

Seeing Eye Training is Different

The puppies we are raising have a unique and special job ahead of them. There are some fundamental parts of that job that set it apart from most dog training. Our dogs must be eager to pull out in front of their owners and lead; they should not be content to follow! We need to encourage that desire and confidence to lead as our puppies grow up. It is therefore extremely important not to teach these pups to "heel", which means to walk next to a person and follow the person's movement without pulling. Our pups need to pull and take the lead!



Another important difference in guide work is the fact that guide dogs must be confident enough to disobey a command! This is quite contrary to most styles of dog training. If a Seeing Eye dog is commanded to go into a dangerous situation (i.e. cross a street when traffic is moving) he/she must refuse the command. This is what is known as intelligent disobedience. If we are overly demanding and controlling in other areas of training, it will affect the dogs' ability to disregard a command when necessary.

Strict obedience isn't what we are looking for. A Seeing Eye dog must have a certain amount of freedom from heavy discipline, because he must be able to use his reasoning power. He might have to figure out a way around a barricaded sidewalk in a big city, for example, or he might have to decide if it's safe to cross a street. A dog that is used to extremely strict obedience would stand and wait to be told what to do, instead of figuring out the problem and finding a solution.

The basis of all other types of dog training is "command and obey." With dog guide training, the basis is "command and obey if it's okay." This is the difference between educating a dog and training a dog. The learning process introduced by puppy raisers is a key to completing this education successfully.

These two fundamental skills for guide work -- pulling and intelligent disobedience -- contrast sharply with many styles of dog training. This may not be well understood by people who train dogs for different jobs. There is a lot of exposure to different professional trainers on television and other media. It may be tempting to try these techniques, but please remember it is important to follow training techniques as explained by your coordinators.

Don't worry if your pups aren't perfect! They are learning and so are you. Celebrate their spirit, laugh, and relax!