

YIELDING - MOVE IT

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By Dick Russell

Your dog is a social, pack dwelling animal. Your household is his pack. All pack or herd dwelling animals thrive best within a relatively stable hierarchy of status with some members being more dominant and others assuming a submissive role. Your dog wants to gain as much status within the pack as he possibly can for the very simple reason that status bestows perquisites. Status is not achieved within the pack by aggression, but by submission, with the lower ranking animal yielding to the higher ranking animal's ritualistic display of authority. Your dog will be a much better pet, as well as a safer pet, if you will do a number of things to keep him from assuming increasingly higher rungs on the dominance ladder.

Pack and herd dwelling animals maintain status in a number of ways. One is to control the use of space by other animals. This week, we are going to start controlling space by teaching your dog to yield to you on command and by your body position. Teaching this also has the added value of allowing you to walk into your home with both arms loaded with packages. We will not use food treats in the teaching of this exercise.

Have your dog standing in front of you on a loose leash. This is for control only. You will not use the leash to move your dog's body. Lean into your dog. Leaning your torso toward the dog seems to be recognized by them as a status related gesture, Say the word, "Move," and move toward him with tiny shuffling steps. Keep moving in your intended direction. Do not step around him as this will bestow status on him. As soon as he moves, tell him, "Good." Keep moving until he moves out of your way. Do this several times every day. In your house, you can practice this with the leash off. Whenever your dog gets in your way, tell him to move and shuffle through him. Plan your routes around your house through your dog. If he is lying in your path, do not walk around him. Instead, make him move out of your way.

The key to having your dog yield to you is your tiny, shuffling, straight ahead steps. Do not kick your dog or bump him with your knees.

A word of WARNING. Do not attempt to practice having your dog yield to you if he has bitten or seriously threatened you. Dogs only bite members of their family to whom they feel dominant or when there are serious dominance related, but unresolved, questions.

A very practical use we have found for yielding is that if everytime the dog jumps on someone, they walk forward saying, "move," that it quickly stops jumping up. The dog cannot get set to jump if he also has to get ready to backpeddle.

You know, to train and then to live with a dog, there are two things you need to get from him. The first is his love. That's easy. Dogs give it freely. The second is his respect. In most classes I have observed, this issue is not addressed. It results in dogs that know "tricks," but are not really responsive to the owner. Yielding, because it simulates precisely one phase of the dog's natural social behavior, gets his respect.

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