

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Hey, everybody. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett. I am super excited for today's episode. You know, like the talk shows, like daytime talk shows they have what's called sweeps weeks. And that's when they do the ratings for the year so they can be like the top talk show of the year. And during sweeps weeks, they have like the best guest stars, ones that they'd never have during the year.

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Well, if this was sweeps weeks for podcasts, if there was such a thing, then this would be the topic I would talk about during sweeps week, because it is so important to everybody who owns a dog. And that is holy crap, how do I help my dog when he is distracted? Like, how do I get my dogs focus when they're around bicycles or chipmunks or somebody eating a bag of potato chips or a tennis ball, whatever it is for your dog.

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And I asked on Facebook just last night, what people's biggest distractions were? Everything from lizards to cars. I mean, things that you'd expect and some things you wouldn't expect, whatever it is. You are in luck today because I'm going to share with you a formula that you can use to strategically work through distractions.

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Now, what are distractions, right? Distractions are things that make your dog less responsive to you. It's like they go deaf whenever this person, place, or thing, or food, whatever is around, you may lose their focus. Their focus might zone in only on that distraction. Right? So that is what today is all about.

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I'm so excited to share this formula with you. First, I just want to share something called "response costs", and it will come back later this episode. So, our response cost is how much effort it takes the animal to do something and the reward they get for doing that. For example, let's say you are in bed and you've decided, Oh, I'm thirsty. Now, if your glass of water is on your nightstand, the response cost is super low. You just reach over, grab your... drink water, and get yourself a gulp.

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If that glass of water was still in the kitchen and your bedroom was on the third floor and you had to go down several flights of floors and it was in the winter time and you didn't have slippers and your feet were super cold and it was a stone floor, the response cost now got higher and you'd lay in bed and go, "How thirsty am I really?". Now, if you had to go to the store to buy the water, Oh, heck I'm not doing that. I've done that in a hotel room where I've gone, "Ah, I really could use a bottle of water". Um, I'm not going out to buy it and I'm not drinking this stuff out of the top here, so I just don't drink it. Right. Response cost. That's something we're going to come back to. How does that reflect dogs? It's not like, the dog does the math in their head, they just know. If I see a cat run in front of me, the chances that I could catch it are pretty high. So, I think I'm going to try. If I see a cat, like 200 meters away, my ears might perk up.



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Oh, it's not worth my effort. By the time I start going, it's going to be gone. Now, if it's a young puppy. For example, when Tater Salad came here, he would go off chasing anything with the expectation, "I think I'm going to had just one". I remember when momentum was younger, she used to chase the airplanes or the birds that flew over her head. Like, she was a little puppy.

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She didn't know, she couldn't catch them. They figure out things, the response cost is something that dogs learn. Their little brain goes, "don't even bother. Don't bother with that". Okay, that's a little tidbit I wanted to put out in front. Here's what I've got for you today. We are going to talk about distractions that you can use to work for you.

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What I mean by that is some of your dog's biggest distractions could become your best rewards when you're training with them. And then there's other distractions so those are distractions we can use. And then there's other distractions that potentially could be dangerous or there... let's call those off-limit distractions. We need to fix it. And I would put like wildlife dogs who chase cars in these off-limit distractions. We still need to deal with it because they're still a distraction. They still take our dogs focus. But I just want you to know there's two different groups of distractions and you need to decide or categorize, write down all the things that your dog's distracted by and put them into one of these two categories, right.

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That there are things that could be dangerous, or things like in some parts of the country, rattlesnake are a huge distraction. Okay. So now that we have that, first thing I'm going to do that I'm going to share with you, just critically important is my distraction intensity index. You need to be aware of the distraction intensity index for your dog, and it's going to be different for your dog versus my dog. And it will be different at different stages of your dog's life as well.

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So, here's how you calculate the index. There's four items that are involved. First is, the value of the distraction. So, you've made that list of all the things that distract your dog, right? From tennis balls to the neighbor's cat, to chipmunks, to bicycles, to food, like any kind of food, your dog might just be a food hound, right. To kids or a favorite person. Yeah. So, if your dog loves like your kids or the neighbor's kids or your spouse, you could be working with your dog and they see that person and they lose it.

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Okay. So those are distractions that you could work with versus off limit distractions. All right. So, we have two categories of distractions. We're now going to work on the index for these distractions. And then the last part we're working on the formula to overcome them. All right.

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So, the index, four parts. First part, value. You've gone down on a scale of 1 to 10. How high a distraction is this for your dog? Now you might say Susan, everything's a 10. I lose him around butterflies. Everything's a 10. Okay well, like, is there something more of a 10 plus, like you got to get some sort of ranking in there. So now we know the value of the distraction.



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So, to create the intensity index, we multiply four things. So, it is the value. And we multiply that by the distance away so you can put an arbitrary number in there. Like if the bunny is a one foot away, then that is a multiplier of a thousand or 10,000, whatever you decide. So, if the bunny is a mile away, then that might be a multiplier of one. Might really not because your dog response cost, your dog says, "I'm not going to, I won't catch that". Now some dogs will say, "I'll give her a go". But sometimes a go, yeah, that's not much of a distraction. Like their ears might go up and then they go, "oh yeah, you got food, that's good".

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So, we have our value, the value of the distraction, how much your dog loves that, whatever that is, the distance away. So, we're doing value multiplied by the distance away, multiplied by senses engaged. So that would be the sense of sight. Can the dog see it? The sense of sound, could the dog hear it? Now sometimes if a dog can only hear something in the bushes, that actually is a higher multiplier than if they could see it.

