



SLOW DOG MOVEMENT

by Laura Dobb

The basic idea behind the [Slow Dog Movement](#) ([#slowdogmovement](#)), of going SLOWER, has deep roots in our social history.

Eating slowly, enjoying life, making crafts by hand and other cultural traditions have been the fabric of our lives for thousands of years. It has been forty years since Carlo Petrini started the idea for the Slow Food Movement in Italy. Twenty years after Petrini started Slow Food, Carl Honoré created 'The Slow Movement'. Honoré wrote 'In Praise of Slow: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed' in 2004. Last year he published an updated edition of his classic book.

As the international 'voice of the global Slow Movement', I am thrilled to report that Carl Honoré is now a supporter of the [Slow Dog Movement](#)!

As an only child, I am a renowned slow eater! I love eating local and traditional food from around the world. I spent some time in Bergerac, France in 2018. My favourite activity there was going to the Saturday market to view and buy local, seasonal food. In 1995, I spent five hours eating at a French family home in the Loire. It was a normal family meal celebrating Epiphany and I was a guest. We had wine with every course. The children and dogs of the family stayed at or near the table and ate with the adults. Everyone took part in conversation, and no one ate too much!

As a visitor to any country, I enjoy the pace of walking or cycling to explore my surroundings. In fact, standing and picking grapes during my 2018 trip to France was the right speed for me. Eating lunch with my fellow 'vendange' workers for one and a half hours each day helped me relax. I was able to learn about French culture and language. I could digest my food and open my senses to the countryside and the kindness of strangers.

Again, as an only child, I grew up with plenty of space and time in which to explore the nature that abounds in Canada. Long Spring and Summer evenings allowed me to be out of doors after school. And back outside after dinner until bedtime if the weather was good. I was lucky to be born in the last generation that grew up without computers in childhood.

I spent my time outside without a phone. I had an analogue 'Snoopy' Timex watch and that was it.

I adopted my first dog, at the age of ten. I was unbound by technology and had plenty of time and space in which to bond with Muffin. There was no agenda. I had no plan. I followed Muffin and we explored the tall grass surrounding my house. Or we braved the wild streets of the rough First Nations Reservation 'village' I lived in at the time. Fort Chipewyan, Alberta. Sometimes we would climb the granite hills of 'Ft Chip'. Hills shaped by glaciers millions of years ago into slippery red rocks. Muffin would watch while I slid down the glassy hills only to climb back up where he waited for me. I am sure I talked with him but there was also a lot of comfortable silence.

If we allow children to explore nature with freedom and safety, why not our dogs too? When I think about what rooted me and calmed me in my early years, it was having unlimited time to just be a child, outdoors. If you think about it, dogs don't often get the freedom to 'just be dogs' in the company of their humans. I think we can take back those images from our younger days. The memories of simpler days when we could 'just be.' We can enjoy the company of our dog who is given freedom to sniff at length, roll in the grass, eat rabbit poop, and watch the world go by with us nearby.

The **Slow Dog Movement** is a combination of who I am and my experiences. I am influenced by the original 'Slow' movements (Food, Cities, Travel, Money, Books etc). The **Slow Dog Movement** is distillation of everything that I have learned in my International Dog Trainer Education (IDTE) training with Turid Rugaas. Many others have inspired The **Slow Dog Movement**. Dr Amber Batson's workshops on dogs (Sleep, Reactive and Aggressive Dogs). Sindoor Pangal and 'The Lives of Streeties', specifically her research into dogs, stress and the ethogram of the dog (how they prefer to rest and sleep and scavenge more than we think!). Kirsty Grant at The Dog Nose and



her indoor enriched environment. Her expertise on slowing dogs down to use their senses in an indoor space. Anne Lill Kvam and her nosework section during my IDTE. I have learnt volumes from my PDTE mentors in the Mentor Program. I shadowed Winkie Spiers on her social walks and puppy classes. I enjoyed many conversations about starting my behaviour business with Marina Gates-Fleming.

Karen Webb gave my family sound advice when we first adopted our Cairn Terrier, Nash. He was an ex-breeding dog from puppy farm. Karen said, 'do nothing for one month.' We let Nash get used to our house and garden and he had no outside walks or explores. This helped Nash rest and figure out where he had landed in his own time. There are many PDTE members who have informed the **Slow Dog Movement**. If I have forgotten to mention someone, it is only because there are so many who are helpful and supportive.

There are four words that ring in my ears over and over from Turid. They are 'Show the right (correct) thing!' This is what the **Slow Dog Movement** does. It shows people, through photos, videos and stories, how to offer a slower version of the average dog's life. A version that is closer to the ethogram and better for a dog's health and quality of life. We do not show dogs chasing balls, doing agility or running with their humans. We do show dogs walking at their own pace, sniffing, relaxing with other dogs or their humans and more. There are also images of dogs sleeping or watching the world go by – with their humans or with cats and horses!

