



FABJOB GUIDE TO
**BECOME A
DOG WALKER**



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1. Introduction

1.1 A Dog Walking Business

It all starts with a special someone who comes into your life — a four-legged bundle of fur and kisses... a noble purebred or an adorable mixed breed... a loyal and devoted companion. Suddenly you find yourself head-over-heels in love, and the feeling is mutual. Then one day as you are out enjoying a romp in the sunshine and fresh air with your dog, you think to yourself, “If only I could spend every day doing this, life would be perfect.”

If this sounds familiar, here’s some great news: many people make a career out of professional dog walking, and this dream career is completely within your reach. If you love dogs and being outside with them, read on to discover a career that lets you do these things every day, and get paid.

1.1.1 What a Dog Walker Does

Professional dog walkers take other people’s dogs out for a walk, either one dog at a time or a few together. Dogs are picked up en route, and

often brought to an off-leash area for some playtime with other dogs before they are dropped back off at home.

Walking (or sometimes just visiting) people's dogs is an important and needed service. Some dogs are okay all day long by themselves, but puppies, young dogs, dogs with small bladders, and breeds with lots of energy benefit greatly from a mid-day walk and/or bathroom break.

People busy at work rarely have time to go home at lunch and let the dog out — in fact, if they live in the suburbs of a big city, their commute may be as long as two hours each way. And people with reduced mobility (such as seniors, or those recovering from surgery) or new demands (e.g., new moms) simply may not be able to get out for the exercise their dog needs.

Getting out for a mid-day walk with a dog walker means that when the owner gets home after a long day of work, they are less likely to find the sofa destroyed, be bounded upon by a restless dog, or need to clean up accidents. Additionally, if the dog has had a mid-day outing, then walking the dog doesn't have to be the first thing they do when they get home. Instead they can make dinner, relax, and save a romp with Rex for later in the evening.

A dog-walking business can be started with very few supplies and equipment, and doesn't require buying a building, paying rent, or modifying your home. It does require a genuine love of dogs and in some cases a reliable vehicle. In general, you might enjoy starting a dog-walking business if you:

- Are an organized person
- Are physically fit and like to get outside
- Have a reasonably flexible schedule
- Don't mind working some weekends or holidays

A dog walking business can be anything you want it to be. Beyond the type of dog walking service you offer (private, group, etc.), you can further specialize by choosing only a particular size of dog to walk (large, small, toy), or even a specific breed of dog if the market exists in your area.

In addition to the enjoyment of working with beautiful and lovable dogs, dog walking draws people because it requires little or no training, lets you get exercise and get outside, offers a flexible work schedule, and can even be done part time.

1.1.2 The Booming Pet Care Industry

Lots of North Americans now share their lives with dogs, and where there are dogs, there is a need for dog walking services. According to the 2007-2008 National Pet Owners Survey, 44.8 million U.S. households have at least one dog, and there are approximately 74.8 million dogs owned in the U.S. The survey also shows that pet ownership on a whole is on the rise.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has identified animal care as a growth industry — in fact, they expect it to grow faster than the national average for all occupations through 2014. The BLS research indicates that: “As many pet owners increasingly consider their pet as part of the family, their demand for luxury animal services and willingness to spend greater amounts of money on their pet will continue to grow.”

In addition to more people owning pets, it turns out we’re also spending more on them annually too. The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association estimated Americans’ annual spending on their pets at \$40.8 billion as of 2007. This impressive figure has more than doubled since 1994, when annual spending was estimated at \$17 billion.

Starting a dog walking business offers the owner unlimited income potential. You can add to your client base until your daily schedule is full, and then begin to add employees to increase your earning potential. And most importantly, you can start a dog walking business right now. Like other service businesses, your start-up costs are minimal: as little as a few hundred dollars can get you set up with everything you need.

Dog-walking businesses are usually best suited to cities or well-populated areas. If you don’t think you will have enough clients in your area to support a dog walking business on its own, consider adding on some other pet services described in this guide such as pet sitting, pet massage, pet transportation, etc. to ensure you have all the business you want or need.

1.1.3 Benefits of the Career

Being a professional dog walker is truly a dream job that most days won't even feel like work. This flexible career can be custom-made to fit your lifestyle or other commitments. Perhaps you are looking for a career that will let you keep your children home with you, or be able to meet them after school. Maybe you are just looking for a bit of extra income. Or maybe you've decided that you should be able to do work that makes you happy.

Whatever your reason, a career as a dog walker can be all these things and more. Dog walking businesses allow you to work from home, scheduling your work around family life or other commitments. Sometimes you'll have busy times that require long days, but a career as a dog walker definitely offers more flexibility than most.

More than once in this career you'll hear clients tell you that they appreciate your work, and that they don't know what their dogs would do without you. You will be trusted and appreciated by the dogs you walk daily or weekly, and you will see firsthand the difference you make in their health, happiness, and well being.

"It's satisfying to know you are creating a valuable service that people and their pets really appreciate. And just being with the animals is very rewarding!" says Zeth Weissman, co-owner of dog walking and pet sitting business PhilaPets.com.

1.2 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Dog Walker* is designed to help you launch your new business by providing industry information, how-to guidelines, helpful hints on finding clients, and general advice on starting up. It will teach you how to take your interest in dogs and your talent for earning their affection, and turn them into a profitable business.

Throughout the guide you will find handy samples of registration forms, budget planners, marketing materials and checklists you can adapt and use for your dog walking business. You'll also find encouragement and ideas from a couple of dog walking business owners who have kindly shared their advice and experience with you. They include:

- Zeth and Deirdre Weissman, who grew their dog walking business, PhilaPet.com, into one of Philadelphia's largest pet businesses in less than four years (www.PhilaPet.com).
- Paul Mann, founder of Fetch! Pet Care, the largest dog walking/pet sitting franchise in the United States (www.fetchpetcare.com).

The information, resources and advice on these pages will save you hundreds of hours of research, so that you can start earning money more quickly. You'll avoid the common pitfalls, and make business decisions like an expert. Armed with the inside knowledge this guide provides, you could be getting out for a walk with your first furry "client" in just a short time from right now.