

## Cape Fear K9 is Helping Working Dog and Pet Owners Located in North Carolina Overcome Aggression and Obedience Issues With their Relationship Based Training Approach



**Mike Chambers**  
CEO

**Cape Fear K9**

**Interview conducted by:**  
**Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor**  
**CEOCFO Magazine**

**CEOCFO:** *Mr. Chambers, one of the first things I see on the Cape Fear K9 site is "Training Based on Principles of Fairness, Understanding, and Accountability." What is your approach? What does that mean at Cape Fear K9? How is that different from other methods?*

**Mr. Chambers:** What it really boils down to is our emphasis on training with a bond and focusing on relationship in our training programs. We are really big about approaching all obstacles, whether it be aggression, obedience, working k9. We are very big about approaching things from a relationship

point of view. Relationship is definitely one of those things that can be difficult to get once you have lost it.

We are really big about trying to just make sure the dogs are happy, they are doing what they want to be doing, and encouraging a real positive environment, first and foremost, no matter what we do. That is where fairness comes in. Where it is a little bit different is that there has been a shift in dog training across the board that is more focused on positive based and less correction-based means in terms of training. Therefore, we really try to emphasize the positive aspects in terms of training.

**CEOCFO:** *Why does that work better?*

**Mr. Chambers:** The principal there is that you can do a lot with a dog on a leash, whether you use different tools or collars on the dog to manipulate them, to get them to do what you want, and that is effective to a certain degree. However, equipment will fail, leashes will come undone, collars will break, and when those things happen, inevitably, the only thing you have left is your relationship.

If you train the dog primarily through corrective means and punishment, as soon as that dog is off leash or has an opportunity to get away and make a mistake, they definitely will. Therefore, with the positive based, we nurture an environment, we elevate ourselves in the dogs' eyes, making ourselves more advantageous to the dog. In that way we can interact with the dog and get more out of the dog, while also making sure that they are having a good time in the process. We do a blend of both.

There is definitely a place for common corrections and punishment, however, we layer the foundation with positivity. Then we do a certain training method to correct the dog, or deliver punishment in a way that is not detrimental to the relationship.

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**CEOFCO: *How does that transfer from you, the trainer, to the ultimate person or people that might be working with an individual dog?***

**Mr. Chambers:** Most of the time, the dog simply does not know what it does not know. Using our relationship, we are able to show the dog what is advantageous. We show them that these certain behaviors are going to get them the things that they want, and get them to a certain point, and then teach the handlers or the owners how to continue that training, and to deliver that system with them. This is also very successful with dogs that experience reactivity or aggression. Many times there is a lot of frustration in that relationship, and so the owners or handlers have a hard time combating it, whereas with us, we get a reset, and we get a fresh pair of eyes and fresh pair of hands to help nurture a relationship with the dog, help them overcome some of their difficulties or their nervous behavior around other people or dogs, and then show the handlers how to implement that new form of training and nurture a more positive based relationship to help them be successful in the future.

It is a little bit like a pause and reset, but then there is also a lot of knowledge implemented into that, so most of these things are happening unintentionally and the owners are not aware, and they do not understand how the dog has been shaped to be where they currently are. Therefore, it is simply our job to fix some of those handling mistakes, while also addressing the dogs. We believe that the dog has a part, the owner has a part, and then us, the trainers, we have a part.

**"My passion is, first and foremost, working dogs. My passion is putting good K9s on the street, educating handlers, giving them the most up to date tools to go out there and to protect and serve. That is my passion." Mike Chambers**

**CEOFCO: *What do you understand, or what is intuitive to you when you are first engaging with a dog? Do you know who is going to make it through the training? What are the intangibles that you sense that other people might not?***

**Mr. Chambers:** One of the biggest key factors is really being able to read the dog and read the dog's body language. It really is a different language. Like Spanish, French or sign language, it is its own thing. When you spend enough time with various dogs and various breeds, various ages, you start to be able to look at them at a glance and tell exactly what they are feeling, what they are thinking. That is one of the things that is intuitive, and that will allow me to understand to what degree that dog is going to be successful, what is realistic in their goals and expectations, what is going to be doable in the time frames that we gave to train them. That is one of the more intuitive things that goes into the dog training; being able to read the dog's body language and understand their mentality.

**CEOFCO: *What led you to start Cape Fear K9?***

**Mr. Chambers:** What started us was that I left military service, I was 4 years Marine Corp infantry, and I did some security detail as well with the presidential core program. After that, I found myself in the private sector while going back to school and pursuing my degree. I did the private sector for a couple of years and enjoyed it and thought about moving into federal law enforcement. At that time, I was missing some law enforcement experience on my resume, so I thought I wanted to leave the private sector and go into the public sector as law enforcement. However, I really had an interest in doing K9, from a childhood experience.

I found American K9 Interdiction, which is a course up in Virginia. You go through their K9 course, you select a dog in the first week and you go through the training pipeline with your dog that is untrained, and you train the dog during that time. At the completion of their 13-week course you get to graduate and leave with your certified dog. During that process I met with my older K9, Riggs, who is trained in protection and bomb detection. During that process I fell in love with training the dog and found that I had a knack for it, and my instructors guided me very well during that time. Therefore, I felt like I had a calling and I found my calling, and that I could do more for the law enforcement community as a trainer and putting good dogs on the street, as opposed to just handling one or two throughout my career.



