

Leader of the Pack

BY SANDRA M. BROWN

TUCSON'S DOG WHISPERERS

Picture this: you're standing in front of an audience, training people on the importance of good leadership. You're confident and commanding, and the audience hangs on your every word.

Now imagine that scenario again — but with your dogs as the audience. Are they as attentive as their human counterparts or are they ignoring you? That answer depends upon your understanding of the canine psyche.

“The philosophy is that dogs need someone to be a leader of the pack. When they have found that, they can become more comfortable in assuming a submissive role,” says Gerard Raneri, a Bark Busters K-9 behavior therapist/trainer. “It sounds like a real mind game — but you want the dog to respond to you on your terms.” He adds, “Dogs are very symbolic.

They will assume a leadership role if their owner does not — that's why dogs pull when they are being walked, for example. But this actually stresses the dog out.”



BARK BUSTERS, FOUNDED IN AUSTRALIA, IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST DOG TRAINING COMPANY, BOASTING MORE THAN 320 FRANCHISES INCLUDING MORE THAN 250 IN THE U.S. FOR HOURS, PRICING OR TO SET UP AN APPOINTMENT, CALL 877.500.BARK OR VISIT BARK-BUSTERS.COM

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Bark Busters techniques have been perfected through nearly 20 years of constant refinement. All employees receive extensive training at the company's U.S. headquarters in Denver. In addition to a four-week program, each student spends at least 20 sessions shadowing other trainers before being sent out alone. “It's rigorous because they want to make sure you're ready,” says Raneri. “There are instances where they actually turn people away and give them their franchise money back.”

However, the headquarters' role doesn't end after training. Steve Dell, a Bark Busters K-9 behavior therapist/trainer serving Northwest Tucson, will look to the

corporate office for support when encountering tough cases. “The best part of my job is to see results very quickly, within the first couple of hours,” he says. “But if I need further advice, I'll post questions on the company's intranet.” Thankfully, it rarely comes to that, Dell says.

The company is so confident in their product that they offer a “Lifetime of the Dog” guarantee. No matter the circumstance or the owner, Raneri and Dell will travel to clients' homes as many times as needed at no additional charge. “If a client needs me, I'll be there,” says Dell. With service like that, you'll be inside your dog's head in no time. ■



GERARD RANERI

STEVE DELL

TRAINING TIPS FROM THE PROS

- Don't impart human characteristics to dogs: It's one of the biggest obstacles for trainers. Dogs are pack animals, and they want to follow a strong leader. That's the owner's responsibility.
- Timing is critical: If you know your dog is about to jump on you, for instance, anticipate their reaction by correcting them before it happens. If they obey, remember to praise them immediately.
- Verbal communication is vital to successful training: Use one-word commands in a calm, assertive tone. When correcting, use a growl or “BAH.” When praising, use high-pitched, light tones.
- Keep them calm: Is your dog riled up when you come home? Ignore him. Don't give attention to this behavior. Instead, attend to him when he's calm and relaxed. Ignoring is the highest form of dominance.
- Assume proper body language: If you bend down to correct your dog, you're submitting to them. Crouch down to show affection, and then stand back up to show authority.
- Consistency is key: Practice the training you've learned with your dogs for at least 15 minutes every day.

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