



## **SIGHTED COMPANIONS**

The purpose of this lecture is to explain how to work your Pilot Dog while accompanied by other people. This lesson will explain:

- Positioning considerations
- Other people's reactions to guidework errors and dog behaviors
- Ways other people can assist you with patterning your dog
- When to use human guide or the "Follow" command with your Pilot Dog
- Working with another guide dog team

### **Positioning Considerations**

Ideally, when another person walks with you, they should walk slightly behind you on your right side. If the other person walks in front of you, it is easy for the dog to focus on following the other person rather than on guidework. If the other person is immediately to your left or right, the dog may feel that he doesn't have enough space to move around obstacles, and if the other person is directly behind you, the dog may try to turn around to look at them.

### **Other People's Reactions to Guidework Errors and Dog Behaviors**

Many people who are unfamiliar with guide dogs may have unrealistic ideas about how guide dogs work. If they see the dog make an error, such as bumping you into something, getting distracted, or missing a curb, they may assume that the dog is not completely trained or that you are not safe with the dog.

It can be discouraging to hear these comments when you have just arrived home with a new Pilot Dog and are just beginning to adjust to your partnership. It can be helpful to explain normal behaviors that your companion may see from a new Pilot Dog before allowing them to watch you work with your dog. You can reassure them that you know how to correct undesirable behaviors, and at the same time explain how they can best assist you while you work your dog.

## **Ways Sighted Companions Can Assist You with Patterning Your Dog**

While you are in class with your dog, you will learn about and practice patterning your dog to a frequent destination. People at home may be able to help you with patterning your dog using the methods you were shown.

One way they can help is by offering to be a human guide the first time you bring your dog to a new environment that you would like to pattern him to. Using a human guide, you can either heel the dog to the desired target such as a classroom door, store entrance, or bus stop and then back chain from there, or heel the dog through the entire route to show the dog the path you would like to travel - both methods can be effective. You should learn in class which method you prefer to use with your dog.

No matter which method you use, it is often beneficial to have someone observe you the first time you work the dog on the route you have patterned him to. An observer will be able to give you feedback, especially if it appears that you and the dog need a little more practice with the route before working it independently.

## **When to Use a Human Guide or the "Follow" Command with Your Pilot Dog**

There are some situations in which it is preferable to use a human guide or the "Follow" command rather than working your dog in harness.

One situation where you may want to use a human guide is when working in a complex, unfamiliar area with a non-standard layout (such as a county fair, an airport, or an open pedestrian area with no sidewalks). Remember that you have to be able to provide meaningful direction to your dog in order for him to work effectively; this may be impossible if you aren't familiar with the environment.

Another example is inside an unfamiliar business such as a store or restaurant; guide dog handlers frequently use the "Follow" command in these settings. When unsure of whether you should work your dog or seek assistance from someone else, ask yourself two questions:

1. Is this a standard, predictable environment (such as sidewalk travel in a familiar city)?
2. Do I know where I want my dog to go and can I direct him there?

If the answer to both of those questions is no, you should seek assistance in the form of a human guide or by using the "Follow" command.

If you use the "Follow" command, you should instruct the person you are following to continue talking while you are following, especially with a new dog. Many times, the other person will assume that your dog will automatically follow them, and they may not understand that you can't be certain whether the dog is following or not unless they continue talking.

It is also important to be consistent with your expectations of guidework; if the dog allows you to bump an obstacle or fails to stop for a change in elevation, you need to ask the person to wait while you correct the dog. This can feel awkward, but consistent handling is important at all times to maintain good guidework.

### **Working with Another Guide Dog Team**

Working with another guide dog team is referred to as working in doubles; if this is something you will do when you return home, you should practice it while you're in class as well.

- When working in doubles, it is recommended that you alternate which dog is in front. If one dog is always in front and the other always follows, the one following may become less focused on guidework and more focused on staying with the other dog.
- Working in a single file will provide your dog adequate space to work around obstacles, allow for a safe line of travel, and avoid being distracted by your partner's dog.
- Maintaining some distance between each other will ensure that each dog is able to work independently while handlers continue to communicate effectively.
- Generally, people switch leads at the down curb, so that whichever team arrives at the curb first leaves last.
- Each handler is responsible for judging their own traffic at crossings and for being consistent about correcting and reworking any guidework errors.