

'Russian Dog Wizard' Trains Pooches To Paw The Line



'Doglish': A Primer

Vladae Roytapel created "Doglish" as a way to communicate with dogs based on how dogs communicate with each other. Here's his advice on communicating with your pup:

Verbal Language

—A high-pitched tone indicates approval; use it for praising your dog. (A falsetto when you say "good boy!" tells him he has done something positive.) —A low-pitched tone indicates displeasure; use it when you want to correct him. ("Bad boy!" "No!" "Stay!") —Staccato tones are for commands ("Sit!" "Stay!" "Stop!")

Body Language

—Leaning over the dog, just slightly, means "sit." —Towering over him will communicate "down." —A step forward is translated as an invasion of space and should be used for corrections. —Moving backward is translated as an invitation to follow. —Lowering yourself (kneeling down) is seen as a friendly gesture. —Raising yourself into a posture over the dog is seen as a gesture of dominance.

Physical Communication

Roytapel says that mother dogs communicate with their pups by licking (to praise) and nipping (gently, to correct). You can imitate that by patting (not rubbing) a dog on his head to praise, and by snapping his leash (one tug, not hard) to get his attention for correction.

The rest of the world thinks Americans are crazy for the way they treat their dogs: Doggie day care? Gourmet dog food? Ultrasounds? According to Business Week, Americans spent \$41 billion on their pets in 2007.

That's all fine, but Vladae Roytapel, the self-proclaimed "Russian Dog

Wizard," says American pet owners are not giving their dogs the most important thing they need.

"Your dog needs to know you are the boss," he says. "Humans, we don't like having a boss so much, but your dog? He loves it! Dogs need to know the order of things. They need to know who's in charge."

And that, of course, should be the household human. How dog owners communicate their status to their dog makes all the difference between a well-mannered canine companion — and the kinds of dogs that keep Roytapel in business.

'The Canine Dr. Phil'

Roytapel grew up in the Soviet Union, near the Turkish border in what is now Azerbaijan. His grandfather was a well-known biologist who specialized in animal behavior. Roytapel assisted his grandfather on his farm, working with wolves, foxes and even chickens, charting their conditioned reflexes in the same way colleague Ivan Pavlov did.

As a young man, Roytapel was mentored by a deaf-mute dog trainer who was legendary throughout Russia. Eventually, he trained dogs that patrolled the Russian-Chinese border and paratrooper dogs for the Red Army.

After immigrating to the United States about a decade ago, Roytapel focused on the dog-human relationship in civilian life. He has been called "The Canine Dr. Phil," because he resolves relationships between the two species so well.

Human Folly Mostly To Blame

Roytapel agrees with America's other star dog trainer, Cesar "The Dog Whisperer" Millan, that most of the problem in the dog-human equation is on the human side.

"Dogs aren't humans, they're not babies — they're dogs," he says. Even for the tiniest Yorkie, "the wolf is still their second cousin."

And like wolves, dogs are firm adherents to hierarchy. So they look to their owners to set the pace and make decisions.

Speaking In 'Doglish'

Roytapel has learned to speak to dogs on their own frequency, using a combination of sounds and body language he playfully calls "Doglish." And while he might laugh about the name, he's serious about the results. Dogs, Roytapel insists, don't hear English, but they are finely tuned to tone (see "'Doglish': A Primer," inset).

Above all, Roytapel says, never let your dog lead while on the leash.

"You walk the dog; the dog doesn't walk you," he says. "Pulling on the leash is a sign that your dog believes he's in charge of you. It's putting him in a position of authority."

Teaching your dog to walk at your side or behind you eliminates a lot of problems, like on-leash aggression, excessive barking and possessiveness of the owner, Roytapel says.

"You have to walk your dog with the same authority like Oprah when she walks on stage, you know? You have to own it. The dog will sense that."

But if doing that were as simple as it sounds, everybody could do it — and Roytapel wouldn't have a waiting list.