

Member Profile



Dee and Oxford

Denisa "Dee" Hoult

Business Name: Applause Your Paws, Inc.

Location: Miami, FL

Phone: 786-239-6216

E-mail: training@applauseyourpaws.com

Web Site: www.applauseyourpaws.com

Years in Business: Five

Personal Training Philosophy: Because dogs love unconditionally it's especially important for us to treat them with kindness through positive and humane training methods that encourage a dog's desire to work for us.

How long have you been in business and what types of services do you provide?

I've been training full-time since March 2009 and was training nights and weekends while growing my business starting in 2005. I used to work from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., change in the office bathroom and start lessons at 6:00 p.m. I noticed that so few people in my community even knew about positive training and how effective it was, which inspired me to find a way to get busier so I could train full time and begin to train other trainers who could share my philosophy about dog training. Now a multi-trainer company, Applause Your Paws offers both private in-home and group lessons for behavior modification, obedience and manners, as well as growl classes for reactive dogs. I specialize in behavior modification for dog-dog reactivity and working with the family dog. In addition to running my business and helping pet dog owners, I recently became involved with New Horizons Service Dogs, a 501(c)3 organization that donates service dogs to those in need. Working with New Horizons is really a dream come true, not only because I'm training dogs who will one day help give someone their confidence, independence and life back, but also because New Horizons raises all its service dogs in prison programs in Florida. I spend three hours a week at the prison working with my guys (the inmates) at the South Florida Reception Center and feel very honored to contribute to the human side of the program as well.

How did you get started?

Looking back it seems so clear that I was destined to be a dog trainer. When I was five I won a stupid pet tricks contest with my Border Collie mix, Babe. As I got older I found myself reading more and more books about animal behavior, which nicely supplemented my studies in biology while in college. Becoming a professional, however, happened by accident. I'll never forget my first client, Peanut, who came through a friend who knew I had a passion for working with dogs. At that point I was training rescue dogs (no people, just dogs) for fun. When Peanut's mom asked me how much she owed me for the consult, I said \$25 bucks. It was at that moment I realized I could

do what I loved and get paid for it. I started researching becoming a professional trainer, which ultimately led me to the CCPDT, the APDT, and getting more involved with rescue dogs after their placement into homes. Wanting to have the best business in Miami also lead me to pursue my MBA, which has been a huge asset to my successful business.

Are you involved in any dog sports or activities?

My Border Collie mix Zoe (five-years-old) and I are far from competing in agility but train regularly for fun. My yellow lab Oxford (four-years-old) and I do therapy work together as well as career days, which he loves. As far as dog activities, my dogs and I frequently attend dog-friendly events like happy hours and other fundraisers around Miami. We always bark for a good cause.

How do you get your business, and what is your relationship like with the veterinarians in your community?

By far my biggest referral source is through veterinarians. I'm lucky that I have gotten to know so many vets personally because of my affiliation with the South Florida Veterinary Medical Association and Foundation (I'm their director). I've worked really hard to show vets what positive training is all about by offering to give free seminars for their staff, teaching group classes in their parking lot and making sure their clients report back to them about their experience with my company. Client feedback to the vet is so important. My second biggest referral source is through Paws 4 You rescue, for which I serve as head trainer. Volunteering my time as a behavioral consultant for the rescue is not only fulfilling, but healthy for business. I give a lot and get a lot back and encourage all trainers to volunteer with a rescue they believe in.

Do you belong to a trainer networking group, or otherwise consult with/refer to trainers in your area?

In October 2009 I started the South Florida Trainer Network Group. With twenty trainers on my roster >

(most are R+ trainers), and about 10 that actively come to meetings, we meet every month at Starbucks to share our cases, marketing ideas, and keep each other posted on dog-related events in our neighborhoods. I feel very strongly about having other trainers as partners and not competition. We can learn so much from and inspire each other, so it's important to have trainer-trainer friendships. I definitely do refer business to trainers in my group.

What is your community's perspective in regard to positive training?