**CEO CFO: *What surprised you as Cape Fear K9 has grown to where it is today?***

**Mr. Chambers:** I think that truthfully, the biggest surprise is just how much of a demand there is for good dog training in general, how many dogs need help, how many owners need help with their dogs, how many dogs are struggling, how many issues that are out there just in general. It was a little bit of a shock as to just how many dogs need some help and some guidance. Secondly, I would say that from a business point of view, I never saw myself as being the CEO of the owner of a company, but here I am, and I fell into it. I really love the business aspect. I love the idea of starting something from nothing and building it up and growing it and really just seeing how far and how big I can take it.

**CEO CFO: *What did you learn from your military experience that has been helpful in the business side of Cape Fear K9?***

**Mr. Chambers:** I actually equate a lot of my handling principles to how I was as a leader in the military. Especially in the military, you are in an organization where you can use your rank and your status to get things done. It is accepted to listen to your seniors no matter what they say. However, I always tried to nurture an environment within my squad or my platoon of respect. I found that the individuals that I had earned their respect and shown them that side, that they were much more willing and adept to follow me in cases where it was not always that easy or more likely to bear some of the bad times, because they knew that I was there with them and I had earned their respect.

I equate that same thing with dogs. Once you earn their respect, the things that you will get out of them, the trainability, again going back to that relationship, what you are able to get out of that dog is so much more than what you are going to find by putting a training collar on the dog or forcing them to be in an uncomfortable position.

**CEO CFO: *Would you tell us about the range of services you offer today?***

**Mr. Chambers:** Cape Fear K9 is first and foremost, a working K9 company. However, we have a lot of pet side of the business that is operational. On the pet side of things, we do everything from very your puppy training, as early as 8 weeks old, and then we do advanced training that entails everything from off leash training, e-collar training, as well, for your standard home obedience, good manners. Then we also have a couple of smaller things like personal protection, scent detection, and things of that nature, to give certain dogs natural outlets.

From the working side, we do basically everything. We do scent detection on narcotics, explosives, mold, human remains detection as well for dogs that are doing search and search and rescue. We do search and rescue dogs as well. We also do any dogs that are doing any kind of bite work, apprehension training as well, and tracking.

**CEOCFO: *Are you able to take on as many customers or as many dogs that come your way, or are you limited by time, space, personnel?***

**Mr. Chambers:** The biggest limiting factor right now would be the space. I try not to overload myself or other trainers. I want to make sure that the dogs get adequate amount of time and training. Generally speaking, that has not been an issue. However, of course, as we continue to grow and scale, that is something that we always want to make sure that we are not getting too far ahead of ourselves, but we are also not falling behind the curve either, so yes, it is definitely a talking point when thinking about scaling and stuff like that.

We want to make sure that each dog is unique, and they deserve their own amount of time. As much as we try to make our program all encompassing, at the end of the day every dog is different. Some dogs progress super-fast, some dogs struggle a little bit more, some dogs come to us with a little bit of foundation, or maybe they came through a previous program when they were younger, or some dogs come out of a shelter and they are extremely shy and timid, so those dogs would take a little bit longer. Those are all factors that go into it.

**CEOCFO: *What is your geographic reach? Are you mostly local or do people come from a distance, particularly in the K9 training? Where are your customers?***

**Mr. Chambers:** For the K9 side of things it depends. It is very sparse. I have done training up in Northern Virginia, I have gone down to Georgia. It kind of depends on the demand and need and what departments are looking for. We are also involved here locally as well. Then for the pet side of things, we are obviously very local based training. However, given the geographic area where we are, we are a high tourist area, and many people end up moving down here, so we get many clients from all over the country.

**CEOCFO: *Are people coming to you because they understand the difference in your approach? Are they sometimes surprised about that? How do you reach out for potential customers?***

**Mr. Chambers:** We have had a couple of local magazines do advertisements for us, as well as articles that showed interest in a new, or younger, up and coming business. We have gotten a lot of traction from that as well. There have been many people that said, "Hey, I saw your article in this magazine and that is what drove me to reach out," or "I have a friend or a neighbor that you trained their dog, and we are super impressed." Much of it is through word of mouth, or researching who I am as an individual, and what the business stands for and what our goals are.

We get lots of clients that come through us where rarely are we their first trainer. Most people have either had previous dogs in their lives, or previous locations where they have lived and they have been through trainers. Therefore, when they search the local area for a trainer and they are looking for somebody, they have things that they are looking for, and definitely based on the feedback that we have gotten, the principals and the mission of Cape Fear K9 have definitely stood out to them.

**CEOCFO: *Do you see at some point expanding to other locations, maybe franchises, maybe training, trainers? What is in the future for Cape Fear K9?***

**Mr. Chambers:** To summarize it would just be open-minded. I definitely have goals for myself. I would love to have a working dog kennel, specifically that would hold probably about 60 dogs or so. That is kind of where I would like to be. My passion is, first and foremost, working dogs. My passion is putting good K9s on the street, educating handlers, giving them the most up to date tools to go out there and to protect and serve. That is my passion.

As far as the pet side of things, I have a personal attachment to the pet side of things and the need to help with dogs that are struggling with aggression and reactivity. I love helping people bridge the gap between their dogs and themselves, bringing them closer and helping them enjoy the most out of their companions.

As far as franchising and growing it, I would definitely like to be a stronghold in the state of North Carolina, being that the Cape Fear region is my home. However, as far as national franchising, I really believe in what we are doing, clearly, and as long as I can maintain the integrity of our principals and our mission, as long as the integrity is there, I hope to make it as big as it will be.