

Vladae Roytapel the Russian Dog Wizard

By Kerri Danskin

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I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Vladae Roytapel, also known as the Russian Dog Wizard. A dog trainer with a very big, very Russian personality, Vladae's was one of those phone calls that felt like a roller coaster ride from start to finish.

His main purpose in calling me at the Pet Style News office was to promote his new product, which he calls the Magic Wand, something he uses in his training and is now offering both wholesale and direct to consumers. Like any good salesman, he is convinced that his product will be the next big thing for home dog training.

I haven't seen this product yet, but Vladae tells me it is a stick with which a dog owner can blast a short spurt of pressurized air to "put the brakes on" whatever bad behavior a dog is exhibiting to give the human the opportunity to do some training. He also said it can be handy even if your dog is well trained because often when dog owners are taking walks with their dogs, they encounter other dogs that are not as well trained. If a stranger's dog were charging at your dog, he said, you could use the stick and the sound and feeling of the compressed air would cause enough of a startle response to possible thwart an attack.

It's an interesting idea and one that I'd like to see in person, but Vladae was also kind enough to give me some great information about what he thinks most Americans are doing in the training of their dogs. There are two major flaws, he said, the first of which is allowing your dog to bark.

"When a dog is barking, he is already biting," Vladae said. "He just hasn't closed his teeth on anything yet."

Allowing this expression of aggression and frustration upsets the balance in the canine/human relationship, he said. After we spoke, I looked at some videos of Vladae online (he has appeared on Late Night with David Letterman, CNN and local news programs) and saw how he recommends owners correct barking and other bad behaviors. Using what he calls "doglish," Vladae uses a low tone of voice to stop a dog from doing what he's doing, noting that it sounds like a growl. A high tone, sounding more like a howl, is great for praise, he said.

The other major mistake Americans make in dog training is allowing their dogs to pull on the leash.

"You can either walk your dog or your dog walks you and if you let him walk you, he will walk all over you," he said. His method for correcting this is similar to one I've seen Cesar Milan do on his Animal Planet show. As soon as the dog walks in front of you, you turn around and begin walking the other way. The resulting tug on the dog collar is similar to a correcting "bite," Vladae says. When the dog turns with you, you praise with a high-pitched word or sound, which again sounds like a celebratory howl to the dog, he said.

When Vladae and I spoke he told me he had been on the phone with Animal Planet the day before and they had expressed some interest in doing a show with him. I did not confirm this with the network, but I wouldn't be surprised if it were true, considering how entertaining Vladae was during our conversations. His habits of describing dogs as "barking like AK-47 in downtown Beirut," and saying, when a dog does something right, "This is American dog and in America, every job must be paid. Have some cookie," make him sound like an entertainer already.

Good luck, Vladae, with your new product, and hopefully we'll all be seeing some more of you soon!