



10 Things

Every Dog Walker Should Know



We've come a long way

It wasn't all that long ago that vacationing neighbors gave the kid next door a few bucks to walk the dog... Now dog lovers in many communities include dog walking as a line item in their monthly budgets. Large tech companies have noticed the trend and launched on-demand dog walking apps backed by venture capital funds.

But we still have a ways to go... Though the dog walking industry may be growing, it's as of yet unregulated. Anyone can call themselves a dog walker, but only in a very few places are dog walkers required to seek the professional skills and knowledge of dog walking.

Can you answer these questions with confidence?



Why does he do that?

From humping to hackles to aggression in all its various forms, do you have a science-based understanding of why dogs do all the things they do?



How can I stop that behavior?

Do you know science-based, force-free, reliable ways to change unwanted behavior like pulling on leash or stalling out, or barking and lunging at other dogs?



Is that safe?

Can you identify early signs of conflict in dog-dog interactions, the safest walking equipment choices, first aid dangers, or the most common causes of trouble on a walk?



How do I build a sustainable business?

Do you know what to do to build a business that provides reliable income month after month so you can make a healthy, stable living serving dogs?

If you're a serious professional dog walker looking to stand out to potential clients—or you'd like to become one—this book contains the 10 topics you must master.



1

Canine learning theory

We all anthropomorphize our dogs. We give them human names, narrate their thoughts out loud, carry on conversations with them, prescribe human motivations to their actions. It's hard not to see the world and all its creatures through our own human eyes.

But in truth, dogs are far from human, despite their amazing ability to live in our world. Understanding how dogs' minds are similar to and—most importantly—different from our own lets us set aside common dog myths that get in the way of our ability to bring out their best behavior and make walks easier and safer.

For example, did you know?

Contrary to how it often seems, dogs aren't capable of understanding right from wrong. Dogs see the world and make choices very differently from humans. Where we divide choices into right vs. wrong, dogs use these two constructs: works vs. doesn't work, and safe vs. dangerous. Dogs aren't immoral, but they are amoral. Most dog lovers struggle with this concept, but accepting how dogs' minds work clears the way for much easier and more humane, effective training.



Canine ritualization and body language

2

Learning to read the complex and often subtle language dogs use to communicate with each other and with us takes the guesswork out of working with dogs, minimizing misreads and counter-productive responses.

Where we humans rely primarily on spoken language to interact with each other, dogs rely on smell and a rich visual language. Dogs are incapable of accessing more than a few spoken human words, and we're not equipped to relate to their olfactory-based world, so it's body language that provides the most common ground for understanding.

Canine body language is a remarkably ritualized form of communication, and far more is said between dogs (and from dogs to us) than most dog lovers realize. Alas, much that we do see we often misread, leading to unnecessary conflict, misunderstood dogs, and missed opportunities to change canine behavior and deepen our relationships with them.

For example, did you know?

Often misunderstood as a sign of "dominance," humping is most often a clumsy invitation to play, akin to a kindergartener pulling another child's braids to get her attention. (And yes, sometimes it's sexual in nature as well.)



Canine aggression

Canine aggression isn't random, and it doesn't indicate whether a dog is a "good" dog or a "bad" one. In fact, most of what we think of as aggression isn't even aggression. A more helpful way to think about unwanted dog behavior is to describe it, rather than labeling it.

For example, take resource guarding. Rather than simply labeling a dog who guards tennis balls from dogs or humans, describe the behavior: "When Rex is chasing a ball and another dog joins in, he growls at the other dog." Next it helps to understand the motivations behind the behavior, whether environmental or otherwise. Now we can decide what we want to do about the behavior. Will we manage it, by taking tennis balls out of the equation? Or will we devise a plan (perhaps with the assistance of a local positive trainer) to help Rex change from his current behavior to a more acceptable one?

