



"Batman and I"

Simple tips to turn your shy dog into a confident companion. By: Zachary Uplike

As most dog owners know, each and every one of our pets has his or her own unique personality. The great thing about our loving companions ~~is~~ ^{is} that we can actually and gradually mold them into the characters we truly desire them to be. All it takes is a bit of patience, consistency, and structure.

For example; hyper active dogs can be taught to calm themselves unless given permission to act freely. We can also teach more docile, shy, or reserved dogs to become sociable, excited, and confident. The latter of the two personalities described ~~are~~ what has led me to share this quick story with ~~all~~ of you.

Recently I had the pleasure of working with a beautiful, retired, racing greyhound who goes by the call name of Bruce Wayne. Bruce is white spotted with a few brindle spots which led to his namesake; most of his face is brindle and the markings end on top of his head in a perfect "bat" silhouette. It is truly the perfect name for this guy.

Anyhow, this handsome puppy was brought to us (The Hardee Hero Hounds) for basic obedience training and also for social development. The training would prove to be far easier to accomplish



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than developing his social skills.

I only had the luxury of working with Bruce for the ~~last~~ ^{last} ~~remaining~~ three weeks of his ten week session. ~~But~~ My colleagues and I routinely share stories and/or advice concerning all of the twelve dogs in our program. With that being said, I knew that Mr. Wayne was a very intelligent puppy and just needed a confidence boost to help elevate him to another level.

As a Fairly experienced trainer, I knew from past graduates that my first goal was to gain Bruce's trust. Along with trust, I needed to establish myself as the "Pack leader." By doing so, I hoped that he would understand that not only is he safe with me, but also that I was in control as well.

Most professional dog trainers will agree that the best way of taking control of ~~any~~ ^a dog is ~~by taking control with the leash.~~ I strongly recommend using a six foot leash with a one inch to inch and a half, Martingale collar for training purposes.

Believe me when I say that a dog can and will feel your emotions, determination, and/or your reluctance to correct them through your approach with handling their leash during walks or training sessions; as we are currently discussing here. Proper leash etiquette is a strong tool when building on



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a shy dog's confidence. I want for the dog to stroll along beside me with his head held high and in step.

This is where Bruce and I, turned to a method referred to as "focus walking." He loved to dart left, dart right, cross in front of me, or even duck in behind me at times. I was certain focus walking could fix this, as it did.

Focus walking is very simple and anyone, man or woman, young or old can and should try this if they are dealing with the walking behaviors I listed above. Whenever my buddy Bruce decided to "pull" on the leash or wander off course, I simply turn in the complete opposite direction and resume our walk. The leash will become taut if he does not react to the sudden change of course and this will force him to redirect his or herself back in tune with you. After this occurs several times, your pet will become more aware of your movements and less aware of the distractions that previously took away their focus.

Another element of building confidence during a focus walk is knowing when to treat your dog's behavior and just as importantly ~~where~~ how to treat him.

Whenever Bruce would correct himself, after a "re-direction," I would treat him ^{by} "luring" him into a proper heel position before actually rewarding



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him with the treat. By doing so Bruce came to the conclusion that "good things happen when I am in this position." Therefore he learns to maintain this placement whenever we are out walking.

Last but certainly not least, whenever I reward Bruce for responding to a command properly; I ALWAYS give it to him "over-hand" and above his eye level. I cannot stress to you enough about the impact this will have on a reserved dog who typically chooses to walk with its head down and avoids eye contact. By rewarding Bruce in this manner it forced him to lift his head in order to find his prize. If he did not search up-ward to retrieve the gift, he did not receive it at all. This is where the discipline of the trainer comes into play.

Do Not reward unwanted behaviors, no matter how tiny they may seem or they will manifest into unwanted traits in the future.

In conclusion I will say this, "Batman and I, only had three weeks together; to mold his shy habits into the desired confidence we were hoping for. Not only does Batman walk more comfortably on his leash now but he also does this with his head held high and a smile on his face.

Make training fun, keep it simple, and don't forget to reward our furry friends for the work they put in.