

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG Hey everybody. Welcome to Susan Garrett's Shaped By Dog. I am Susan Garrett, and today we're going to be talking about the number one most important thing in training. It doesn't matter what you're training. I have been blessed with the opportunity to train many different species of animals. Of course, dogs. I've trained cats, I've trained ... a lot of my formative understanding of shaping behaviour came from training chickens in several workshops with my mentors, the late Marian Bailey and her husband, Bob Bailey. Also, most recently, I've trained sea lions, manatees and dolphins. The number one most important part, the most important aspect to training, if you haven't guessed it, it is reinforcement.

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Because, as the great B.F. Skinner identified, reinforcement builds behaviour. Because it's such an important part of training any animal, and of course here on Shaped By Dog, I'm talking about not just the behaviour of dogs but the behaviour of your kids or the behaviour of your co-worker, your spouse, all the people who you interact with. You are shaping their behaviour by the use of reinforcement, whether you're aware of it or not. Hopefully today, we're going to become far more aware of it. So I'd like you to think about your dogs, whether you have a puppy or an adult. What are their reinforcers? You might be saying, "Oh, well, this isn't pertaining to me because my dog just loves all food and that's all I can use".

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But even if your dog just loves all food, I bet there are other things that reinforce him. You're going to be surprised, by the end of this, how much more understanding you have in the food. So animals, let's say our dogs, have generally three general areas of reinforcement. Food, you nailed it, activities, we'll get more to that in a minute, and toys. So toys could be activities. You could say, "Susan, they can't be" ... ahhhh maybe, maybe not. But there are other activities that don't involve toys. Food obviously is a primary reinforcer because they need food to survive, that by definition is a primary reinforcer, and toys and activity becomes secondary reinforcers, in that they take on the value of what it is that the animal loves, food, and they start to grow in value of their own.

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All right, so let's just start with food because that is the primary reinforcer. You can say, "Oh, my dog loves all food." I'd be willing to bet if I put a big chunk of steak and some dried up dry kibble or small treats, your dog's going to go to the steak. Most dogs go to the steak. So what you need to know is, number one, what food does your dog love? Make a list. Just go crazy with this list. If you [go to my blog](#), you can find it and just do a search. You'll find I've given you a list of kajillions of different things dogs might love. What you need to do is find out, from your dog, which one he loves best, and I'm going to put a little asterisk beside this because that changes during your dog's life, and it changes depending on what's going on.

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For example, your dog may love training with little dried up cookies. Now my dog loves dehydrated cookies or whatever cookies. Maybe it's dehydrated beef liver. But if your dog just went for an hour hike



with you and it's 40 degrees Celsius outside, be careful if you're hiking in that kind of weather FYI, I bet your dog's number one reinforcer at that point is water. I really just want to drink a water. That's all I want. So the reinforcers change depending on the situation. Reinforcers could change depending on the life cycle of the dog, so puppies may love food that they don't love when they're geriatrics. If you're a geriatric you know, as my dogs get into their late teens, their palate gets a lot more selective and there's things they absolutely want and things absolutely they don't want.

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You want to be fully aware of what your dog loves, and we're going to talk a little bit later about once you know what those are, the most effective way to use them in your training. Make a list of all the things your dogs love, food wise. Now toys. You might be saying, "Oh, my dog's a rescue dog, and he came to me without loving toys." Just make a list of all the toys you would love your dog to want to love. All right? So tug toys or things you can throw. Make, just go crazy. What would be convenient for you in your training if your dog loves these things? Trust me, it's easier to train a dog who loves toys and food than for dog who just loves food, because they'll come a point where they've had enough. Now, if you're training a little Chihuahua, guess what? They're going to be full a lot faster than a Great Dane.

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So having the advantage of teaching that Chihuahua to playing tug with you is going to extend the time that you can train with them. So it's really important that we teach the dog that toys are really cool too. More on that later. The third area of reinforcement that I use in my training is the area of activities. So what activities do you love? This is a great reinforcer, and it's a great reinforcer for people as well as for dogs. So my dog loves to go in the car, my dog loves to go to the park, dogs love - Tater Salad loves to meet new people. I mean that is one of his high, high, high value reinforcers. There are dogs that just don't care about meeting other people. Dogs love chasing, so running with other dogs or chasing wildlife. It might not be a great reinforcer for you to use.