Most dog walkers work with "project dogs"—dogs who require extra management, attention, or training due to a particular behavior, whether resource guarding, proximity sensitivity, leash reactivity, policing tendencies, "Tarzan" or rough play styles... the list goes on. Understanding the causes behind these behaviors, and how to manage them, makes dog walks safer and more enjoyable for walker and dogs alike.

For example, did you know?

Most of the behavior we think of as aggression is actually fear-based: All that snarling and lunging and barking is a desperate attempt to get the scary thing (usually another dog or a human) to go away. Understanding this changes how we work with these dogs, making positive behavior change more likely.



Screening & group composition

4

Which dogs you walk make all the difference in how enjoyable, safe, and stress-free your walks are. It can be tempting to say yes to all dogs, especially as you're building your business. And some walkers just love dogs so much it's painful to say no. But learning how to effectively screen for the dogs who are the right fit for you—and for each other when offering group walks—will keep your safety record clean, and professional burnout at bay.

Screening isn't just about deciding what kinds of dogs you'll take on—what sizes, ages, project behaviors, personalities, and the like. It's also about how you'll get the accurate information you need to make your choices. Effective interview techniques are every bit as important as knowing what to interview for.

For example, did you know?

Predatory drift is a common safety risk when walking large and small dogs together. Drift accounts for a high percentage of deaths and life-threatening injuries between dogs, particularly those with large size differences, and happens most often between non-aggressive dogs who know and regularly enjoy each other's company.



Walk management

Walk management brings all the knowledge and skills of a professional dog walker together to create a positive experience for walker, dogs, and other dogs and humans sharing the same trail, sidewalk, beach, or park. Good walk management requires a keen ability to read dog body language, an understanding of fear and aggression, awareness of how the environment impacts canine behavior, a firm grasp on how dogs think and learn, and basic dog training skills.

All of this professional knowledge is underscored by a professional approach to “trail etiquette” and a developed skill set for making quick decisions and keeping dogs calm and focused in distracting or challenging situations. The real world is an unpredictable place. A walker must know what to do when a loose dog runs up to join her from across the street, a well-meaning stranger tries to pet a fearful dog in his care, or a tight space requires passing other dogs at close quarters.

For example, did you know?

Punishing leash reactivity (barking, lunging, or growling at other dogs while on leash) can make it worse by deepening the negative conditioned emotional response (CER) driving the behavior. But simple training techniques aimed at changing the emotions behind the lunging and barking can turn a leash Cujo into a leash Lassie.



Basic R+ dog training

Dog walkers and dog trainers have different jobs, and a dog walker doesn't need to master a trainer's full body of knowledge and skill set. But professional dog walking does require a basic ability to train dogs using the latest science-based positive reinforcement techniques. While dog trainers seek to change a dog's behavior for the client, a dog walker uses training to make walks safer and more enjoyable for themselves, the dogs they walk, and the dogs and people they encounter along their route.

Basic cue training for a dog walker typically includes teaching dogs to walk politely on leash without pulling, to sit and wait (at curbs, for example, to exit their homes, and before jumping down from a walker's vehicle), let's go (to gain a dog's focus and change direction), and—for those who have the opportunity to allow dogs off leash—a rock solid recall.

For example, did you know?

Building a strong recall requires consistently following 5 rules. The first is not repeating yourself. Repeating the cue ("Fido, come! Fido, come! Come, Fido!") undermines the dog's learning. Dog lovers repeat commands; dog professionals do not. (Ever seen a good trainer at work? You'll never see her repeat a cue!) The fourth rule is never to call a dog for something the dog finds unpleasant, like a bath or nail trim or—wait for it—to leash him up. That's a recipe for building a spotty recall. You don't want a dog weighing options when considering your recall request: "Hmmm... I'm having a pretty good time digging this hole. Not sure if this is a check-in request or time to go home. I don't think I'll risk it."



7

Emergency planning

The first step of emergency planning is knowing the emergencies most likely to befall a dog walker, and all the ways these can be avoided. But should all best avoidance efforts fail, step-by-step emergency protocols for handling these situations can keep an emergency from becoming a crisis. It's hard to think when you're startled, scared, hurt, or panicked—better to do all the thinking up front.

