



Below is the next in a series of Random Tidbits of information (from me) in regards to the AKC Obedience Regulations. Knowledge of the Regulations provides you the power for...

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Today's Random Little Tidbit – **Guard Against The Mood Swings in Obedience They Can Do Irreparable Harm To Our Sport.**

Many of us compete in a variety of venues with our dogs so you must have noticed by now how a handler's mood can change rather *quickly* during or after exiting the obedience rings. If not, walk around the next dog show and spend time observing competitors in the agility rings vs. the obedience rings. There are those of you who may compete in both, but are your moods the same in both? Give it some serious thought.

From my experience in competing in both the agility and obedience rings, I have noticed a distinct difference in the handler's moods. Or course, there are the exceptions.

I have witnessed exhibitors in agility whose dog knocked off almost every bar on the course, BUT made their contacts on the dog walk, A-frame and teeter. They left the ring cheering with pure delight in what was accomplished. They could not care less about the 12 bars left behind lying on the ground! Plus, what did *not* go as planned was THEIR fault, not the dog's. Fellow exhibitors came up and cheered them on for what was accomplished. How refreshing that is to witness!

I have witnessed exhibitors in obedience doing a warm-up with big smiles while being cheerful to the dog. They enter the ring and the moment the dog makes ONE error the mood can swing to a whole different tune. The body English also tells the story, and so does the change in tone of voice. They leave the ring down-in-the-dumps and, of course, blame the DOG for what happened. Fellow exhibitors seem to stay away and not want to be a part of that "pity party." How disheartening that is to witness!

Why are there differences in the handler's attitudes (in general) between these two venues? Let's look at a few items to maybe/hopefully "up" our game and perceptions in regards to attitudes.

1. The two venues are quite different from each other in many ways. Agility is a *physical challenge* for the dog and ring time for the most part is less than one minute. The handler has the mental part in walking the course ahead of time, planning and plotting the moves and their positioning while the dog is crated. In obedience at the Novice levels of **Beginner Novice**, **Novice A** and **Preferred Novice** there is a walkthrough time for the handler to do some planning. The other classes the handler must have their game plan ready in their heads when it is show time. In addition, the obedience handler and dog are in the ring for at least five minutes or longer, depending on the class; therefore, it is more of a *mental challenge* for the dog during their ring time. Plus, compared to agility obedience is not as adrenaline driven as agility, which then requires the handler to work more with the dog in maintaining its sharp mental attitude while in the ring for the extended times.

2. We must *always* be aware of our attitudes during our training time, and in and around the rings at obedience trials. This can take some work to accomplish in our learning to suck up the bad vibes and move on with the positive vibes, regardless of what is going on, especially when your dog is present. You have heard the saying "what is in your head travels down the leash to the dog". I have a whole article on this subject so I won't go into it here. Check out **Random Little Tidbits #21, Drum Roll Please – And the Oscar Goes To...**

3. Those of us in this sport of obedience need to always work on bringing others into this venue. It is the venue of training a dog good manners (a foundation venue) and then moving on to other challenges if we so choose. Keep in mind the spectators standing around the rings. What do you think they are observing and learning? Are they witnessing a great group of folks enjoying their dogs and showing good sportsmanship? Are they seeing us support each other? Are we going over to the Novice rings and supporting the newbies to our sport? Are we welcoming them to come over to the other rings and learn more?

Or, are these spectators seeing some folks getting after their dogs in a not-so-pleasant way for what went wrong in the ring? We are all good winners, but how do we handle not qualifying in the ring? What kind of message does a poor display of disdain send to future participants, and to entice others to give our sport a try? Poor attitudes (moods in and around the rings) can do irreparable harm to our sport.

Besides putting the training time into our dogs, we must *always work on putting training into our attitudes*. Others will be learning from us in what they see, hopefully our good attitudes will be setting examples for others to follow. It may not be easy at first, but some of us can do better in the image we want to present to our dog, fellow exhibitors, and to the general public. Let's learn from our fellow agility exhibitors in the joy of what went right in the ring and do some soul searching to bring our attitude to newer heights in obedience.

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