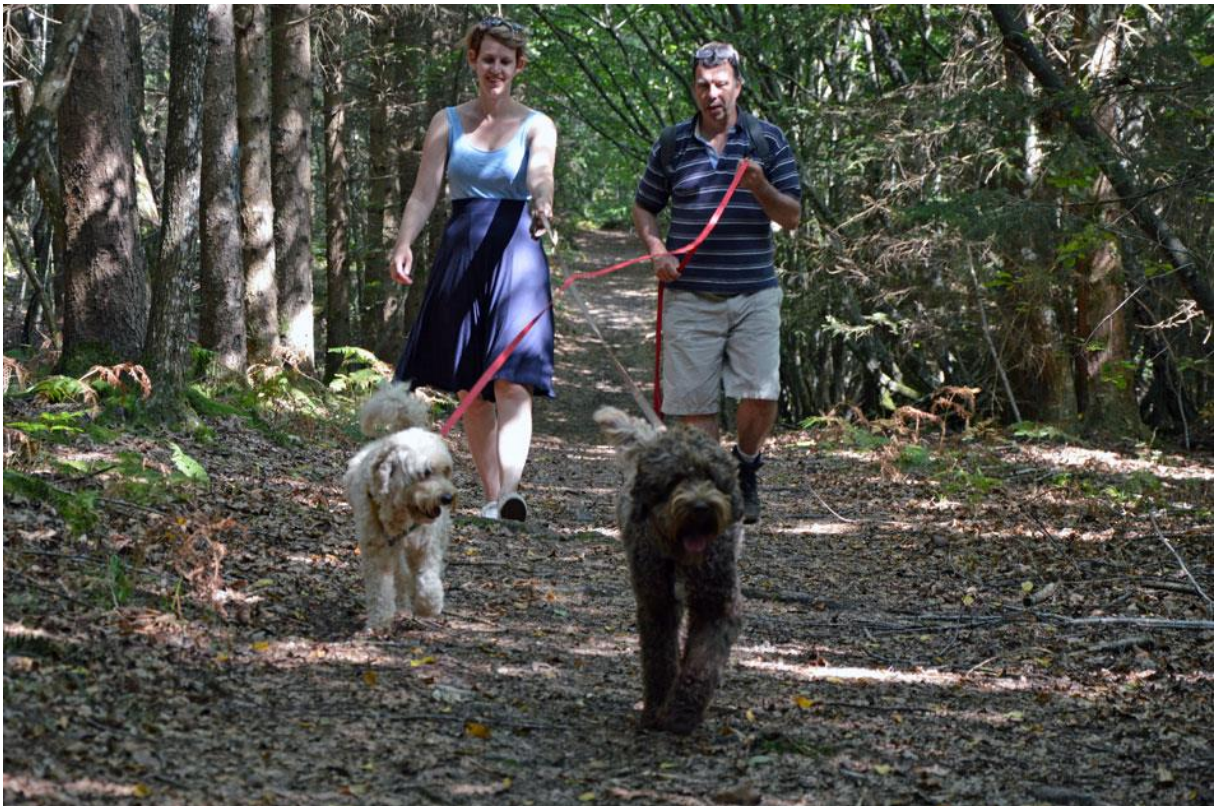


The Ella Walk

When the leaves turn a golden crimson, autumn rolls around again. Often a wonderful time to go for a stroll, particularly as a dog owner. Walking with a dog is a great way to clear the mind of both you and your dog. During those times it's essential to take the time, letting things slow down from fast paced modern life. Furthermore, it is also invaluable for the dog, giving it the time to explore, smell and experience all the scents. In the course of one of those walks we noticed a change in one of our dogs: it looked like she did not enjoy as much anymore. She often lagged behind and we just had a sense that something did not feel right. Call it the sixth sense, call it years of experience or knowing and observing our dogs closely so that we can see what they need to thrive. And Ella needed her "Ella" walk. Our sweet Ella, who is very good at calming signals, has been a bit uncertain in her behavior for a while. At that time we had our first vacation in years with our 2 dogs instead of our pack of five. A great opportunity for us to see what we could do to help Ella to gain more confidence. So we tried a different approach, an "Attention & Choose" walk. The walk we had in mind and developed was meant to make Ella more confident of herself without compromising her soft character. The results were even better than we hoped!

What is the purpose of this walk?

We noticed during the daily walk that Ella often walked behind us and needed a lot of reassurance not to stay behind and to start exploring and sniffing like the rest. We believe that if dogs can make their own choices they gain more confidence, but that is often not the case during a walk because we unintentionally determine the walk, the length and the course.



How do you start?

We started walking with a 5 and 10 meter leashes, giving the dogs more self-determination and assurance. While you're still there to provide the safety of vicinity and holding on to the leash, you also give the dog the complete freedom and choice to choose the direction. In the beginning it was very difficult for Ella, we sometimes waited for 5 or 10 minutes because she did not know where or how to start: left, right or just standing right next to us. Just because we're used to certain patterns they aren't necessarily helpful. Dogs are often used to walk along and it can be easier to stay in that mode. But now she had to do it all by herself and that was pretty difficult for her early on. Sometimes I could get her to start moving again by walking a circle around her, but I wanted her to make the first move. Along with our dog Becca, who has developed learned helplessness due to experiences in her past, we started making this walk every day. In the beginning we did not go beyond the 20 -30 meters but gradually that changed. We did have to wait a lot and felt like we were standing still for ages but as the days gone by the progress was amazing. Our only goal was that the dog chose the path and we followed.. and good things come to those who wait!

And it worked!

It was in the middle of France and we didn't see another soul during our walks in those forests and along those fields. We did not have any cell phones or other people with or around us either. In short, both we and the dogs were on our own. Through these daily attention-walks where we did not speak to each other but only observed the dogs and their choices we could see them becoming more and more certain of themselves and the choices they made. You could see their behavior change every day! After a week the dogs were decidedly and assuredly walking in front of us on the 5 meter leash, walking and exploring sniffing. Their attitude changed into a more composed, relaxed and confident dog. Instead of walking 30 meters, they walked quietly through the forest for a while and became themselves. We had reached our goal!

After experiencing these changes we still often go for an "ella" walk, not every time because we also enjoy our walks when we walk and with other people and their dogs but regularly. In creating that balance we have found it to be very a valuable asset and highly recommend people trying this this attention-walk: let your dog determine the route and put the focus of your attention on your dog, not your surroundings.

It may not work at once, but with patience and attention you will soon see a difference!

We have shared this experience with other dog trainers and it was nice to see how the positive reaction and how others experienced the power of such a walking exercise.

Have a great walk!

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