**Chapter 26: Doors and Elevators**

This chapter will review the basic skill set of navigating doors and go into greater detail about the different types of doors you may encounter. Although these skills were introduced early in training, there are many more factors to consider as you and your dog progress as a team and begin to work in more varied environments. We will also introduce more advanced concepts such as navigating revolving doors and elevators.

Doors of all types may be utilized by a guide dog team during the course of a normal day. Doors can be set up in a variety of ways, and this must be taken into consideration as it can affect how the team should approach and the safest way to pass through the door. The dog’s ability to recognize the door can also be affected. During training and throughout the dog’s working life, he or she begins to recognize the general shape and configuration of doors. However, your dog may still have some difficulty recognizing a door that you have never used before. In many modern designs, the doors are nearly indistinguishable from the surrounding wall.

Back in Chapter 7, you learned to classify any door as either right-hinged or left-hinged, as well as how to safely pass through a left-hinged door using either the “Side” method or the “Pivot” method. This foundation skill still applies to any door. Please review Chapter 7 for details on the two methods and why this is important. Both methods have value, and the dogs understand each one. This is an example where the dog can read the handlers body language. Simply by moving the leash to the right hand tells the dog that the Side method is occurring. By turning the right shoulder towards the door, the dog will interpret a pivot. These simple methods are designed to keep both dog and handler safe. Students should practice both methods.

When locating doors with your dog, it’s important to be understanding of what the dog may perceive as the actual door. It is unrealistic to expect that your dog will target the handle or knob of each door accurately every time. It is your responsibility as the handler to help your dog by searching for the actual handle or knob. If you use the same door or doors frequently, your dog will become more consistently accurate over time.

A **single door** is set by itself, commonly found in private residences, shops, and hotel rooms. When locating this type of door, your dog may align himself with the door handle, especially if it is a familiar door. If it is unfamiliar, you may need to check both sides for the doorknob or handle. Once you have located it, push or pull the door slightly to determine which way it swings. If you find that it hinges of the left, use the Side or Pivot method as you proceed through.

A **double door** is two doors set right next to each other, typically swinging out to either side. These are common in larger stores, schools, or lobby entrances. When locating this type of door, your dog may align himself at the middle between the two doors. While it is acceptable to pass through either door, the easiest and quickest solution is to push or pull the door on the right (right-hinged) and simply work your dog straight through.

A **bank of doors** is comprised of multiple single or double doors set next to each other. There may or may not be a small amount of space between doors. These are common in malls, theaters, and other large venues. When approaching an unfamiliar bank of doors, your dog may have difficulty locating the door opening. If you do not find a handle above your dog’s head, check slightly to the right or left. If the first door you locate is left-hinged, you may want to check immediately to the right as there is a good chance you will find an easier-to-navigate right-hinged door as well.

**Glass doors** are common in any of the above configurations. They allow the dog to see to the outside and often make it easier for your dog to identify exits. However, in some situations it can be difficult for them to distinguish between a glass door, and a glass wall or panel, especially if it is set between doors. The glass is often set in metal framing, and guide dogs will typically gravitate toward the frame, perceiving this to where the door opens, which may or may not be true. If this is something you encounter regularly, your dog will quickly come to understand where the actual door is.

**Automatic doors** are typically glass as well, operated by a motion sensor or pressure plate so that the doors slide open as you approach. Most dogs will simply proceed through the open door without any additional cues from the handler, but you may feel your dog hesitate or pause as the doors slide open. Similar to other glass doors, your dog may find them difficult to identify until the sensor is triggered and the opening becomes apparent.

A **revolving door** is essentially a cylindrical doorway divided by glass panels into four wedge-shaped compartments. The panels are attached at the center and rotate on the center axis. These doors are designed to keep people moving rapidly between two spaces while keeping heat or air conditioning inside the building. The revolving door can be thought of as a pie shape cut into four slices. Each wedge-shaped slice is a compartment that the traveler will move through. Close to the center, the compartment is very narrow; the entrance to the compartment is much wider. Revolving doors move counterclockwise in the US, and there is typically a horizontal bar on the door on the right side as you enter. This is where you push to move through the door.

Using a revolving door with your guide dog is very similar to passing through a left-hinged door using the Side method. However, there are some additional considerations to keep in mind in order to keep your dog safe. When using a revolving door with a guide dog the handler should follow these steps:

* Allow your dog to work up to the door, locating either the rubber stripping at the outer edge, or the handle bar of the door itself. You may need to advance the door slightly to give yourself full access to a compartment.
* Move into the interior of the compartment as you use the Side command. This allows the dog to stand in the wider outer edge of the compartment. Your dog should now be standing on your right side with both of you facing the front part of the compartment
* Put both hands on the handle bar with your right hand still holding the leash and ready to push on the far right side of the door. The short leash should be fully relaxed and looped through your right hand. Do not loop it over your arm as the leash will slide up your arm & your dog may not follow you properly.
* Cue the dog with “**Lets Go”** as you gently begin to push the door forward.
* Push through the door at a consistent speed. Control the speed by holding the bar or positioning yourself with one heel at the back of the compartment.
* Exit the compartment as you feel the air on the other side, or when the dog initiates movement out of the door.

You may encounter some revolving doors that are motorized and rotate automatically. These are not safe to use because it is difficult to decipher when to enter the door and the speed cannot be controlled. In a large automated revolving door, it is very easy to become disoriented or for the dog or handler to be injured.

**Elevators** are a mode of access frequently utilized by guide dog handlers. Elevators can be easily targeted in the same manner that any solid door is targeted, though some may be more difficult for the dog to recognize than others. For instance, if the elevator is hidden around a corner or if the door is covered by a large advertisement, you may need to teach your dog where it is first so they can locate it on subsequent visits. Generally, you can use the targeting command “To the Door” when the elevator is withing the dog’s view. If you use an elevator regularly, you may also choose to teach your dog to target the elevator button rather than the door itself. In either case, be sure to praise and/or reward your dog for locating the target, the use the following procedure to ensure safe elevator use.

* Press the button, then step back and to the side as you wait. This allows space for people to get off the elevator when the door opens.
* Once the elevator has emptied, use the “Forward” command to direct your dog inside. Be sure to hold the harness handle and allow your dog to lead the way into the elevator. This allows your dog to exercise intelligent disobedience in the rare case that an elevator malfunctions and opens to an empty shaft or misaligned car.
* When you and your dog have entered the elevator car, use the “Right” command to make two right turns so that you and your dog are facing the door.
* Your dog can remain standing at your side while riding, or you can place them in Sit position for greater control as needed. Stay aware of what your dog is doing while riding. Do not allow him to visit other riders or investigate their belongings.
* When the door opens at your desired floor, use the “Forward” command to direct your dog to exit. Be sure to move out and away from the door promptly so as not to block others from exiting.

Most elevators open only on one side, but there are also elevators that open at both the back and front. If this is a known elevator then face the door you plan to exit. If it’s an unknown elevator to you, then be prepared to move and turn with your dog when he locates the door as it may open behind you.

You may also encounter **glass elevators** which are popular at high end hotels or malls. These can be a bit unsettling for dogs since they can see out on all sides. Some dogs may need a few exposures to acclimate and accept this type of elevator. It is not uncommon for a dog to move around and try to look out the sides to find it’s equilibrium. If you find that your dog is uncomfortable in this type of elevator, using some food reward while riding (counter conditioning) can help him acclimate more quickly.

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