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So what we're talking about is things that you can use in training, but then in order to have that great family pet, you need to become aware of what are the reinforcements that my dog is getting daily that I may not want them to be getting? You need to be aware of those. Things like looking out the window and aggressing at X, whether it be a delivery person or dogs going by, fence fighting with the neighbour's dog, running up and down and aggressing at the neighbour's dog. These are things that you may not want them to ... Obviously, chewing on the corner of your cabinet, you might have a new puppy that could be very reinforcing. These are activities you might not want to use in training, you might not want your dog to find reinforcing, but they find them reinforcing.

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So make a list of those. We had a Jack Russell years ago, lived with my folks. My mom had this rule that dogs had to stay in the kitchen. Sad but true. I know a lot of people have that kind of environmental restrictions for some dogs. This Jack Russell, her number one reinforcement was to get on the table and steal steak knives and chew the handles off of them. Kind of dangerous, right? Because they got a pretty hefty blade on them. So make a list of all the activities your dog loves, both the ones you prefer them not to love and the ones that you could use in training, for example, going for a car ride. What we're going to do is we're going to take those things that your dog loves and we want to ... Once you establish the value, your goal as a trainer is to transfer that value in areas that would be of benefit to



the dog and of benefit to you as their owner and caregiver.

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So it's not just what they love. Today is about how we can transfer what they love into what we want them to love, if that makes sense. Transfer value. I've touched on it that it's important for us, in interactions with humans, that we know what they love. I'll give you an example. I worked in a job years ago where the head of the department, he knew I had a horse and I love to ride. We got monetary bonuses throughout the year, that if you did this, you got this bonus, and that was great. I got the reinforcement of getting a paycheck every two weeks. Great reinforcement there. But things that happen predictably are less reinforcing. Here's how reinforcement works in the dog's brain or in the human brain, is you get the reinforcement and it gives a dopamine release in your brain, and that dopamine release is the feel good chemical that actually junkies get, and so that's why a drug use is so prevalent, is because you get multiple dopamine releases.

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Social media likes create a dopamine release. That's a whole another discussion I'm not going to talk about. But that's how reinforcement works, is this dopamine release. Funny enough, science has shown that the dopamine release, when you're training with food in dogs, as soon as the dog sees the food, initially they get a dopamine release. But very, very quickly, if you're somebody who uses lures, the dopamine release, you don't get it anymore. Which is one of the reasons why food luring doesn't create an addiction to training in the dog the way reinforcement-based choice learning does. So in the same paper that they talked about the dopamine release happens initially when the food lure comes out, but eventually, very quickly, the dog doesn't get a dopamine release, they called it the choice point. So when there's a choice point made by the dog and they can predict reinforcements coming, that's when the dopamine release happens, which is why when you use choice in your training, you get many dopamine releases in the dog and they learned to love to train.

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All right. Getting back to when I was working and I had this awesome manager. It would be like a beautiful spring or fall, summer afternoon on a Friday afternoon, and he'd come into my desk into my office, and he would say, "You know what, Susan? You've done amazing work this past month, and it's a gorgeous day out there. It's too good a day to waste. Go out and ride your horse." I mean that's got to be 30 years ago. That was one of the biggest reinforcements that anyone could ever use for me. So just think about, if you've got a child at home, how can you use those reinforcements to deepen the bond that you have. I will always remember Richard Donnelley. I'll remember his name, I'll remember what he looks like, and I'll remember him walking into my office on the occasions that he did to say, "You know what? No one's going to ever be on their deathbed and regret not having spent more hours at the office."

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That's what he would say to me, "Go out and ride your horse." What are those activities? Now that we've got our ... we know that there's food, toys and activities that we can use in training, the goal is ... Right now, the value is with those things. So the dog loves the food, the dog loves the toys, the dog loves the activities. Our goal is to transfer that value to us and to other things. So if your dog only loves food, our goal is to transfer the value of the food to the toys. If your dog loves to swim, for example ... Here's how people waste the value. Let's pick on Labrador Retrievers because they genuinely just



ooze with this childlike joy when they get around water. Like, "Oh my gosh, I get to go swimming."  
"Swimming? Someone say swimming?"