With two million people in Miami, perspectives vary widely by area. The attitude towards the humane treatment of animals is changing for the better, and I feel more and more people are seeing the benefits of positive training and that positive trainers are available. Yet there is still a lot of force and punishment based training going on here.

What do you believe are the three most important things to teach a dog?

The "place" or "bed" command is by far my favorite to teach because it can be helpful to families in so many situations—dinner time, door greeting, house cleaning, bedtime—lots of ways to use "place." Impulse control or "leave it" is also crucial in preventing ingestion of potentially hazardous items, and third is bite inhibition. It's never a matter of if a dog will bite, but when. Just the other day Zoe bit me because I was pulling a tick out of her foot and pinched her skin too hard—lucky for me she knows how to use her mouth appropriately and didn't even bruise me.

What types of cases do you find most challenging and why? What techniques or philosophies have you found helpful in dealing with those cases?

I get particularly attached to my cases involving resource guarding of household objects or food. Living with a dog you are potentially afraid of can be very emotionally draining for clients, and I tend to take on a lot of that stress and anxiety as I help my clients work through it. Teaching people patience is often much harder than healing the dog, and there have been many times when I have wanted to throw in the towel on a resource guarder because progress can be so slow you often feel helpless. Patience and confidence in one's own abilities to help people and dogs play the biggest role in dealing with any long-term case.

What advice would you give other trainers about working with dogs and their owners?

Never underestimate how much knowledge you have to offer your clients. Often times we, as trainers, forget that the most obvious things to us are not so evident to our clients—that is, after all, why they called us! Also, with so much time spent saying "good dog," don't forget to commend your clients for all their hard work.

Can you offer a specific tip or trick for working with dogs or owners that other trainers might find helpful?

Having a pre-training survey where the names and ages of all family members is listed is critical to having a great first lesson. Take time to memorize all the family members names before you arrive so you can more actively engage everyone in training the dog.

What was your scariest moment with a dog (or a client)?

I once had an 80-pound Chow mix (who was a resource guarder!) charge then lunge at me. I remember seeing his black tongue right before turning away from him and praying that I wasn't about to get a level four bite. I didn't even get a scratch, but my heart wouldn't stop racing for the next 10 minutes. My client had to put the dog outside and get me water so that I could calm down and decide what the plan of action would be for his dog!

What would you say are the top three things you have personally learned as a trainer?

1. Turning your hobby and your love into a full-time career can be dangerous because you risk burning out.
2. When you work for yourself you have to set clear goals and expectations so that you are able to define your own success.
3. Clients will never be mad at you for being honest so you must always be realistic when you evaluate a dog.

What was the last training-related seminar you attended?

Dr. Ian Dunbar's three-day adolescent dog seminar in Orlando, Florida. I went home realizing that I never had to use a dog treat again if I could convince my clients to get their dogs motivated for their own "kibble." Talk about cutting down cost on treats! Brilliant. The seminar, overall, was so eye opening and validated a lot of my views. I left Ian's seminar feeling inspired to push harder in my quest to open a dog training facility where I could have off-leash puppy classes.

Are there any specific books, authors, DVDs, or seminars that have influenced you as a trainer?

Can I just answer yes? Too many to count! If I had to pick some favorites from my dog training library here in my office I would have to go with Pam Denison's *How to Right a Dog Gone Wrong*, Nicole Wilde's *Getting a Grip on Aggression Cases* and Jean Donaldson's *The Culture Clash*.

"Member Profile" editor Nicole Wilde, CPDT-KA, is the author of eight books including **So You Want to be a Dog Trainer, Help for Your Fearful Dog, and Getting a Grip on Aggression Cases**, (all available at www.phantompub.com). Nicole presents seminars domestically and internationally, and is on the advisory board of the Companion Animal Sciences Institute. She is a columnist for **Modern Dog Magazine** and other print and online publications. You can visit Nicole's blog *Wilde About Dogs* at <http://wildewmn.wordpress.com> and follow her on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/NicoleWilde>.