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# The power of intention

By **DIANNA YOUNG**  
Special to the NEWS

I had been working recently with a training client and her two dogs, which had been through several obedience training sessions and were doing wonderfully well. The woman was intelligent and perceptive, her dogs were likewise, and they were all making great progress.

One day, my client offered a suggestion. She was scheduled to join a large gathering of people at a private social event.

"Let's take my dogs to this meeting and see how they do around people," she said.

I said, "See how they do? Wow! I wouldn't turn that power over to two dogs. How about we decide how the dogs will do, and we relay it to them?"

That's exactly what we did. We did it by assuming the leadership role from the get-go, instead of following the dogs passively on their leashes and waiting to see what they proposed.

I wanted my client to understand what I call "the power of intention."

I don't want to fault my client for her suggestion, because it's a trap that we all fall into. People do it in almost every conceivable situation.

They'll say, for example, "I'm going to introduce my dog to a house guest, and see how he'll do."

Or, "I want to introduce my dog to other dogs, and see how he'll do."

"I want to take him for a ride, and see how he does in a car."

That's far too much power to give to a dog.

Say you're outdoors walking your dog on a leash. You encounter another person walking another dog. Dog owners often greet each other and stop to see if their dogs want to be friends. Watch the owners, and you'll see that while holding the leash, they often move back a step and observe their dogs to find out how they will interact. It's a passive role.

I say to clients, "Why do we give a dog, of all things, the power to make important decisions about whether there's going to be bloodshed? A leader would not stand on the sidelines and watch. A leader, with his energy and physical presence, would dictate how this interaction will take place."

This is where the "power of intention" comes in. I might also describe it as, "attitude is everything."

When I work with a dog, I decide beforehand that the dog will behave appropriately in

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whatever situation I introduce it to. I already know what outcome I want, and I insist on that outcome.

Leadership is about assertiveness, and a dog receives your message through your body language. You must project leadership, and in order to project it, you actually must feel it.

Canines and people have shared each other's lives for hundreds of thousands of years, and canines have become truly expert at interpreting human body language. They are attuned and aware of what you are doing and what you are feeling.

If you aren't confident, with head high and shoulders back, you won't have to tell your dog about it. He'll already know. If you are unsure or lack confidence about walking near other dogs or about meeting a stranger, you won't have to tell your dog, because he'll already will be aware of it.

Those two dogs-in-training that my client and I took to the social event, by the way, made their owner proud. They looked to us for leadership — for direction as to how we expected them to behave — and they gave us what we required. Their behavior was almost flawless.

Dianna Young is a certified, professional dog trainer and canine behaviorist from Camano Island, where she operates Camano Island Kennels Dog Boarding, Grooming, and Training, Facility. She can be reached at (360) 387-DOGS or at [info@camanoislandkennels.com](mailto:info@camanoislandkennels.com). Her web site address is <http://www.camanoislandkennels.com/>.



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