

December 2019 *AKC Gazette* (rerun from March 2012 issue)

Evelyn Piano Behrens wrote the following advice for the *Gazette* in 2012, and her good insights for Chihuahua owners are worth revisiting.

"The Good "Tiger Mom"

By now you have probably heard the term "tiger mom." It is sometimes used to describe an overbearing mother who pushes her child to achieve, and examples of such often sound cruel and heartless. Those who take pride in the label, however, define it as encouraging outstanding behavior. Their view is that it builds the child's self confidence, enabling the child to face challenges with an optimism that she or he is capable of great things.

Consider being a good "tiger mom" to your Chihuahua, beginning as early as possible. Training for the show ring cannot start soon enough. The Chihuahua who enters the ring happy, with tail up and moving confidently, instantly has an edge over the shy, unsure, tail-down, apprehensive dog. (Remember our standard, which mentions the breed's "terrierlike" qualities.) If that same dog is rock-solid for the table exam, the edge can be significant.

Expose your puppy to new environments, new people, and new surfaces to walk on. Buy a piece of mat material (a ridged stair-tread works well), and attach a strip of duct tape across it. Give the pup a treat for walking on this unfamiliar surface.

Bring your puppy to a variety of places, such as pet-supply stores, training centers, and fun matches. At each new place, have different kinds of people, both male and female, hold your puppy. Have each person continue holding the pup until it's clear that she is relaxed with her new friend.

Find treats and toys that the puppy really likes, and use them only for training. Set up she might not enjoy some aspects of grooming. Have other people approach her on the table and "play judge."

While this may sound like all the other training tips you've heard, the key is in being a "tiger mom"—you, the owner-handler, must be consistent, strict, and disciplined.

I got my first Chihuahua after 20 years of training and showing Shiba Inu. My first few attempts to train my Chihuahua to self-stack didn't seem to have an effect. I figured the little dog couldn't see the bait, so although getting up and down wasn't easy for me, I began getting on my knees and trying to hand-stack him.

A very tall Chi exhibitor soon told me that not only could Chihuahuas be taught to self-stack, they can make for a very dramatic picture when you the only one in the ring with a self-stacked dog and everyone else is on their knees trying to hold their dog together. Since then, I have taught all my Chihuahuas how to self-stack. I might have to bend at the waist quite a bit, but they can see and smell the bait quite well.

Stop making excuses for your dog's incorrect behavior. ("She's shy" ... "It's his first show" ... "Another dog scared her.") Keep practicing until the desired outcome is consistent and reliable.

—*Evelyn Piano Behrens, 2012*