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Get to Know Siddhika Bhat — Porch Potty Dog Trainer Q&A



by Melody Keilig

Say hello to Porch Potty's official dog trainer, Siddhika Bhat! We're so fortunate to have Siddhika on our team to offer you expert advice on all things dogs. Take some time to learn more about her in our Q&A session below!

Siddhika is a professional dog trainer and behaviorist based in Toronto, Canada. Bhat has received three certifications for dog training! Bhat provides her services and dog training advice on her blog, [Wag A Bond](#). Let's take a look at what she has to say about being a dog lover, trainer, behaviorist, and blogger!

Melody: How would you introduce yourself?

Siddhika: My name is Siddhika. I am a professional dog trainer and a behaviorist and I've been practicing since 2015.

M: What are your certifications in?

S: I am certified in basic obedience training, in aggression dog training, and in therapy dog training. And I've received all three certifications back home in India. It's been about three and a half years since I've moved to Canada and I have been training here ever since.

I used to be a PetSmart trainer. I worked with PetSmart for about three years and I recently quit my job to be a trainer in my own capacity. And I also am a freelance writer in the pet niche.

Rewards



M: Wow. So you just broke off and started your own thing?

S: Yeah, I always wanted to do my own thing, but since I just moved here in Canada about three and a half years ago, I decided that finding a job and working at PetSmart would be a better option to begin with. But then eventually working for my own clients and having my own business I think made better sense for me because my scope was a lot more when I was doing it on my own rather than being at PetSmart.

M: So starting your own business, what was that process like?

S: To have to work for somebody and then you get to work for yourself, you can do what you want. Unfortunately, in some cases, the dog training industry in North America is unregulated, which means that anybody who has a dog who says that they have the experience can go ahead and start their business. So I started off by gaining clients from my experiences in PetSmart and I built my client base over there.

Then once I decided to quit, I started to socialize more and go ahead and speak with the network more, with veterinarians, with other behaviors, with trainers, and also in places like coffee shops and every veterinary place that I could put my hands on, I would just go and network. And that's how I started to build my base.

M: So have you been an animal lover your whole life?

S: My whole life. Absolutely my whole life. So I was told my love for dogs started when I was a little baby. Apparently, that is what my mother told me. When I was two years old, I put my hand in a stray dog's mouth. Like, literally, I inserted my hand in a stray dog's mouth. Obviously, I got bit, like, really bad. I had to take 14 injections back then. And then the next day, I again went to attempt another friendship with the dog. So, yeah, I've always been a dog lover!



M: So what got you started working with animals?

S: I've always felt like I've been able to connect with animals a lot better than most people around me. I always had a keen interest in observing them and observing their body language, their behaviors.

And apart from that, back into 2015, I was actually working for a media firm. And to put in a nutshell, I wasn't really looking forward to Mondays, and that is not how I wanted to continue working and living my life. So I just thought that it's okay if I'm not earning as much.

But I really wanted to wake up every single day loving and looking forward to what I was doing the whole day. So that's what made me quit my job and get into animal training and behavior. And luckily, I also found a very credible institute back in India where I could take my certifications, and that's how I got started.

M: So what is your specific method of training dogs and working with clients?

S: I rely only and only on positive reinforcement. I stray away from aversive techniques because personally and ethically, I don't believe in them, and I don't think that they work at all. Positive reinforcement all the way. Because I feel like when you need your dog to do something, you have to look at things from their perspective. You have to see what motivates them.

Why would they do something for you? I mean, treats cannot be the reason all the time. You have to find something that strongly motivates your dog to do something for you.

And I also focus on building and enhancing the relationship between a pet parent and a dog. What I essentially mean by that is people normally come to trainers as a last resort. So when nothing seems to work, when everything is out of control, that's when they usually resort to trainers.



But I think when I'm trying to make people understand what and try to spread this education, that trainers are not your last resort, but they're more of a safety school so that things don't go wrong with your dog. So it's a smart idea to invest in trainers beforehand rather than only wait till something goes wrong.

So that's something that I strongly believe in and that's what I try to make people understand as well. And that is exactly what I write in my blogs as well. Like, trainers are not your last resort, it's your safety school so that things don't go wrong.



M: While I was on your site, I saw that you have the words dog lover, trainer, behaviorist, and blogger. What's the difference between being a dog trainer and a dog behaviorist?

