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How to be the  
**Leader of the Pack**  
... and Have Your Dog Love You for it!

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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**

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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.