

BUILDING CONFIDENCE THROUGH SUCCESS

[January 31, 2017](#)

Training Tip Tuesday: Building Confidence through Success

This is a topic near and dear to my heart. I believe strongly that you cannot correct FEAR. It is one of my foundation beliefs. A dog that is afraid isn't misbehaving; he needs guidance, understanding and confidence. One of the best ways to start is to set the dog up for lots of small successes and celebrate every step. Whether you are working with a puppy that missed out on some crucial socialization; or an adopted dog that had some rough experiences; taking it step by step is going to get you much farther than forcing the dog through a situation.

If you have spent any time with me at all; you'll recognize this exercise. It's one of the first I teach to almost everybody, and for good reason. It's simple; it builds trust, it lets both dog and handler be successful, and it lays the foundation for many future skills.

All you need is an object that is a few inches tall, and big enough for your dog's front feet. Make sure its stable, not too slippery, and won't fall over. A telephone book (does anyone use those anymore?), an upturned bowl, a concrete block, even a pillow. If you want to get fancy, get yourself a balance disc.

Sit on the floor with your dog. Have a lot of treats, or something your dog values. If you use a clicker – this is a great opportunity to practice. If your dog is really skittish – start by just rewarding any interaction with the object. Smelling it, looking at it, etc. From there, lure your dog's front paw up. Either one. You're just going for one foot. Reward any effort your dog makes. Remember; your goal is to create success! Once your dog is comfortable with one, and is offering it as soon as you gesture, start working on getting two feet up. Lure one, but this time only praise; withhold the treat and keep encouraging your dog. The second paw usually comes up easier than the first!

You may be thinking to yourself 'what does any of this have to do with confidence?' .. Trust me – these teeny tiny baby steps have a huge psychological impact on your dog.

Once you can reliably get two paws up; start asking your dog to move his hind feet. I went go into my lecture on hind end awareness here (PM me if you want to hear it) – but once your dog gets that he can move all 4 feet independently of each other, his confidence will skyrocket!

Practice paws up on lots of different surfaces. Practice hind end pivots in both directions. Practice walking on logs and rocks and other things that are a bit 'unusual'. Make sure you always spot your dog – never let him fall! He needs to know he can trust you! Try short tunnels, or climbing under things. If you aren't sure how he feels about an obstacle; look at him. Is he rushing to get to the other side so he doesn't have to deal with it? Or will he stop in the middle, think about what he's doing, and maybe even perform a cue or two for you?

Doing these things will help bring a dog out of their shell; and if you are working with a major fear issue – you will see your relationship start to blossom, and your communication improve tenfold!

<https://youtu.be/bANihO8SNNc>