

The Thing Before Your Dog's Thing

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Hey, everybody. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. What if I was to tell you, there is one question you could ask yourself that would help you solve virtually any dog training problem or people training problem. If you would like me to put it in those terms. This is a spoiler alert, giving you the answer to the whole podcast, right at the beginning.

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The question is, what is the thing before the thing? That's all you have to remember. And we're going to apply that question to four common problems that you dog owners may or may not see. So, jumping on guests, chewing furniture, digging holes in the backyard and biting. Okay, so there's four naughty dog behaviors that we would like to eliminate. And I'll share with you how you can eliminate them by asking that question. What's the thing before the thing? Okay.

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Now I'm going to give you a little bit of science. Behavior doesn't just happen in a vacuum. Behavior, as my mentor Bob Bailey says, behavior is lawful and in science we refer to it as an ABC. The B is the thing, the behavior: jumping on your guests, chewing furniture, digging holes in the backyard, biting. That's the thing we don't want to see happen. Traditionally, what happens, we try to fix the thing by going at the thing. When the dog's jumping on our guests, we'll tell them off or tell them, hope nobody does this, but I've heard of trainers that say, knee the dog in the chest, or one trainer, one of the rescue Jack Russell's I got, I got it because it was biting people who came in the house. Why was it biting people who came in the house? Because from six months on, the owner was told when it jumped up grabbed the front paws, walk backwards and flip it over. Yeah, the thing before the thing I'll tell you how that led to what the dog ended up doing was biting people when they came in the house.

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Jumping up, people attack the jumping up. That's the thing. Don't look at the thing. Chewing furniture, catch the dog chewing furniture you get all bent out of shape and get mad at the dog for chewing furniture. Chewing is the thing. We don't want to look at the thing. The thing is the behavior. So, the C of training, of learning, is a consequence. If the outcome is something the dog enjoys, then they're going to keep doing it. So, the consequence, even if you're yelling at them, if they really, really enjoyed chewing your furniture, they got some reinforcement from it. It doesn't matter if you yell at them, right.

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You can't look at the thing and think you're going to fix it. But we can look at the thing before the thing. And that's A of the ABC, the antecedent. So, for every behavior out there, there is an antecedent. Think of it, it's a stimulus. Really easy way to look at it is a stimulus could be, or the antecedent could be a cue. You say, sit, if you've trained your dog really well, they're going to sit. The stimulus or the antecedent to the behavior of sit was you telling them to it. You're giving them the cue, 'Sit', ABC. A the cue, B the sit, C the consequences. You probably say good dog, or maybe give them a cookie or play a game or give them a release word to go outside. The thing is a sit. The thing before the thing is your cue.



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Now, how does that help you? Because antecedents are other things other than just what comes out of our mouth, they are triggers. They are, a dog seeing a bunny, a pain could be an antecedent. I feel pain therefore I'm going to turn around and bite at what I think is the cause of that pain. The dog's physical state. Actually pick any sense, what the dog smells, what the dog feels as in pain or in pleasure, what the dog sees, what the dog hears and even what the dog senses ... "doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo".

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Hey, have you ever seen a dog that's afraid of thunder? The behavior changes. The thing changes in response to the thing before the thing. Something they sensed. What's going on? Why are you freaking out? Because you don't sense it doesn't mean the dog can't sense it. The antecedent, the stimulus is the thing before the thing.

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And when we focus on that, we can fix any behavior. All right. So, there's two ways you're going to fix it. Now, number one would be, could you teach an incompatible behavior? And that we pair the trigger, the thing before the thing, with doing a different behavior. For example, in our [Recallers](#) program, we have something called 'Barkensteins'. And Barkensteins someday may be available for sale on my website. So, check out our website, [DogsThat](#) to see if it's there.

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What we teach is when the doorbell rings, for the dogs to go to a place. This is a great video of, um, one of my students with her two dogs, just, they hear the doorbell, they run to their crates because they know they could get reinforced. What happens when they're in their crates? They can't jump on the guests.