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When the dog learns that they love to swim, then they learn ... Because dogs are great at predicting behaviour patterns of reinforcement, they learn, "Okay, in order to go swimming, we go in the car, and I know when we turn down the road that leads to the place where I can swim," so then they start to getting really anxious in the car and then you try to get them out, and you've got to walk them on a leash to get to the pond and they're pulling and screaming, and all of that gets reinforced. The dog start barking and spinning in the car when they're getting closer to something they love, gets reinforced by you getting them out of the car when they're barking and spinning or continuing to drive is the first reinforcement.

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The second reinforcement is you getting them out of the car when they're barking and bouncing off though, because we think it's cute at first. "Oh my gosh, look, he loves this so much." This isn't going to be cute a year from now when you're just like, "For the love of all that's holy, would you just effing stop that nonsense." So you want to pick up on these things that you ... and recognise they may be driving you crazy later on. So we want to not reinforce and continue the loop of when you're crazy in the car ... How are you going to stop that? Well, the first time they get crazy in the car, drive somewhere else. Do not drive to swimming so that they can't predict that, and don't stop until the craziness subsides. Or you can use a remote feeder, and just feed them for being calm and peaceful in the car.

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The same as getting out of the car. Crank games is a great routine that they understand. They don't get out until they do X, Y, and Z. But when you get these Labradors or any dog who loves to swim in there ... or it doesn't even have to be swimming, they're going toward something they know that they love to do, they're pulling you, they're clawing at the ground and you're continuing to walk. You are reinforcing that by ... This is one of the biggest, biggest reinforcements on the planet for everybody, all animals alike, permission. Permission is a massive reinforcement, so the permission to go for a swim, it reinforces them pulling on the leash because they pull on the leash then you unclip the leash, and they just charge to the water, rather than backing that up and the act of being calm in the car gets reinforced by you continuing to drive to the pond.

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The act of sitting patiently while you open the door and put on the leash gets reinforced by the act of getting to walk on a leash. The act of walking on a loose leash gets reinforced by you carrying on walking towards the pond. The act of sitting calmly on a loose leash and not screaming like a banshee gets reinforced by you unclipping the leash. They still don't get to run to the pond yet. The act of sitting calmly off-leash at the pond. You might even ask them to lie down, sit, build in all these other behaviours. Now I'm talking down the road. You're not going to do this at first, but you're going to build in all these other behaviours. Those are the things that now you're transferring the love of swimming into things that work for you.

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A great calm dog that can listen while they're excited and want to work, that is awesome for you. So we



want to transfer the value of what your dog loves most of all into something beneficial. That's what helps build that relationship. That's what strengthened the bond with Richard Donnelley and I, because he use great reinforcement, the permission to do something of high value to me, which helped strengthen the bond that I had with him and ultimately with my job that I loved. That is using whatever that activity is. For example, we've had stud dogs here, and what a stud dog love most of all is breeding, and so we built in doing simple behaviours for me before you are allowed to breed a bitch, and that is something that people just throw away that value.

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Don't give the value away. Build something into that value. So even if it's just you have to do a sit-stay while you know that bitching season is right in front of you and I'm going to release you, giving you the permission. All right? That's how you can use that value to your great benefit. Now, activities are going to change as your dog grows up. So when a puppy comes to the home, their number one ... They love to chase other dogs. There's nothing, probably no activity, more valuable than that, and that will change as they grow. You want to jump on right now, what is the list of what your dog does that they love that you think is great? How can you transfer that value into you? Give you the spoiler alert, it's just permission. And what are the activities your dog currently does that is not beneficial to you, and how are you going to use reinforcement to stop those behaviours?

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Today has been focused on activities. We will revisit this topic and we're going to talk about how can we take the value of the food the dog loves and transfer it into getting our dog to love toys? Because toys are huge when you want to train your dog. They're are massively value. So we've got make a list, check that list routinely, what your dog loves, food, toys, activities, how can we transfer value into things that are going to be a benefit to training and a benefit into ultimately developing that relationship? Whether it be the relationship you have with your child, relationship with a co-worker, a spouse, somebody who works for you, and of course, Shaped By Dog, it's all about the relationship we have with our dogs. That's it for today. We'll see you next time on Shaped By Dog. See you.

### Resources

[What's a Reward for Your Dog? List of Reinforcers](#) – Blog

[How to Create a Motivating Toy](#) – Blog



### About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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