

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG Hey, everyone, welcome to Shaped By Dog. I am Susan Garrett. Today, we're talking about names. How do you pick a name for your puppy or your dog? What you should consider. Things you want to avoid. I'm actually getting a new puppy. This year is exciting to me. I go about the naming process different than some, and I'm going to share with you why I do what I do, and it's very intentional. We'll also talk about rescue dogs. The question, do you name the dog, change the name that you have - and in some cases I would recommend strongly and in some cases I would recommend strongly, no.

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I'm going to start off by talking about things I recommend you not do with a name. When you're thinking of names for your dog, I like to put them on a piece of paper and put down other cues that you know you're going to be using. Now, if you play a sport, like for me in agility, I made the big mistake. I didn't write down all my cues with my dog Encore. I was at a Canadian national championship event. I was in the lead. I could have won. The last event was the Gamble. Nobody else had got the gamble up until this point. She only had to go, she did the difficult part, she had to just keep driving straight over two jumps, which was the easy part for her, no problem. But my cue for my past dogs to go straight away for me in a gamble was "go on" now, Encore's nickname, which meant give me your attention was 'on'.

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So, I had tried to avoid using "go on" with her because it causes conflict. And that's what happened on that day. I said, go on. She stopped dead, turned around and came back to me. You want to make sure when you pick a name that it isn't conflict with cues you're going to be using. That's something particularly true if you're playing sports.

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But like, if you're somebody who uses the word "no", probably you don't want to name your dog Nome. Because your dog's going to think that, you know, Nome, hey, Nome might sound really cool until they think you're always telling them they're wrong. Nobody listens to this podcast uses the word "no" with their dogs. I'm pretty sure that a lot of us, for those of us who played sports, you would think of fast name. Like they named them like 'manic' and 'frenzy' and... But when you name your dogs these kinds of names, two things. Number one, you have a subconscious idea of what frantic and frenzy is. And so, whether you mean to or not, you will be creating frantic and frenzy, which may not really be what you want for the sport that you're playing.

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I know that firsthand, I named a past dog. His registered name was "High On Emotion" and I called him 'Buzz' and he sure as heck was. And so, I remember thinking when I was getting ready to get my next dog, I thought, wow, anybody who has ever had a buzz, you sure are going to want a decaf next. So, I named my next dog 'Decaf' and she was way decaffeinated. She was so laid back and soft. It took me years to get her to build drive. I learned that there's not just the subconscious thoughts of what we think in the name. There is energy attached to words. That might be a bit woo out there for some of you, but just consider what if. Here's some of the names that I've heard of dogs... a dog that grew to be very aggressive by the name of Killer.



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I have known dogs, now I don't know of these personalities, but I've heard of a dog being called Toxic one called Ugly one called Thug, Vengeance is another dog, like you, you've got to know these could be very, very lovely dogs. But there's a very good chance that you are not setting that dog up to be thought of in your eyes, which is most importantly, even subconsciously is the dog that you really want them to be thinking of.

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So, my recommendation is be very conscious of what it is you want to conjure up the image, the thought. Or not, call your dog, Sally. And then it's just, yeah, this is like a good friend, just as long as you don't call them Karen in this day and age. Right. Go and look up the meaning of that one. Another thing you might, you should really be conscious of in today's climate is being very culturally sensitive. There's a term called cultural appropriation, which is taking something that is meaningful to one race. Like the word 'chief'. Calling your dog 'chief' may be insensitive to Aboriginal people. Now, some may say, well I'm actually showing appreciation for the culture.

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But it doesn't matter what your meaning or intent is. The meaning is, how it's received by the race who you are trying to appreciate. So why not just pick another name, another word? I was talking to a friend of mine, Nancy Gyes. I asked her if I could tell the story and she said I could. She had a little Sheltie named Jinx. When Jinx was a puppy, he had almost all his teeth pulled out.

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And it turns out Jinx only had one testicle and Jinx only had one kidney. When Jinx fractured his third bone, Nancy decided to change his name from Jinx to Jack. Who knows if Jinx's had some energy associated with them? But why take the chance, why set out to set your dog up for those energetic possibilities, let's call them. Now, what if you get a rescue. I believe in almost all cases you should change the name of the rescue dog that you get. There's a couple of reasons for it. Number one, names are cues and cues get associated with either a lot of positive triggers or negative triggers.

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So, if the dog is in rescue, there's a very, very good chance he wasn't working out in the family that he was with. And if you know the history that he wasn't working out, you definitely want to change the name. The reason is that that name was likely used in a tone that was associated with a lot of blame, possibly some uncomfortable punishment for that dog.

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You don't want to carry that through to your life with that dog. So definitely, at the very least, the name is probably been poisoned. What does poisoning mean? Poisoning means that the dog heard the cue which, what is the name mean, period. Let's start, let's start with that. When I say my dog's name, it means I want your attention. Now, if you can't see me in an eye line, that means find me until you can see me in an eye line. So, if my dog is doing agility and I say their name, I just want them to give me attention. If it's around the house and I say their name, I just want them to come into the same room I am I'm in, so I know where they are.