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So, jumping on the guests is the thing that we don't want, let's create a new trigger to the thing before the thing. Which is, you hear a doorbell, go to a place which prevents you from jumping on the guests. That's like magic. The stimulus is something that we need to focus on the thing before of the thing.

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So, we want to create an incompatible behavior. That's one way we can fix it or eliminate the possibility for it happening. Like altering the environment that the dog is in. For example, if your dog was locked away in your room, when the doorbell went, they could not jump on your guests, right? That's not something I would like to do because that's lessening our dog's lives. And remember my dogs, all, I'm always wanting to create confidence and comfort for my dog. So, locking them up somewhere for the rest of their life isn't giving them the kind of life I'd want to give. But there's times when that is the easy answer.

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For example, people say to me, how do I stop my dog from digging in the backyard? I've never had a dog that's ever dug in the backyard. You could say, well, it's because of the breeds you've owned. But I've owned terriers and they do like to dig. Why doesn't that happen? Because I don't give my dogs access to the backyard unless I'm there with them. And if I'm there with them, they want to interact with me.



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And by the time they get older, they don't feel the need to dig. Because what's the thing before the thing for dogs who dig? Two biggies, I mean, sometimes we don't know, but the obvious ones are curiosity, or you take... Siberian Huskies, they love to dig holes because smart dogs, they know that I can get cool by digging a hole in the earth and curling up in there. All right. So, what's the thing before the thing, it could be curiosity, or it could be a feeling. I am hot, therefore I would like to be cool. Therefore, I'm going to dig up big old hole in the backyard. So, we're all upset.

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Could you create a more desirable behavior? I've heard of people putting in sand pits in their backyard and teaching the dog this is where you dig, don't dig anywhere else. For me, the easier one is I don't allow them access to the outside unless I'm there with them. If I was going to, like, I was going to a place where I wanted a dog, doors, my dog could go in and out, not really something I've done, but I wouldn't give a young puppy access because curiosity is at the highest when the puppies are the youngest.

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How about let's wait to the curiosity drops a little bit, that before you give them access to the outside. So maybe when they're a year, a year and a half, you start engaging that dog door. If that's something you want to do. Okay. So, the two ways we're going to look at the thing before the thing is, can we teach an incompatible behavior, or can we eliminate the possibility of the undesirable behavior from happening?

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If you know your dog only likes to dig in new earth, then you could put up a baby gate around the garden or the new earth. So that would be a way of preventing the thing happening by altering the trigger to the thing before the thing. Right?

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So, let's look at chewing. Take Tater Salad for example. When we got Tater Salad, he had chewed three coaches in his previous home. Which is why he had to go to a new home, which we liked out, right. It, Tater Salad now lives with us. You would look at, you chew, you come home, and you see this exploded couch and this dog is like, what, what? Or even, you know, you might catch them in the act of chewing a couch.

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What is the thing before the thing? Now with puppies, he was young. I would guess two things are, 'my gums hurt because I'm a puppy and I'm teething', or it could just be curiosity. "Yeah look, there's a little piece of fluff on this coach I'm going to pull, what happens if I pull it? Oh, look, it gets bigger. Oh, look at it, Oh, look now there's, there's something, I think I see something white underneath there. Let me pull it that white. Oh, it's stuffing. Oh, it's this fun". So, a lot of times it's just curiosity.

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Now what I observed as a thing before the thing, Tater Salad has got a really undershot jaw, which means his jaw protrudes way out in front of his top jaw. There's a big gap. And so, when he would chew on a bone, it was maybe difficult for him to hold it.



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So, what he would do when he came here, he had a habit of taking a bone, putting it head up against something, could even be your leg, to give him leverage so that he could chew on that bone. Now, if he was putting it up against the piece of furniture, he would chew on the bone, but if the bone fell, he would just keep chewing on the furniture.

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So, the thing before the thing was, I like to press the bone up against things to chew it. And we just had to teach him that, a different behavior, we taught him how to chew bones by giving him bones that were easy for him to hold between his front legs. So, looking at the thing before the thing and eliminating the possibility of the undesired behavior by, when we go out, he would be put into an ex-pen, or we would always be supervising him if we are home. If we couldn't supervise him then he would go back into that ex-pen until we get to a place where the likelihood of the chewing furniture has gone, which knock on wood, he's been with us almost 2 years and he's never chewed furniture. Because we created the antecedents that created the behavior we wanted, rather than allowing the behavior that was there when we got him to continue to happen.

