

## - Shyy Dogg -

### Teaching an Old Dog New Tricks

A question that many have asked is, "Should shy dogs participate in obedience training classes?"

When I first looked at this topic, I instantly felt that it was addressed in a negative light. I felt a positive push to ask, "Why should a shy dog NOT be allowed to participate in obedience classes. Upon reflection I could settle on no concrete answer to support the denial of the opportunity for a better quality of life.

The following are some thoughts and details I have come up with after many observations and debates with other trainers in our community here at Hardee Hero Hounds.

For the purpose of this article I will be referring to our shy dog as Shyy Dogg.

When I looked at the characteristics of a shy dog, they typically would fall into two columns. The left column was the trigger, or the action, that caused the characteristic. The right column was the reaction to the trigger. (See table below)



<u>Trigger</u>	<u>Reaction to trigger</u>
Common/Uncommon Noises	Jumpy or Shivering
New Noise	Defensive Barking/Howling
Overly Energetic People	Withdrawn from Interaction
Energetic People	Tucked Tail/No Eye Contact
Unfamiliar Places Unfamiliar Smells	Pull on leash/Tries to leave erratically / area

Many of the reactions can be triggered differently. One thing is for certain, Shyy Dogg has some trying moments during his day. Shyy Dogg is continuously on the move or sometimes, he shuts down and sleeps for extended periods of time.

I am confident that during open discussions that other connecting details and triggers would be identified. We rarely receive detailed information on our dogs, so for our general purpose we can deal only with the tangible indicators instead of the assumptions of Shyy Dogg's past. Once I have identified the "look" of the shyness, I must then plan for the "how" of working with Shyy Dogg to achieve success, which should result in a better quality of life.



In my opinion, there are four steps to achieve my objectives with Shyy Dogg.

Step One: "Patience at all times" was my mantra as I worked with Shyy Dogg daily. My goal was to instill in Shyy Dogg the skills that he would need for a better quality of life. This process would also have a dual effect of Shyy Dogg being a better K-9 Citizen for our community.

Step Two: "Tolerance of Shyness." Tolerance is the capacity for respecting practices and/or flexibility for a variation from a standardized process. Tolerance can be as simple as not correcting each error, but using them to better facilitate success later in the training process.

Step Three: "Repetition of Exercises" or how I would work with Shyy Dogg in a way that encourages consistency of these exercises. This step combines the Patience with the Tolerance. The key to success is starting slowly on the repetition of successfully completed exercises, which will eventually result in Shyy Dogg reaching 100% success rate. Of course this will be time consuming, but the reward is seeing Shyy Dogg gain confidence and eventually will not have reactions to the triggers he started with when I began the journey with him.



Step Four: "Creativity at all levels" is a mandatory function in combining the first three steps, e.g. Patience, Tolerance, and Repetition. In other words, without creativity, Shy Dogg would not be able to be successful reaching the levels that of Confidence that I expect from Hardee Hero Hounds Operations.

Many times, we incorporate Behavior Modifications into Obedience Training. Not just for the behavior of our dogs, but for the behavior of our trainers too. It can be as simple as learning how to modify the phrase "Good Boy!" I realize I have adapted that phrase to fit so many different opportunities for praise that it is almost an instinctive action. "Creativity" makes the "How to" work with Shy Dogg appropriate at so many points.

Do shy dogs make mistakes? This is a question that I have pondered for awhile now. My answer is an unequivocal NO. Do people who work with shy dogs make mistakes? Of course, however, mistakes that are honest ones, are unavoidable. The reason they are unavoidable is that we do not have a long-term investment in shy dogs and their individual personalities. As a result, there seems to be a lack of return on investment (ROI). Nevertheless, with time and experience, all the unavoidable mistakes can be corrected quickly.



As I reflect on my time with shy dogs, I must admit that I have made honest mistakes but I also have learned from my mistakes. Below are my top four gaffes.

1. Too many expectations: First I had, and probably still have too many expectations of what Shyy Dogg might be capable of when asked to respond to a range of exercises and skill request.

2. Low tolerance for mistakes: I found that I, along with others, had a low tolerance for mistakes that occurred when first working with Shyy Dogg. By extending my timeline for completion, I was able to see speedier results toward success for Shyy Dogg.

3. Impatience: I found that I was impatient with the way results occurred. In other words, it took longer for me to achieve the goals I had initially set because of my impatience.

4. Inexperience: I had low expectations for outcomes and completions. I should never had set any expectations until I had been with Shyy Dogg for a length of time and had practical data and/or experience to base any expectations on.



these are correctable, and I strive to lessen my errors when working with dogs. I try to transform these mistakes into opportunities, I am enabling Shyy Dagg to be able to conform to standards that are more socially acceptable. Furthermore, these mistakes are also correctable which can result in creating standards for completion of the exercises, and ultimately, the program.

As a testament to the training program at Hardee Hero Hounds Operation, the success of completed exercises creates discernable good self-esteem in Shyy Dagg. The socialization of the class environment improves his community acceptance and improves family compatibility, which in-turn, raises his adoptability chances exponentially.

Finally, we have come full circle to be able to answer our original question, "Should shy dogs participate in obedience training classes?" To this, I must say, of course shy dogs should participate in obedience training classes. Someone once quipped, you cannot teach old dogs new tricks. I am here to state, that it is possible to teach old dogs new tricks. For this old dog, I have found that the trick is to be consistent in the training process.

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