



The Dog Wizard

By Jeanine Matlow

When Vladae Roytapel arrived in America a decade ago, it didn't take long for him to prove that when it comes to working with problem dogs, he is one of the best in the field.

"People are so busy in this country," says Vladae, who emigrated from the former Soviet Union and formed Alternative Canine Training in Royal Oak seven years ago. In fact, he says one of the side effects of our high standard of living is that something gets sacrificed along the way.



training classes. "Not everyone can afford private training," says Vladae, whose only option until recently was in-home obedience training.

As Vladae likes to say, dogs do not speak Russian or English but "doglish" instead. "Body language, eye contact and sharp movements speak more clearly," he says.

Dog training can be a serious business, especially when animal aggression is a concern. Vladae says his favorite part of the job is seeing the amazing transformation that follows. "I can turn the most maniac of dogs into loving companions people can take everywhere they go with confidence," he says. On the other hand, his biggest challenge can be the humans, who are often more hardheaded than the dogs.

In the end, Vladae says he is striving for lifelong changes that cannot be accomplished overnight. "People often look for short-term solutions to long-term problems," he says. "Most dogs misbehave because the humans don't know how to behave."

As The Dog Wizard points out, pet problems arise for different reasons including:

- Lack of structure and discipline
- Not meeting major needs – physical, mental and social

All types of frustrations

"People are stressed and disconnected," Vladae says. "They overcompensate with lack of attention for their pets." This observation has led Vladae, also known as The Dog Wizard, to his latest endeavor of puppy preschool (or potty camps) at Pet Ritz Lakeshore Resort in Roseville. Here, people can drop off their pups in the morning for a combination of potty training and play. Housebreaking results are achieved in about a week, which is way ahead of the average two-month training time.

His business is based on honesty and integrity. "I put clients first because the best teacher success is to see how their students succeed," says Vladae, who resides in Troy. "I also always think about community." Together with his business partner, Bonny Wainz, not only do they bring the best of American and European dog training techniques to metro Detroit and beyond, the two also volunteer through animal rescue and therapy dog programs.

Though Vladae says his clients have included everyone from professional athletes such as Steve Yzerman to news anchors like Paula Tutman, he has decided to bring his popular training methods to the masses with affordable

Vladae says pet owners often go from one extreme way of thinking to another, by either punishing their pets or ignoring negative behavior, hoping it will go away. "It's not going to happen," he says, "even in a Hollywood movie." As for the prime time for training, "It's never too early and it's never too late," says Vladae, who still believes the earlier you start the better. "You establish yourself as authoritative first."

When Brenda Hendley could no longer handle her 2-year-old Cocker Spaniel, she turned to Vladae for help. Maxwell had become very aggressive, she says. "Nothing worked – yanking on [the] leash, correcting, even yelling at times." When he began growling at her granddaughter, that was the last straw. "I either had to get help or get rid of him," Hendley says. Two sessions with Vladae and she has already seen a change. The Dog Wizard taught Hendley how to regain her power to become the alpha leader.

One thing Vladae does not agree with is the old adage that you shouldn't fix something unless it's broken. "People don't understand the value of prevention," he says. "They

are reactive instead of proactive. I don't like to play Russian roulette. I like to play Russian chess." From his experience, Vladae has noticed that women often end up as the dog handlers of the household. "Ladies are often running the house and the kids and the pets. Kids want pets and women end up caring for them." In the case of a problem pet, "Dogs may be considered man's best friend, but the woman's best friend can be the dog trainer."

"What I learned over time is that a lot of American ladies failed in relationship with pets for the same reason as with people. They gave a lot to them and expected nothing in return." With dogs, kindness is a sign of weakness. "Every leash has two ends. If you don't pull it, someone else will."

Vladae will be the first to admit that he is not a conventional dog trainer. In fact, there is nothing conventional about him and that is part of the charm. "I do believe in the positive way of reinforcement," he says. "And my clients are loyal followers."

When he left the former Soviet Union, he brought with him more than money could buy. "I brought my international experience and education," says Vladae, who earned a master's degree in political science and studied animal behavior and economics.

Dog training is a combination of sport and science, says Vladae, who credits yoga and martial arts for teaching him discipline and self-control. The Dog Wizard says his first teacher and student was Berta, his Siberian Husky when he was six-years-old. Now, he uses his two German Shepherds as working dogs. His extensive career has included training for the canine department of Focus Hope, search and rescue dogs, Leader Dogs for the Blind, border patrol dogs and more.

"When you go Russian, any dog will stop fussin," he says. "Your dog is not bad. You just need Vlad."

For more information on Alternative Canine Training, go to www.911dogwizard.com or call 734-462-2810.

Here is a preview of training tips to come from Vladae:

Always calmly leave your home and NO welcome home celebration.

Walk with your dog on a loose leash.

If a command is given, follow through by all means.