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It means give me your attention. However, I train that, we'll talk about how you can train that as well for your dogs. I train that, what most people do is just start using the name and the puppy or dog chooses to acknowledge it or keep going about their daily business. What the family does is they start saying the name over and over and over and over. And it kind of turns like Charlie Brown's teacher, right? Wa, wa, wa, wa, wa. They just ignore it. If they hear you calling their name and you're in the refrigerator or opening a cookie jar, yeah, he'll show up. But if not, if they think what they're doing is better off, they will ignore it.

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That's called poisoning a cue. That's called making it not be meaningful to the dog. So, a lot of rescue dogs, who have been naughty chosen to do what they want. Their name's poisoned. You don't want to start off a relationship with a dog who has learned when you say this word, I just do what I want. Now when might I keep suggest, keep that rescue dog's name the same. That would happen when let's say it was a very well-loved family pet and tragically, their owner died. And there was nobody in the family to take that dog on, that name may be associated with some really good memories and some really well reinforced use. So that might be a time where I would keep that name.

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And if you wanted to change it, I would change it to something thing that started very similar, right. That isn't a dramatic shift for the dog going into the new home. Especially if it's a geriatric dog. Recently, when Tater Salad came into the house, his name was Samson. Definitely his name was associated with ignoring. And so, I said to Kim, all right, we need to change his name. So, this is what I said to Kim. Think of something that you love. We were actually in Europe at the time. The name of the dog should spark something fun or something you love or something that when people hear the word they're going to go, oh, I love that.

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So, I will love your dog. That's the energy you would want associated with it. Or it's benign like Sally. Kim and I were having these conversations and at one time I had suggested, Oh, he's, he's a big bulldog, let's call him Bam-Bam. As soon as it came out of my mouth, I said, what am I saying, why do we want this dog to come into this home and think Bam-Bam. We're at a restaurant waiting for takeout at the time, a big plate of mashed potatoes went by. Potatoes happened to be Kim's favorite food. And she said potatoes! Yes. Let's name the dog 'potato'. At first jokingly and then she said, Tater! Tater! We'll call him Tater!

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And it reminded me of a stint from comic, Ron White on tater salad "I'm like tater salad, it's got to be. They call me 'Tater Salad'". And that's how Tater Salad's name came to be. So, what about when I name a puppy. Most people they say, oh, I'm not going to name that puppy until I get to know his personality and I get to know what he's like, and then I will give him a name.

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That's a great system. That's not the way I go about it though. Here's what I do. There is no right or wrong when you're, when, when it comes to how you name a puppy, but I'm just going to share with



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you exactly what I do. I think about the puppy I'm going to get. What I know in both parents possibly if it's not a rescue dog.

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What kind of dog it's going to be? What kind of relationship we're going to have? I just put these thoughts into my mind and somewhere before the puppies even born, a name comes to me. That's how Feature got her name. That's how Encore got her name. That's how Swagger got his name and that's how Momentum got her name. And then, so now I have the name long before the puppy is born.

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And then when I go to see the litter, it's like the name came, the universe said, this is the puppy who's waiting for you. Their name is Momentum. And then when I'm sitting with this litter of puppies, it's almost like I'm saying, "which one of you is Momentum?", and they show themselves to me. So again, maybe a little bit woo for you, but that's exactly how my puppies get their name.

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I believe they always had their names and then, the puppy and I just find our way to each other. So how can we make sure our puppy's name is meaningful to them? Number one, this is important if you have children. You can just build an association for that puppy, with the words "pup-pup". So, pup-pup, give them a cookie.

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Tell your kids if you want to call the dog, just say "pup-pup". So, pup-pup could be a nickname. But if you're going to use the dog's name you always must have the magic key. And the magic key is a reinforcement. So, if I'm going to say the puppy's name, they're going to get a reinforcement. I'm only going to say their name when I know they're close by and they're going to want to turn and look at me, or maybe when I'm running away and they're going to chase me so that their name is always associated with a reinforcement, at least for the first week or two.

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So, they hear the name and they give you what I call that head whip reaction. Yeah, the name has meaning, and then you're not going to use that name unless you know that dog is going to choose to look in your direction at the very least. Now, all of my dogs have nicknames. I'm going to do exactly the same thing with the nickname. I'll use it and give reinforcement and use it and give reinforcement. And therefore, not only the name, but the nicknames will always be meaningful to your dogs.

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That's all I got to say about naming your dog. This has been Shaped By Dog. Please, if you haven't, leave me a review, I read each and every one of these reviews and I love to read them. Subscribe, so you won't miss any episodes here on Shaped By Dog and I'll see you next time.

### Resources

[Shaped By Dog Podcast Episode 8: Get Your Dog in the Belief Loop of Awesome](#)

[Blog Post: A GAME to Preserve Your Dog's Recall Cue](#)



### 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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