



## **WORKING IN STORES**

The purpose of this lecture is to explain the way that your Pilot Dog works inside a store. There are many differences between working in a store and working on streets and sidewalks. This lesson will explain:

- The importance of being able to give the dog direction in a store
- How to pattern the dog to a familiar store
- Different methods of using the dog in a store
- Importance of pace control and dog awareness
- Special situations: stairs, elevators, escalators

### **Directing the Dog Inside a Store**

Pilot Dogs have generalized sidewalk travel to the point that they can work curb-to-curb in a straight line in any environment, familiar or unfamiliar. This is not the case with store work. All stores have different layouts, and if you are going to work the dog inside a store, you must be able to give the dog direction. That means you must be able to tell the dog approximately when to turn left and right, and how to locate places you might need in the store, such as the restroom and customer service counter.

If you are not familiar with the layout of the store, you should either seek assistance or use your cane and heel your dog. It is not fair to expect the dog to know where you want it to go without knowing yourself how to direct him to get there. If you enter an unfamiliar store and say “Forward,” your dog will go wherever he wants to go; he will not be able to guess where you want him to go.

### **Patterning the Dog to a Familiar Store**

- Patterning simply refers to repeating a route to a desired location as many times as necessary until the dog begins to anticipate the location and the turns required to get there.

- Different dogs take different amounts of time to pattern - some can pattern to a destination just by taking them there once and rewarding them, while others need several repetitions.
- Some handlers prefer to have assistance in patterning their dog, while other handlers are comfortable patterning their dog independently.
- Some handlers use a method called “back chaining” to pattern the dog, in which they start with the dog at the destination (for example, the women’s restroom door), reward the dog there, then go several paces back and work forward to the door again. They go further back each time so that on each repetition the dog is more and more familiar with the route. You will have the opportunity to practice back chaining while you are here in class.

### **Different Methods for Using the Dog in a Store**

Each person has their own preferences for using the dog in a store. The following are the most common methods:

- The handler may seek assistance and use a human guide while heeling the dog.
- The handler may seek assistance and hold the handle of the shopping cart and heel the dog, while the assistant pulls the cart from the front.
- The handler may use the “Follow” command with an assistant, wherein the assistant walks in front of the handler while the dog guides behind. If the dog is unfamiliar with the individual providing assistance, the assistant may need to use more frequent verbal communication with the handler.
- The handler may work independently and carry a bag to put items in.

### **Pace Control and Dog Awareness**

- Even a dog that walks very fast on the sidewalk must slow down when working in a store. Most turns in stores are walking turns, which are best made at a slower pace.
- It is common for the dog to have to stop suddenly when people step into his path, which is made easier for the dog if he is working at a slower pace.
- Stores often have displays that can fall over if making a clearance error; clearance errors are less likely if the dog is going slowly and concentrating.

- The store environment often presents many distractions to your dog; these may include adults and children who distract or interfere with the dog, food on the floor, and candy or gum displays. Many of these distractions are found at the dog's nose level, so it is very important that you closely monitor where your dog's head is at all times.
- It is important to note that many of these distractions are at the checkout when you are busy paying for groceries and may not be concentrating on the dog's behavior.

## **Special Situations**

- **Stairs**

- The dog must always stop to indicate the presence of the first step up or down, and must maintain a safe speed on stairs at all times.
- Some people choose to heel their dog up and down stairs and other people choose to work their dog in harness. Either one is acceptable.

- **Elevators**

When using elevators, the main things to remember are:

- After pushing the button, take a couple steps back to allow wheelchairs and/or strollers to exit before boarding.
- Once in the elevator, turn and face the doors in preparation for exiting.
- Maintain control of your dog's head in the elevator by keeping a short hold on the leash.
- Be aware of automatic doors when entering and exiting the elevator; use your arm to prevent them closing on your dog.

- **Escalators**

- Some people choose to heel their dog on escalators and other people choose to work their dog in harness. Either one is acceptable.
- When approaching an escalator, the dog will locate the edge of the metal plate and stop. Once you locate the handrail, he can step onto the escalator.
- When reaching the end of the escalator, you should assist in getting the dog off of it safely by taking a leading step as the escalator comes to the end, taking a large step to initiate movement and getting the dog to step over the metal plate, or lifting the backstrap in order to lift the dog's front feet over the threshold.

Not all dogs are comfortable on escalators; therefore, it is not a requirement of our dogs. If you are not comfortable on escalators, we recommend that you avoid them; if you use them very rarely, it is possible that you may have difficulty using them with your dog when you do encounter them. Escalators are potentially dangerous to you and your dog if proper technique is not used and if you and the dog are not both comfortable and well-practiced on them.