

# There's Method in the Magic

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When we speak about the relationships between physical, mental and emotional balance, and between self-carriage, self-control and self-confidence, we are acknowledging the complex relationship between all parts of the being. We recognize that no one part, or issue, exists in isolation. There are probably many different issues influencing the animal we're working with, and the more information we have about him - his body and his attitude - the better equipped we are to help.

If you go to your doctor with a longstanding headache, and he or she gives you a strong painkiller that works, you'll indeed be happy that the pain's gone. If you discover down the road that it recurs when you stop taking the pills, you'll probably want the doctor to look deeper. You don't simply want to manage the pain, you want it not to happen in the first place. The doctor will need to find out what there is that could cause, contribute to, or support the pain and will send you for tests to see what else may be involved. Is it a digestive issue? Tension? Neurological? All the above? The result is a full picture of everything that may be affecting you. This gives the doctor a better chance of finding a solution for your problem, and you'll probably have a lot more confidence in him or her. Everything has been taken into account, and you feel fully listened to.

Working with an animal is similar to a doctor working with a patient. It's a bit like being a detective. We keep on the lookout for clues to what could be behind the problem we are trying to solve. Each clue may lead us to more questions and more clues. Sometimes we may have no idea how what we find relates to the problem or the solution, but we

know that all parts of the being are related with such complexity that we should overlook nothing.

To make this more clear, we'll consider two scenarios.

## Scenario 1:

Here's an example of how we might take the painkiller route with TTouch and end up being ineffective in the long run. We are asked to settle a happy, friendly, but overly active jumpy young dog. His person loves his enthusiasm, but wishes he had a volume button, and would like him not to pull.

We decide to try a bodywrap – so often good for hyperactivity. Great idea, and indeed it does go far to settle the dog. We do some ear work to calm him and a bit of movement work with balance leash or harness to help him be easier to lead. The client is delighted with her "new dog," but finds that she's sometimes dependent on the wrap and/or harness to keep him manageable. Could we have been more effective? Possibly.

Why? In scenario 1, we chose our tools based on their known effectiveness as solutions for the problem that was presented. In scenario 2 we'll look for things that may be causing or supporting the problem. We will (1) run through a checklist of observations of his body and behaviour, and (2) listen more closely to the owner. In doing so, we may gain information to address more pieces of the issue.

## Scenario 2:

It doesn't much matter where we start, and often we begin by investigating whatever initially attracts our attention. If nothing stands out about what the owner says or the dog displays, we may simply work our way methodically through a list of observations: of body, behaviour, overall posture, movement, etc. We make a point of being brief but

unhurried in what we do, and we intersperse it with movement to keep the dog calm.

At some point, since it's on our list, we want to get a sense of how his feet feel and how he feels about having his feet touched. We might note that they feel cold, and that he is concerned, stepping away as we begin to touch them. Dogs that are concerned about their feet are often overly bouncy and poorly grounded. Helping him to be comfortable with having his feet handled could reduce his bounciness.

In fact, simply reaching towards his feet causes him to begin to bounce. Is this "fooling around" and therefore an indication of concern? As we continue, we notice that his tendency to bounce is triggered by a variety of things we do. It seems to be a reliable indicator that we have come upon something with which he's uncomfortable. His person believes his bouncing indicates he is happy. However, in the process of our work together, we would like her to recognize that it is not about being happy, and is not a choice, but is his characteristic reaction to stress.

She originally described him as a friendly dog. If we ask how he behaves around people, we hear that he bounces, "smiles," and brings visitors a toy when they come to the door. Where might this information lead us?

Tension and/or concerns around the mouth and muzzle, and behaviours such as mouthing or holding things in the mouth, are often seen in dogs described as immature or emotional. One expression of immaturity is poor self control – no volume button! "Smiling" can be an indication of tension - and sometimes of a dry mouth, when the lips get stuck up on the gums. If we include his mouth/muzzle in our observations, we observe he's concerned about our contact; we note some dryness and feel tension in his lips and jaw. Finding a way

to work with his mouth might help him cope more maturely in the situations that evoke the bouncy behaviour we were asked to address.

You can see that having conducted just two additional observations – feet and muzzle – combined with what our client says, leads us to recognize what we may have missed in the first scenario:

- a) That he has some concerns about his feet, which can be associated with jumpy and poorly grounded dogs.
- b) That his feet were cold - another good reason to use a bodywrap, since it could help his circulation.
- c) That concern appears to contribute to his bouncy behaviour.
- d) That he has issues about his mouth/muzzle, which often go hand in hand with the behaviours he displays and may be a key to the volume button his person seeks.

What if we had taken even more into account? Breath, balance, belly?... and those are just the 'b's of our checklist!

As we know so well, changing what's going on in the body can change the behaviour. Finding places where we feel something could be better should cause us to cheer: Yay! Addressing what we find can give us a better chance of success, but we'll only find these places when we go looking for them, as the doctor does when he sends you for tests. As your confidence in how the doctor can help you increases as he or she learns more about you, so will your client's confidence in you as you take the whole dog into consideration.

Better yet? Your confidence in yourself and your ability to be effective will also increase. Yay again!