“We recommend this invaluable little booklet to pet owners and working dog owners alike.”

—Michelle Givens, Lighthouse Kennels

Patricia B. McConnell, Ph.D.

Patricia McConnell, Ph.D. is a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist who has consulted with cat and dog lovers for over twenty years. Her nationally syndicated radio show, Wisconsin Public Radio’s Calling All Pets, plays in over 90 cities nationwide; she is the behavior columnist for Bark magazine (“the New Yorker of Dog Magazines”) and a Consulting Editor for the Journal of Comparative Psychology. She is also Adjunct Associate Professor in Zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, teaching “The Biology and Philosophy of Human/Animal Relationships.” Dr. McConnell is a much sought after speaker and seminar presenter, and the author of ten books and booklets on training and behavioral problems, as well as the critically acclaimed book The Other End of the Leash: Why We Do What We Do Around Dogs and For the Love of a Dog: Understanding Emotion in You and Your Best Friend.

Learn how to love your dog without spoiling him, and how to be the benevolent leader that every dog needs. The methods in this booklet are designed to teach your dog that he can get what he wants by being patient and polite, not by being pushy and demanding. The exercises, based on the way dogs communicate with each other, are fun and easy for both you and your dog. Add this little booklet to your library and your dog will thank you for it.

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How to be the Leader of the Pack
. . . and Have Your Dog Love You for it!
How to be the
LEADER OF THE PACK
…and Have Your Dog Love You For It!

by Patricia B. McConnell, Ph.D.

I know you love your dog. But if you love your dog you will do him no favors by catering to him, continually cooing over him or providing him with no boundaries. Dogs need to feel secure to be truly happy; that means they need to feel secure that you will be the leader, and that they can count on you to take charge. But being the “leader” is often misunderstood. It doesn’t mean that you forcibly dominate your dog. Rather, leadership is more of a mental quality, in which you set boundaries without intimidation. Good parents and good teachers know that children need kind and benevolent direction, and good dog trainers know that dogs need the same thing. Like children, all dogs need love, but there’s a big difference between being loved and being spoiled. It will do your dog no good to live in a house where she can get anything that she wants by being pushy and demanding. If you are comfortable being a benevolent leader, your dog can relax, and will love you all the more for it.

The following suggestions are an effective and humane way to set boundaries without intimidation and to love your dog without spoiling him. Keep in mind that love is not related to social status, and that most dogs feel happier when they know that they are not responsible for making all the difficult decisions that leaders have to make. Dogs behave as though they prefer knowing that you are in charge, and often seem much happier when they understand that they can count on you to take care of things. Don’t think of the steps below as a prescription for being cold or unloving to your dog, but rather as a way of helping your dog learn to get what she wants by being patient and polite, rather than being pushy or demanding.
The suggestions below are NOT practices that you must follow every second of every day, no matter how your dog behaves. There are plenty of times I pet one of my dogs when he comes up just to say hello. Who wants a dog if you can’t ever pet him just for fun? But you’ll do your dog no good if you cater to him like a geisha girl waiting on her master. How strictly you follow the program below depends on your dog’s behavior. If your pup seems perfect, you can follow some of these steps some of the time (being aware of them might help keep her that way!) If Ginger gave you a dirty look over her rawhide, then react by following some of these guidelines for leadership over the next couple of hours. If, on the other hand, Spot just bit you, follow the ideas below to the letter for at least a month. (And totally ignore him for the first two days—don’t speak to or look at him, even while feeding or letting him out.) Great trainers act like thermostats—easing up when a dog is being polite, becoming a little more “hard to get” when the dog begins to be demanding or too focused on pack hierarchy. No matter how great your dog is, always be careful about catering to him and indirectly forcing him into the lead. It’s lonely at the top, so give your dog a break and take over. He’ll love you for it, and that’s what you want, isn’t it?

I. PETTING

I think we pet our dogs for at least two reasons: it feels really good to us (and is indeed good for us; it lowers our blood pressure and heart rate), and it’s a way to tell our dogs how much we love them. You’d think this would work well, because so many dogs seem to love being petted as much as we love to pet them. When a dog comes up to you, pushes into your space and insists in some way that you pet her, she’s not necessarily being sweet, loving or cute. She’s demanding that you pet her. If you respond, you are teaching your dog that she can insist that you cater to her.