I created the **Slow Dog Movement** to begin a sea change in how the mainstream world interacts with their dogs. It is like the current trend in parenting: BUSY BUSY BUSY! Many children are over scheduled. Music, sport and educational activities sandwich the school day. This causes exhausted children and families. Carl Honoré talks about this in his 'In Praise of

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Slow' book. Dogs included. There seems to be no down time. People brag about this. They are martyrs to the cause of the most tired Mum or Dad. Many human family members are in a hurry to get through the day's activities. This often ends up with parents having drinks in the evening to calm down. What happens to dogs? They get scheduled in too.

The average dog learns to stay in a crate when a puppy so they can stay at home while everyone works and goes to school. Dogs may have the same walk every day. Up the same street. The same park. And not get to stop and sniff while on their scheduled walk(s). They might go to the park to chase a tennis ball for the allotted time. No time to sniff because that is not 'walking'! On weekends, they may have an epic walk or run where their unprepared body will have to keep up. Or they will go along to a music festival or other loud and busy event. The dog, like its humans, will end up exhausted all Sunday and many Mondays

too! Or, they may stay alone at home, while the humans go out for lengthy periods of time on the weekends. When you are a dog who is alone all day, your life is far from slow. It is often anxious-filled and stressful.

The other scenario is the dog who is over scheduled. They chase tennis balls, do agility, have social time at the park. They could have enrichment toys to eat their main meals from. And on weekends, as mentioned before, huge, fast paced walks or runs with the owner. These are the humans who corral their dogs from one activity to the next. This includes bringing dogs to large human gatherings or events. They do not want their dog to be 'left out.' Dogs do need time to themselves and down time. They do not need to attend large human gatherings. They may be an 'only' dog in a childless family and not want for anything – except PEACE and time to sniff!

Of course, there are exceptions to these extreme pictures I have painted. Some pet dog owners are already enjoying slowing down with their dogs and have done so for years. They may not know that they are doing anything special. And they are not. It is normal for people to go slow. It is only since the advent of the car and computers that we are rushing around like crazy people. These humans may live at a slow pace themselves and treat their dogs as they would like to live. Unless you are an enlightened human or progressive dog trainer, these people are rare.

Relax with coffee and my dogs



It is not possible or desirable in our current culture to slow down all the time. It is okay to go for a run as a human, without our dog. It is even okay to do a little sprint on the beach with our dog(s), out of joy. Dr Amber Batson suggests, if doing a speedy activity with your dog, start with calm and end with calm. It is the prolonged and chaotic life of speed and manic families/owners that dogs do not need. Advocate going 'slow' with dogs - one step at a time. There are others, within the PDTE who advocate a conscious and mindful approach towards our dog friends.

The slow dog walk, with a loose leash and harness is one of the best places to start. The French study, At the Heart of the Walk, shows that walking at a slow pace lowers dog's heart rates. Fellow PDTE colleagues, Cristina and Aurélien Budzinski suggest using a long leash and harness or go off-leash. Allowing dogs to move at will, with the choice to slow down, to sniff and stop when they want is beneficial. It is good for us as well. Walking strengthens and stretches dog's bodies in the correct way. As they are not pulling on a collar and tight leash, their neck, spine, and thyroid gland are more protected.

Another community, created by our own PDTE colleagues, Lyuba El, Ena Kobentar and Leticia Sanchez Moral, is Smiling Leash. Smiling Leash seeks to educate pet dog owners on how to have a positive experience while walking their dog. Their Facebook site posts photos, videos, and educational content.

Their content focuses on correct equipment, ways to walk nicely on a loose 'smiling' leash and other ways to make this simple activity enjoyable for both human and dog.

Other members of the PDTE go deep into the philosophy of the **Slow Dog Movement** by echoing the idea of 'un-schooling' – the term used for children who do not follow a school curriculum and learn about the world, in the context of their lives. Jonas Thulin a PDTE canine educator in Spain, suggests that 'We should put our energy on letting our dogs find things out by themselves. With our guidance, no more. That builds trust and self-esteem.' Another Spanish PDTE colleague, Santos Salcines Nazabal echoes this 'less is more' idea with 'The less I

teach my dog, the more he learns on his own.' These are ideas to explore and weave into our daily life with dogs. And to share with friends, family, and clients.