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Okay. So, we've dealt with jumping up by looking at the thing before the thing. We've dealt with chewing furniture, by looking at the thing before the thing. We've dealt with digging by looking at the thing before the thing. What about biting? So, I'm going to tell you a little story.

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When my dog Buzz, we're at a big agility event, but it was indoor, which we didn't do a lot of indoor. It had a concrete floor. There was a lot of activity happening at this big event. It was like championships for obedience, for a confirmation and for agility. At this time, I think there was only, no, it was only obedience and confirmation. That's all it was. So, they were regional events and they went to national championships. Buzzy and I were at one. So, it's cavernous and he barked a lot.

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We were at the warm up jump. I mean, we probably done thousands of warm up jumps by this point in his life. I think he was about three and I was having him go over and you know, go over the jumps. Sometimes I give him a tug. Sometimes I tell them to go over the jump. While I'm one of these turns where I told him to go over the jump the second time and instead of giving him a toy, he turned and bit me so hard. He left a massive bruise on my thigh. Like I just dropped to the ground. I mean, he had never done that.

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So, what was the thing before the thing? It was environment and arousal state. So, he was in a new arousal state, which he didn't know how to control. And so, what was my fix for that was to go home and create higher arousal states so that he learned how to control himself when he got excited. Biting me was never an answer.

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What about kids that get bit? Now this is going back to episode number 4 on [T.E.M.P.](#), that you are more observant of what your dog's body language is telling you around children. But there is always a thing before the thing when kids get bit.



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You know, people will get mad at the dog for biting the child, but you need to be mad at yourself, because dogs are always doing the best they can with the education that we've given them in the environment we're asking them to perform in.

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What is the thing before the thing when a kid gets bit? Maybe the kid was playing with the dog and had their face near their face and that was okay. But then later in the afternoon, the dog has been given a meaty bone and the same kid goes down and puts her face near the face. Dog does what the dog does. A warning, boom, get out of my face. Hopefully it's an inhibited bite where the dog hits the, and the kid, the kid feels the pressure. There might be a saliva trail, but there's no puncture wounds. Maybe there's little puncture wounds. Maybe they, what we call the velveting, they go to take the top layer of skin off, but they don't like, grab and shake.

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They give these little inhibited bites that, it's still the kid get bit, got bit. The thing before the thing was nobody noticed when the child was down there, when the dog didn't have a bone and the dog just stopped and got the whites of the eyes got a little bit bigger. That was your dog saying, I'm not comfortable with this.

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So, I know Momentum. When children's squeal, that gets her excited and she goes in very close to them and I'm like, there is a potential for her to bite. So, I observed that, and I give her an incompatible behavior. When kids squeal, come to me and let's have a tug game. And I also know if she's around children, they at a certain age, I might have her own leash.

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So, I'll work both things, create new triggers and eliminate the possibility of that ever happening by making sure that I'm controlling her access to being able to bite a child. Okay. So, the thing before the thing is what's going to help you give you the tools you need to be able to fix any dog training problem. But I'm going to warn you, don't assume you always know what it is. There could be multiple things at play. You might look back and fix one thing, but if your dog's still doing the behavior, you may not have fixed the right thing before the thing.

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That's it for this episode of Shaped By Dog. Please be sure, if you haven't watched all previous episodes, start at the beginning cause there's lots of good gems left in every episode that I've put for you here on the podcast I love reading your reviews. So please leave me a review and don't miss the chance to rank us. Five stars, you could give one through five. I'm not telling you which one to give, but if you go with the one that rhymes with hive, I'd be mostly appreciate it. We'll see you next time.

Resources

[Recallers](#)

[Podcast Episode 6: The Art of Manipulation](#)

[Vlog Post: The ABC's of Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 4: T.E.M.P. \(Tail, Eyes/Ears, Mouth, Posture\)](#)



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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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