

Bringing an old dog to heel

Written by By Sam Mazzota King Syndicate
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DEAR PAW'S CORNER: After my aunt passed away, I gladly agreed to take in her dog, "Hunter," a rather squat, obese Beagle. He's a happy old dog of about 9 years, but my aunt gave him little to no training other than housetraining. That makes walking him — something the vet recommended I do twice a day, in addition to a diet — a chore.

Hunter will walk a few steps, then sit down and refuse to budge. When he does feel like walking, he either tugs the leash forward or lags behind. How can I correct this? — James T., Plano, Texas

DEAR JAMES: Hunter is not used to the new lifestyle yet, and he's reacting in a predictable way. He's also out of shape and probably more stressed than you think. The first thing I prescribe is patience. The second thing I'd prescribe is persistence.

You'll want to gradually lengthen his walks. Each day, always at the same time, put Hunter on his leash and start the walk. As soon as Hunter begins to lag or tug forward, stop walking, adjust the distance so that he's standing or sitting next to you, and start again, saying, "Heel" as you step forward.

When he sits and won't budge, encourage him to go a few more steps by giving him a very small treat. Then turn around and go home. On your next walk, repeat this encouragement, going just a little farther. See what I'm getting at? Make each walk just a tiny bit farther.

As Hunter loses weight, learns to trust you, and gains confidence on the leash, he will eventually pull you along. Time, patience and consistency will do the trick.

Readers, how did you train an older dog? Tell me about it at ask@pawscorner.com.

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