

Dogs hear your body language



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Billerica -

Jeter, a one and a half year old German shepherd, no longer gnaws his owner's arm like it's a chew toy; he's stopped jumping on people, too. What he will do is walk on his leash without pulling ahead and he'll sit, lie down, and come on command. All this and it's just his third lesson.

Jeter's owners, Lauren and Chuck DiGiandomenico of Framingham, said they tried other trainers but without success so a co-worker recommended Canine Magic Dog Training in Billerica and so far they've been thrilled with the results.

"We had him on a pinch collar. Now, after two lessons he can walk on a regular leash," said Chuck.

And Lauren added, with a relieved smile, she's happy she's no longer getting chewed.

Terry Christie, a registered nurse and certified dog trainer, started Canine Magic in 2003 and prides herself on fast results, having most dogs trained off-leash in just six to eight weeks, and having complete success with many dogs that other trainers have turned away. She said the rewarding part is being able to save a dog that would otherwise have to be put down.

"It's more than a business for me. It's a passion of mine," she said.

Christie, owner of a 9-year-old female boxer named Daisy and a 4-year-old male blue Doberman named Cobey, uses a method that enables owners to communicate with their pets through body language and tone, instilling confidence and mutual trust. She often receives referrals from the Web site of Cesar Millan, the National Geographic channel's "Dog Whisperer," whose concepts on dog psychology are tightly woven into the Canine Magic approach.

"I don't think you have to be brutal to train a dog," she said. "A dog doesn't respect you if you are angry."

She encourages staying calm and not yelling but, at the same time, being firm and showing the dog you are in charge. "He has to know that he doesn't have a choice," she said.

Chuck DiGiandomenico followed Christie's direction by instructing Jeter to sit by repeating the word "down" while pushing lightly on his rear end with one hand and gesturing a sitting down position with the other. He repeated the word "down" sternly and directly at Jeter, but was reminded by Christie not to raise his voice.

On the third "down", Jeter lowered his lean, brown body to the ground and his owner cheerfully exclaimed, "Good boy!" as his face was happily licked.

But Christie's training method is not all words and gestures. She also uses remote electronic collars to immediately establish a communication link between owner and dog. Jeter was wearing his collar during his lesson. As his owner spoke a command such as "come," he'd press a button on the remote to send a vibration into the collar.

The remote electronic collar does not harm or punish the dog, Christie explained. Its purpose is to get his attention as a command is spoken and once the command is recognized and followed, the dog receives praise.

This is nothing like the choke chains or prong collars sometimes used in conventional obedience training, which can cause pain or injury. The remote electronic collar doesn't give an electric shock; rather it emits a mild, adjustable sensation that brings the dog to attention, similar to a tap on the shoulder, Christie explained.

The collar is a useful tool but it doesn't work without the proper training, Christie said, using the analogy that you wouldn't call someone a surgeon just because they're handed a scalpel.

Bill Bardzilowski of Billerica has been taking George, his 3-year-old mix-breed terrier, to Canine Magic for about a year and a

half and he believes many people have the misconception that remote collars hurt dogs. He said this is simply not true and added that Christie lets owners hold the collar to feel its gentle pulsation.

He said he was impressed with Christie's professionalism and overwhelmed at how quickly he saw results with George, who was a tough, street dog adopted through a save-a-dog program in Puerto Rico. He noted a complete difference in demeanor and ability to pay attention to his owners just after a half hour introductory session.

"Personally I think Terry is very good at what she does because she not only focuses on the dogs but also focuses on the owners," said Bardzilowski. "Terry does not train your dog – it's the owner who trains their dog. She's the guide."

It's important to gain the dog's respect so that he sees you as a leader and then bad behavior can be addressed and corrected, said Christie. Just like with children, providing clear rules and staying consistent is key to keeping the dog trained.

"I don't just take someone's dog and teach him how to heel," said Christie. "I want to be able to help people enjoy their dogs and make them a stress-free part of the family."

She said that everyone who comes to her for training says, "I love my dog, but..." Her goal, she said, is to get rid of that "but."

Christie's training program offers a combination of private lessons and unlimited attendance at group trainings for an additional six months. She works with all breeds of dogs ranging in age from 16 weeks to 12 years and provides a free half hour consultation. For more information call 978-362-1920 or visit www.CanineMagic.Biz.