

Hoof It With Your Woofers

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
May 2014

The merits of dog walking are many

W



alking -- most of us start by age two. As teenagers, we do it when we can't borrow Dad's car. Some do it to raise money for good causes. Billions have been made by the sportswear industry on athletic shoes for those who partake.

King of Pop Michael Jackson's career shot through the stratosphere when he choreographed a backward version based on Marcel Marceau's routine "Walking Against the Wind." President Harry Truman had a strict daily regimen of an early morning constitutional through neighborhood streets, and he lived to be 88.

For me, walking around the block reaps endless landscaping ideas, although, sadly, they're rarely put to the shovel test in my own yard. I see neighbors I never knew I had, and the extra eyes I provide must make the crime watch folks pretty happy and burglars cautious. The biggest beneficiary of all is my heart: the pulse quickens, muscle strengthens, circulation improves, as do my spirits.

At night I certainly feel safer if I'm walking with a dog, but for years I rarely went on walks with my pets other than to train them. I've had a history of owning lots of them at one time, so exercise was playing ball or tug in the backyard. It wasn't until I was down to one, and now two, dogs that we're venturing beyond the fence by routinely going for walks.

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Each dog in my pack has his and her separate walk. I have a 23-pounder and a 40-plus-pounder, and that's just too much for me to handle responsibly together. So ours is a quarter-mile lap on the leash, with ID and rabies tags on the collars, and sensible shoes on my feet (no flip-flops allowed). I try to stay in the shade or on the grass to keep us cool; the temperature difference is more than you'd think.

Flea prevention is up to date, too, but the real key to a pleasant walk is two plastic bags. Like potato chips, sometimes one just isn't enough.

Since going on these dog treks, I've been somewhat shocked at how many walkers among us don't pick up after their own pooches. Is it because they forget the bags? Occasional forgetfulness happens to the best of us, but I think there's more to it than that. There are those who find it repugnant to pick up after an animal. You know who you are, and all I can say is, *Get over it already*.

Leaving a mess is shamefully unneighborly; so is allowing dogs to wander deep into others' properties. I like to guide mine over a sliver of grass adjacent to the street with a shortened leash so I don't wear out my welcome.

My canine companions get something out of these mini adventures, too. Actually, they benefit a lot. Frankly, walking them on a leash teaches them to, well...walk on a leash. Pulling my arm out of the socket isn't allowed, and I earn a few leadership points in the process. There can be only one leader on our spin around the block, and that's got to be me. That's not being mean. That's being in charge -- big difference.

Just as with humans, exercise de-stresses a dog's mind and body, and lessens in-house mischief and bad manners. If they meet a buddy along the way, the opportunity to socialize can't hurt.

I've seen many dogs refuse to go to the bathroom while tethered to a leash. The fenced-in backyard is their preferred spot, where they are free to roam. This can be downright frustrating for owners away from home. Taking on-leash walks with the dog helps to promote success elsewhere. Smells left by other dogs along the route say "do your stuff here," as if these spots

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were lit by flashing-arrow neon signs.

Tracking these scents is pretty darn exciting in a dog's world. This exploration keeps the brain cells fired up, as well as the muscles, and encourages our furry friends to push onward.

And speaking of brains, enough trips through the neighborhood imprints the way home on the canine brain. Setting their natural GPS could come in handy one day. To make the journey less ho-hum, I switch between two simple routes, but always returning to the house.

My little terrier mix has the fastest-growing nails in town. I've noticed that hitting the pavement means less trimming I have to do by hand, for which by the way, she has absolutely zero tolerance. That means one less battle with her, and that's all right by both of us.

Who knew a mere daily walk would be such a partner in household bliss?

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