

“Theatre of the Canine”

*Notes for the owner handler part 2*

In the last column, I spoke about alleviating stress. Some of the causes of stress can be controlled, and some can't. We must concentrate on the things that we can control, and by controlling them, minimize the effect of the things that are beyond us.

A major cause of stress is *time*; allow yourself more than you will need in order to be ready at ring time. You are the only one who knows how much time you need to accomplish this. Arriving an hour or more ahead of your ring time will usually allow you the time needed for setting up, exercising your dogs, getting armbands and a few minutes to relax before going in the ring. Allow more time for show sites that you are unfamiliar with, and if possible, acquire information in advance from someone who is familiar with the site in order to assess any difficulties that you may encounter. In general, the more time you allow, the better. If you have extra time, there are always plenty of diversions at a show, but do not allow those to distract you from your goal. Remember that after you show, you have plenty of time for shopping and visiting with others.

Preparation, organization and contingency planning are essential components of stress management. A check list is a great idea; however, make sure that you personally check anything that you must have to show your dog—leads, brushes, bait, and other pieces of equipment that are essential to going into the ring in a prepared manner. As an actor prepares to go on stage, so must a handler prepare to enter the ring.

If your preparation has been successful, you should arrive at ringside secure in the knowledge that both you and your dog are ready to show. If possible, you have already studied the judge and his or her procedure; however, if you are unsure of anything, ask one of the stewards—they are usually very helpful and willing to answer questions if they have a moment. It is during this time that you should take a few moments and clear your mind of everything but the task before you. There are many methods of accomplishing this—meditation, breathing exercises, stretching—in short, anything to relax and focus on the job at hand. You must find the method that works best for you.

Pay close attention to the classes preceding your entrance, and be ready at ringside when your class and number are called. With Chihuahuas, I prefer to carry the dog into the ring instead of leading it, due to congestion usually encountered at the gate. I have always trained my dogs to move as soon as they are set on the floor, and then come into pose by circling me. This allows me to either stand with the dog posed, or move immediately, depending on the judge's instructions. Once you are in the ring, your training should take over and allow you and your dog to enjoy performing. As I said

earlier, you will make mistakes; everyone does. Just let it go—once done, it can't be undone, and thinking about it will only cause you to lose focus and make more mistakes. In the next column, I will address some specific ring situations, and ways in which to cope with them.

*The 2005 Chihuahua Club of America Handbook is now available! For information go to [chihuahuclubofamerica.com](http://chihuahuclubofamerica.com)*

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