S: A dog trainer essentially focuses on teaching cues and commands, obedience training and stuff like that. A behaviorist is someone who focuses on the dog's behavior in general. So what I mean by that is to deal with behavioral issues like anxiety or nervousness or fearfulness, you need to inherently understand the dog's behavior and the anatomy of a dog. You need to be certified and you need to be qualified to deal with these behavioral issues or else things can go really wrong. So not all trainers are behaviorists and not all behaviorists are trainers, essentially.



M: So if somebody comes in with a dog who has really bad anxiety or something, you're able to basically diagnose and you know how to train that dog?

S: Yes, that's correct. Because I'm able to assess the sign of a fearful dog, I'm able to assess what the dog is trying to express in a certain situation. So a lot of times what I've noticed is people try to train their dogs at a certain behavior.

For example, when it comes to aggression or when it comes to reactivity, I get a lot of questions saying can you fix my dog? Or how do I train my dog to not bark?

What a behaviorist essentially understands is that it is not possible to train a dog out of aggression. You cannot really fix these problems. It's something that you have to work with and it's something that you have to first control and manage and try not to put your dog into situations like these so that you're able to manage these behaviors in future.

M: So when you were getting your certifications, are there any methods that have really helped you in your work today?

S: Definitely yes. So to give you an example, to be more specific about what essentially has helped me is it's not technically a method that is written in books, but it's just the fact of respecting a dog's boundaries.

For example, if my dog is reactive and if I have to train my dog, I don't keep pushing my dog into situations. So my dog has to behave in a certain way, you know, so rather than trying to constantly force a dog to do something or trying to be aversive towards my dog, I'm trying to give my dog the space and that flight option.



So essentially, when a dog is in a conflicted situation, the dog would either choose fight or flight. Now, I've studied both fight and flight options about a dog. A dog only chooses to fight, and when I say fight, it means growling or barking or attacking. That's what your fight technique means. Your flight is when your dog tries to back off or avoid the situation altogether.

So what I really learned while taking certifications is that when a dog is getting reactive or when a dog is getting aggressive, it means that your dog has been denied the option of flight over and over again, which is why the dog has chosen to fight. So as a behaviorist, rather than constantly pushing the dog to fight and constantly pushing the dog to be aggressive and then trying to fix that, you have to let the dog believe or you have to make the dog believe that the flight option is still available to you.

M: When I was reading your blog, you were talking about how you don't say “adopt, don't shop” anymore. And so I read the post, and something that really stuck out to me was the sentence, “Every dog is fit for a certain type of family.” Did you get any pushback in person or over social media for that blog post?

S: So when I shared that post as a story on my Instagram, I did receive a lot of comments that that post definitely became one of the most engaged posts on my Instagram, but I probably say 70% of them really understood where I was coming from. I mean, I'm not against adoption if given a choice. I applied for adoption about ten times, and I was rejected because I either did not have another dog or I was living in an apartment.

So adoption is definitely my first preference because I have the know-how and I have the expertise to raise a dog with behavioral issues and a dog with a bad past, but not everybody does. That is exactly where it's coming from.

M: Sometimes with Porch Potty, we get comments from people who are saying, well, my dog's not using it, they're just lying down on it. Are there any tips that could help a dog learn how to use the Porch Potty if they're not?

S: Definitely, yeah. So expanding on what you just said, that dogs tend to lie down on Porch Potty, not be on it, it technically happens because the dog is allowed to hang out in that area for a very, very long time rather than use it for a potty space. So when you're outside and you walk with your dog, if you notice your dog just peeing in a particular spot and chooses to walk away from that spot, they do not lie down in that spot.



You don't give them continued access to that spot. Then if you want your dog to relieve themselves on Porch Potty, why give them continued access to the Porch Potty?

It has to be a spot where the dog just comes to pee and then just walks away. If the dog is not doing that on their own, you have to put the leash on the dog and make the dog walk away from that spot and don't give the dog continued access to the spot, or else it just becomes a playground for the dog.

And Siddhika has one more helpful tip for you to get the best out of Porch Potty!

M: I know that when I started here, something about the little fire hydrant were some comments that I saw, like they thought it was some little cute accessory when actually it's for scenting. It's so your dog knows to go potty there. So I always remember to write about the little fire hydrant and mention that it's a scenting hydrant. You can wipe your dog's urine on it and they'll smell their scent on it.

S: Yeah, I feel like just take a piece of pee pad, just roll it on the hydrant and just keep it like that for about 20 minutes. Just soak all the scent in and just put it on the Porch Potty. That also works pretty well.



Siddhika has more in the works with Porch Potty, so look forward to seeing her work in the future! She has so much expertise and knowledge in the dog training and behaviorist field, as well as being a fellow dog lover.



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