Ask clients or yourself to leave the phone behind. Or make a promise that you will only use it as a camera. Turn sound and notifications off. Either let your dog lead you on your walk (preferable) or slow walk with purpose so that your dog follows your lead. If you can embody this snail pace, your dog will likely stop trotting. Check to make sure that the harness and leash fit well and are correct. If relaxation and slowness have been heartily attempted, it may be that some dog guardians need a trainer's help with leash work. Otherwise, tune in to birdsong, stop to smell the flowers and inhale the sight and smell of trees and green. If you are in an urban environment – try to find a city park. If concrete is your only option, go with it. Let your dog sniff rubbish bins and metal poles. Find some stairs to sit on. Do a treat search in a disused and quiet cityscape corner. The city environment may not be beautiful to you, but dogs will find it scintillating in sniffs.

Allow yourself to meander. Have a plan to stop midway and have a snack one day and on the next, have no plan. Relax into not knowing what is around the corner. Your dog will relax too. Try not saying a word. Silent walks are heavenly when you get used to them. Your dog will agree. Remember the ethogram and what 'free' or 'village' dogs do without human interference. They spend half their day resting or sleeping. The rest of the day they walk around, scavenge, or sometimes play. (<https://www.livesofstreeties.com/post/2019/06/16/a-study-on-the-activity-budget-of-free-ranging-dogs>)

There are health benefits of slowing down and doing less. For dogs and people. The ultimate result of taking your time on a walk or watching the world with your best friend is CLOSENESSE. We build relationships with others, including our dogs when we take the time to connect. Dogs mirror our moods and level of stress. They can even absorb the stress hormone 'cortisol' from our hair. They watch our every move and expect our next step. Be mindful of your movements. If you avoid multi-tasking and rushing from room to room, it will impact your dog in a beneficial way. It is a positive feedback loop. What is good for our dogs, is good for us and vice versa.

Adding some **Slow Dog Movement** into your dog's life is simple. There are many enrichment ideas that give dogs brainwork opportunities. These are valuable. It is also important to DO NOTHING with our dogs too. As mentioned above, it is a bit like going from homeschooling to 'un-schooling'. Like undoing a system, habit, or way of doing something. Lie in the grass or on the carpet and listen to music. Share some blueberries with your dog. Read a book in the garden with your best friend as literary critic. Or sit still, under a tree with your dog.

The **Slow Dog Movement** launched in late January of this year. Our Facebook page has been buzzing with daily posts from almost 700 members. A 'dreamy' sort of buzzing, of course!

Ideas for bringing SLOW into your dog's life and yours

- a slow dog walk with a well fitted harness and loose (or no) leash à la 'Smiling Leash'
- silent dog walks (no chatter or commands) and let dogs lead - give them choices
- let dogs sniff, explore, and stop and absorb the world with their senses at their own pace
- stop during a walk and watch the world go by or do a treat search
- find places for dogs to climb and explore. Look for different surfaces, heights and levels within nature. Outdoors, find natural 'parkour' (logs, hay bales, streams, tall grass, beaches. In cities, find underused areas, industrial areas. These should be mobility appropriate for each dog and safe.
- try enclosed fields with enrichment facilities.
- let a rescue dog take their own time in getting used to your world and the world outside your home
- provide scavenging and enrichment opportunities for dogs
- sit down nearby when dogs eat their food or have snacks with dogs, as on a picnic
- observe your dog in a caring and meaningful way
- create a deep connection with your dog in nature and at home by relaxing together
- meditate, stretch, garden, cook, do crafts or yoga with your dog nearby
- do 'nothing or little' instead of 'something and a lot' with your dog - less IS more!

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People share photos, videos, and ideas. It is very heartening to share this way of being with our dogs. Having similar values as other dog lovers builds community and spreads the word in a gentle way. Showing 'what is right' in images, helps others to learn that there is another way. It is not preachy or judgmental. The members are supportive, creative, and welcoming. The daily posts make me feel relaxed and positive. A lot of the photography is personal and beautiful. Members come from all walks of life. Contributors are from many different countries. Not all work with dogs, many are pet dog owners.

The Slow Food Movement has 1,600 communities around the world. The **Slow Dog Movement** is growing too. Together we can improve dogs' lives by slowing down and scaling back the busyness. We must all provide the basics for dogs - sleep, water, food, toileting, and social contact. Dogs benefit by having us simplify their lives based on the dog ethogram. Members of the **Slow**

Dog Movement strive to uphold shared values that help our dogs. We can show what is correct. We can invite others to do the same. This will help the movement grow. Together, we can transform dogs' and humans' lives, for the better.

In the coming months, there will be a new **Slow Dog Movement** website (slowdogmovement.org). This will allow us to lengthen our leash even more! Reaching those who are not on social media is a big goal. The website will be a platform enabling the movement to grow and evolve. It would be lovely to start groups or chapters in different geographic areas. It would be exciting to link to other 'slow' movements as well.

Join us in creating a sea change – an evolution revolution for dogs. Where 'less is more' and seeing things from a dog's point of view makes life easier for you too!

#slowdogmovement



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