While most days with the dogs are a wonderful day in the “office,” dog walkers should be prepared for injuries to a dog or to themselves, a dog or themselves falling ill, a dog bite to another dog or human, a vehicle accident or breakdown, or (many walkers' worst nightmare) a lost dog.

For example, did you know?

The least effective way to capture a dog who has bolted from you is to chase after her. Doing so actually increases the likelihood of her becoming lost. And the same goes when you spot a dog who's been lost. Lost dogs are usually in such full fight-or-flight mode that they often do not recognize their walker or even their owners, and moving toward or calling risks them fleeing again.



8

Canine first aid & CPR

While good emergency planning and strong situational awareness can go a long way toward avoiding the need for it, canine first aid training and certification should be on every pro dog walker's credentials list.

First aid is not only about how to treat minor injuries like scratches, bites, or leg sprains. It also covers serious situations like a dog who has been struck by a car, or stopped breathing, or whose heart has stopped beating. What do you do first? Who do you call? Which actions are the most likely to save a dog's life?

Perhaps just as importantly, first aid training teaches general daily health monitoring, allowing a dog walker to notice early, subtle signs that something may be going wrong. Because even better than knowing how to treat an emergency is being able to avoid one.

For example, did you know?

It's commonly believed you should tie a tourniquet around a dog's leg in the case of a bleeding wound or snake bite. But doing so often results in the dog losing the leg. In most cases it's much better to apply steady pressure for bleeding, keep a snake-bit dog calm, and seek immediate veterinary care.



Car manners and safety

Dog walkers who pick up dogs from their homes to drive them to a trail, park, or beach generally report driving as their least favorite part of the job. Traffic, barking and whining dogs, redirected barrier frustration, space guarding, car sickness and diarrhea and dog hair—yeah, car time is not the best part of walking dogs.

Choosing the right vehicle—or outfitting the one you have as best as possible—can greatly reduce transportation frustration for both you and the dogs you drive, and increase safety for all, too. So can a little car manners training, like teaching dogs to wait before loading and unloading.

A calm drive also contributes to a calm walk. It's hard to get off on the right foot and paw after a tension-filled drive!

For example, did you know?

Most squabbles that break out in the first few minutes of a walk can be traced to tensions created during transport.



Ethical, successful business practices

10

To make a living walking dogs, you have to have dogs to walk. And that means taking care of the business side of things, from legal paperwork and liability protection to marketing and client intake, to setting rates and policies that ensure a steady income.

Dog walking is a young industry riddled with common mistakes and money-losing pitfalls. Many walkers find building their businesses slow and stressful. Too many make less than they should once their businesses are up and running. And far too many suffer from wild income swings from month to month due to poorly structured service models and policies.

At the dogbiz Dog Walking Academy, you'll benefit from dog business advice from the leading business support service in the industry. Learn how to set up a legal business, choose your rates, set strong policies to protect against revenue swings, market yourself comfortably, manage client intake, and build a financially sustainable business you can rely on.

For example, did you know?

Most dog walking companies price themselves too low. That misguided effort to compete not only means you make less money when you get clients, but actually makes you less likely to get them, too.



There you have it.

**The body of knowledge
and skill sets of the
professional dog walker.**

Because every dog deserves a professional dog walker.

One who can answer questions like:



Why does he do that?



How can I stop that behavior?



Is that safe?

**If you're a serious professional
dog walker—or you'd like to become
one—we invite you to join us.**

**Because every pro dog walker deserves to
make a great living.**



- ✓ Stand out to potential clients with professional certification
- ✓ Get your dog behavior questions answered
- ✓ Learn new strategies for walking challenging dogs
- ✓ Maximize walk safety and enjoyment
- ✓ Build a thriving business doing what you love

Learn more at www.dogbizsuccess.com/dog-walking-academy

