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Don't confuse your dog while training

Dear Gus,

I have done obedience training with my dog, and have progressed to the point of taking walks around our neighborhood with her at a relatively good heel position depending on the activity around us (distractions). When we are at an area that is wooded, she wants to go and do "doggy things" like sniff. Am I confusing her by sometimes requiring her to heel, and other times letting her leave my side?

At this point in time, I don't think she is ready for this amount of freedom. It sounds like you are progressing nicely with your training, but you do say that she is "relatively good", not perfect. My guess is that she is not yet "distraction proof", and if you had her off the heel command, and another animal ran by, she might try to chase it. And you are correct; you wouldn't want to confuse your dog by being inconsistent. I'm definitely not trying to sell your dog's intellect short, but it's extremely important that you have consistency in training. Once you're sure your dog is 100 percent reliable with the heel command, you can give her more freedom. And by 100 percent, I mean even if another dog runs right past her, she should stay in the heel position.

Start by introducing another command, such as "go free" to let her know she is free to wander a bit away from you. Never let her begin to pull on the leash - if she does correct her with a stem "no." When you want her back at your side, give her the "heel" - command again. In this way, she understands that you are always the leader, but she can still have some freedom while on leash.

I think that with your work ethic (walking her daily and working with her) and by being so consistent, as corny as this may sound, you and your dog will communicate almost subliminally in that she will know what you want her to do and what she is allowed to do without command!! Have fun, you're well on your way to having a well-trained dog.

Gus

P.S. Spring is the time for your canine companion to see the veterinarian for a heartworm check and any vaccinations that may be needed. Ask if flea and tick preventatives make sense for him or her. Enjoy the new season and spending quality time outdoors safely and healthfully with your best friend

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