

# Sparky, Don't Pull on the Leash!

*By Terry Ryan*

I believe the average pet and person need two different ways to walk together connected by a leash. A precise, very close walking position is called "Heel Position" and is good for short distances. When a dog is in heel position he's walking along with you and paying attention. He's as close as possible to your leg without touching. This is an appropriate exercise in dangerous areas, when there is a crowded sidewalk or any time you need strict control. At other times, if appropriate, your dog should be allowed to relax a little sniff and explore--just be a dog. It makes no difference which side of the owner the dog is on. The dog can be slightly ahead or behind. You have minimal rules for appropriate behavior except: Don't Pull on the Leash!

There are many different ways to teach a dog not to pull the leash. Here's one easy way that's especially good for puppies, but it's effective with all dogs in varying degrees. The dog learns all by himself that pulling on the leash gets him - NOWHERE!

If Sparky forges ahead and creates tension on the leash, stop. She'll soon learn that she's not going anywhere if the leash is tight. Just act as if she was tied to a post - you're the post. Don't say or do anything. If you don't follow her, Sparky will eventually slacken the leash--probably to look around and see what's wrong. That eye contact is your "ON" button! That's when the post comes to life - you are the most interesting thing on the walk☐smile, tell her she's great and continue walking.

You can help Sparky release the tension by calling her name. When she looks up at you, the leash will slacken. Your "ON" button has been pushed. Change directions slightly and enthusiastically encourage Sparky to walk with you. If she's distracted, try jiggling the leash to put her a bit off balance. When Sparky moves into a balanced position, she will probably look at you. It's best to make Sparky take the responsibility to check in with eye contact. If YOU try too hard to get her to quite pulling and pay attention, she has just found out the WRONG behavior. Pulling, pushes your ON button. Think of it from the dog's point of view. Sparky is pulling and distracted. You bring out food to get her attention. THE FOOD makes the attention happen. That's OK at first. But if her ATTENTION makes the reward happen, that's a much better and longer- lasting lesson. Make yourself unpredictably interesting - more interesting than the environment. When she slackens the leash or turns to look at you, pull out a toy, magically produce a jackpot food treat, skip away - do something more fun for her than pulling and getting nowhere.

In upcoming classes we will cover other ways to get Sparky to ease up so you can BOTH enjoy your walk. Which way will be the best? There is no correct answer. People, dogs and their environment are all so different. Owners need to try a few things to see what works best for them. That's what makes dog training interesting.