, change from a collar and leash to a chest harness. This prevents injury and can make it easier to control him.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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