

TO PULL OR NOT TO PULL

Sean Howard, PMCT, CPDT-KA, runs Up with Pup in Toronto.

Almost every dog owner has had to deal with a dog that pulls on leash. It's one of the most common complaints. But before we start, I think it's important to frame how we think about walking our dogs.

Whose walk is it?

I don't get up at 5:30 a.m. in the dead of winter because I yearn to take a brisk and shivering walk at first light. I do this for my dog. This is her walk, not mine.

When it's my dog's walk – that is, when we aren't on an errand to a specific destination – I have a single and simple rule: no pulling. After that, just about anything goes. I don't care if she is in front of me, behind me, or if she wants to spend the entire walk going in a circle. I just want to drink my coffee and enjoy a nice walk. What I don't want is to be wearing my coffee or trying to fish my phone out of a snow bank.

There is no cue to a polite, no-pulling walk. This is simply how we walk together.

What I love about this walk is that as the ape, I learn to listen to my dog. And it gives her a better way to tell me she is really, really interested in checking something out. After all, if it's really her walk, why should I be the one to set the agenda?

This is about learning how to have an enjoyable walk together. She gets to explore her world, and you get to drink your coffee and not have your arm yanked out of its socket.

The Right Equipment

Start by getting your dog fitted for a front-clip harness. A front-clip harness will cut the strength of any pulling by over 50%, if not 90%. It works by

turning your dog's shoulders every time they start to pull. By putting her shoulders out of alignment with her hips, your dog is unable to bring her full strength to bear. I recommend three brands of front clip harnesses: the Freedom (my favourite and shown below), the SENSE-ation, and the Easy Walk.



Next, we need to get our hands off the leash. As owners, we are always tugging, pulling, lifting, tightening, and manipulating the leash. One moment our leash is 6 feet long and the next our dog is in a stranglehold as we try to avoid some obstacle. Our dog has no idea how far away from us she can drift before she finds herself in a "pulling" state.

There's an even better reason to not be holding the leash. Every time our dog pulls and causes our arm to extend even a few inches, our dog is reinforced



for pulling. She is learning that pulling works to get her closer to the items she wants!

You can buy leashes that go around your waist and connect back to themselves. You can also clip a carabiner to the end of your leash, allowing you to snap your leash to your belt (as shown below left). A lower center of gravity also means less risk of shoulder/back injury.

Be sure that the carabiner you purchase is rated to handle 200 pounds of pressure or more.

The basics of the no-pull walk

So how do we teach our dog this no-pull walk? We start by taking away the rewards for pulling by not holding the leash in our hands (see The Right Equipment).

Next we teach our dog that pulling no longer gets them what they want.

Pulling = stop

Putting slack on the leash = move towards what she wants

The second our dog lunges after something, we stop. We don't say a thing. We just come to a full stop and wait for her to offer something that puts slack on the leash. She might sit and cause the leash to droop or she might turn and come back to you.

The second your dog puts slack on the leash, mark it with a "yes!" and then run towards whatever she was interested in (if it is safe to do so!). This is called using a functional reward – something in the environment she really wants to check out.

In the event you don't want to move towards the thing she wanted – because it's a pile of vomit, say – you still mark the slack with a "yes!" but now you bring her back to you for a treat and then turn and move in a new direction. I find that in most cases you can reliably use rewards from your environment.

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BITS & BITES

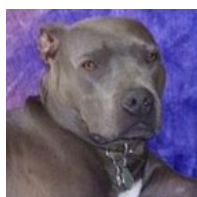
Simply click on a summary to be whisked away to the internet page where you can read the full story.



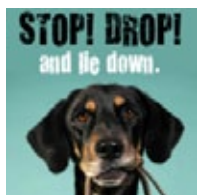
Check out the Speaking of Dogs Baskets and Gifts table at Dog Days of Scugog on July 19th and 20th!



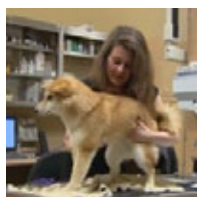
Toronto Police Service is investigating the theft of a six-month-old black Cane Corso dog.



We like to think that all rescues are legitimate and properly look after the animals in their care. However, not all animal rescues are creating equal. Find out the warning signs of a bad rescue.



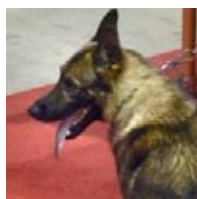
These tips may help you catch a runaway dog. Tip #1, fight your instincts and don't give chase!



A Calgary vet suspects Vitalife Duck Tenders damaged a Yorkshire terrier's kidneys, killing him.



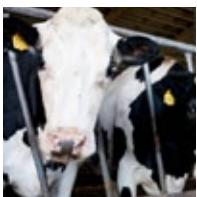
Oshawa is set to follow the leads established by Toronto, Pickering, Vaughan, and Mississauga by banning the sale of dogs and cats in pet stores. Stores will instead be encouraged to work with rescue to help homeless pets find their forever homes.



Danny, the canine partner of slain RCMP Constable Dave Ross, will be returning to active duty once a suitable partner has been found.



Cats and coffee – what a combination! The cat café craze is set to arrive in Toronto this fall!

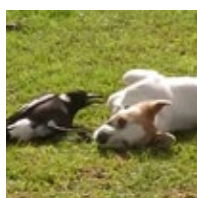


Barbara Cartwright, CEO of the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, recently appeared on Anna Maria Tremonti's CBC Radio 1 show The Current. She spoke about toughening up animal cruelty laws in the wake of the abuse uncovered at Chilliwack Cattle Sales Farm.

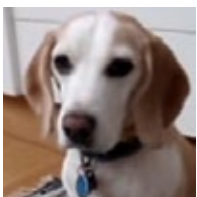
VIDEO BITS AND BITES



Fences in High Park's off-leash area are being cut, leading to dogs being injured on sharp metal edges.



A dog and a magpie sound like odd companions, but these two seem to enjoy each other's company!



Giving a pet medication is rarely an easy task, especially when it involves a sensitive area, such as the ears. This video shows how positive reinforcement can make giving ear medicine a painless procedure – just both dog and owner!

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It's really a very simple protocol. Dog pulls, and you stop. Your dog actively does something to put slack on the leash, and you mark this with a "yes!" and then move towards the item of interest. Just watch to make sure your dog has actively put slack on the leash. As apes, we have a tendency to get impatient and lean forward, putting the slack on the leash ourselves.

This will mean a lot of stopping at first, but if you are consistent, your dog will learn very quickly that pulling is not an effective strategy to get to what she wants. Pulling means she has to stop, wait, and offer a behaviour that puts slack on the leash.

For dogs that don't have a lot of impulse control (most younger dogs!), start out rewarding slack by running all the way to the item of interest. Teach them that putting slack on the leash gets them to the item they were so excited about, such as running all the way to the park.

You should start to see a pretty significant drop in pulling within the first few sessions. The only cases where I don't have quick results are when the dog is getting overly frustrated. To that point, don't try to extinguish ALL leash-yanking on the very first walk. Ignore the soft tugs at first and start with the hardest yanks. Once the worst pulls are gone, you can then eliminate the medium tugs and so on.

Some people go so far as to eliminate all tightening of the leash. That's up to you. I don't eliminate the softest tugs. I teach my dog that a very soft tightening on the leash is how she can communicate with me to let me know that she is interested in something. And then I get ready to have an adventure and see new parts of my city.



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