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So, you have to decide, sight, sound, and smell. So, depending on your dog, the sense of smell might be a biggie. If they catch the scent of something, that you could lose them. And this is an individual thing, which is why you've got to create your own indexes for your dogs. So, we've got the value of that distraction, the distance away from you, the senses engaged. So that's another multiplier, with that's our third and the fourth is the movement. Is the distraction on the move. So, something rustling in the bushes that is moving off, that has got a much higher multiplier than something just staying in one place. Okay.

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So, your index is decided by those four categories: value, distance, senses activated, and movement. Now that you know what those four things are, let's now look at the formula to fix, overcome those distractions for your dogs. Alright, first, we are going to look at only those distractions that we can use. So, you've got your long list of things that are potentially dangerous. You have got to make a commitment to not give your dog off-leash freedom, off-leash access around any of those.

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And if it's a real problem, like let's say your big distraction is other dogs running. And you exercise your dog every morning at a promenade where there's dogs running all the time. I personally would invest in a head halter and use a head halter when I'm walking the dog. That could be another podcast, safe use of a head halter for a dog.

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That's what I would do, because it would allow me to make sure that the dog has focused where I want the dogs focus. All right. So, you've got to eliminate your dog... earning reinforcement from the dangerous distractions. That's your commitment, while we work on the ones that we really can use. So now let's look at the formula to overcome that. We've got our four categories. You are going to bring three of them down to a one. So, let's pick food first, let's pick cheese. My dog loves smelly old cheddar. What I'm going to do is I'm going to be, let's say in my office here and I'll put smelly old cheddar on a chair, and then I'm going to ask my dog to do something. Now, if your dog loves games like tug, then that's what I would start with.



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I would say, will you tug. And the dog's going to go, a distance away, super close, senses engaged, sight, and smell. I'm watering my dog, just drooling. It's not moving, so that's not bad. You know, if we start throwing the cheese around, that'd be even worse, but we're distanced as super close. The senses engaged are super high.

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So then what are we going to do? We're going to eliminate all of those down to a one. So, here's what you're going to do. You're going to go outside of the room and down the hall. The dog no longer can see it. And you might put a piece of Tupperware over the cheese as well. Can't smell it. Can't see it. And the distance away you went out, down the hall. So, it's I don't know, it's maybe five strides. That might not be enough for a lot of dogs. I know when I played this game with my terriers back in the day, it wasn't enough. I know it's in there, I'm a smart dog, the distance isn't far enough away.

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So, you just keep increasing the distance. You work on one element of your intensity index. I always like to work distance first. I get further and further and further. Remember that response costs. At some point you are so far away from that piece of cheese, the dog goes, "all right, I'll play tug with you. Like what else have I got here?". Now if your dog doesn't tug, go to episode 18, where I teach some of the puppy games and play a simple game with your dog, throw a lower value cookie, not cheese, like say a dried piece of kibble, throw it on the floor, call your dog's name, have them come back to you and get them to play that game.

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Right? So, you've got either tag or a small game with food, hand touches, whatever you want. And when your dog does it and doesn't fake do it, but really does it like they're engaged they're like, "okay, I forgot about that food. Yeah. We're having fun here." Then you're going to say, "let's get the food", and you're going to run into the office, uncover the cheese and give the dog the piece of food.

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Boom. That's one round and you might stop there. The next round, you go back to where you had success the first time. Put the cheese so that the dog sees the cheese there, cover it up, go back to where you had success the first time. Play it again and immediately play it half the distance. And you want to keep playing this game until the cheese is on the chair and your dog's like, "I'll play tag with you. Oh yeah, this is good." Because here's what's happening. This is the beauty of this. The value of the distraction, the value of the cheese gets put into the dog working with you. You get a transfer of value from the distraction through you into the game. So not only does your stock come up in the eye of the dog, but the game you've played.

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Okay. So now, what we've done is you've moved so close that you've bumped back up the sense index because they can see them, you've uncovered it, you can play this game right beside it. If you really wanted to tip the scales, you'd get somebody to be throwing the cheese on the floor, get movement in. You get your four-part index.



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All right. So that's something simple with food. Now, how are you going to do it if your dog likes to chase bicycles? Same deal. Now we don't have to worry about smell. We want to worry about movement. So, what I would do is I'd knock the kid off the bike so they can't ride it anymore. Just kidding. I would ask somebody to take a bike and just hold it.

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And then you're going to move far enough away that your dog will play games. Now, maybe he'll play games right beside the bicycle. And then you're going to have that person walk the bicycle around and see if you can get the same kind of games and interaction. Now, the only difference is there's never going to be a time where we're going to say, okay, get the bicycle.

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The game itself is going to be the reinforcement and it will be very reinforcing because you just doubled the value of the reinforcement by playing the game with the cheese first. Funny enough, a bicycle right in front of the dog is maybe not as exciting as the bicycle moving away. So, you get that person, you just gradually increase movement until they can ride in a slow circle around you. Big circle, again take the dog's behavior and you're going to let it guide when you move up closer and closer until you have that person riding and stopping and skidding, and maybe even get a kid on there who laughs and giggles, "wwwweeee!", having fun.

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But the value of all of that has gone into another game the dog loves. That is the distraction formula. All right. So, you're going to work through things like a chipmunk. Now, again, off limits. You can't say get the chipmunk, but you work on one part of this. Like Tater Salad, the values for chipmunks is a 10 and if he hears them, then it gets a multiplier of a thousand. If he sees it another multiplier of thousand, if it's running, because they make that chattering noise and it's close by, off the charts. So, we work on each element separately. And how do I do that? I put him in an exercise pen where I know the chipmunks are going to be, so that he can see them but they're far enough away that he will play with me.

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And we do through the same things. Again, you can't tell the dog, you can now chase wildlife, but if you play this distraction model with every single thing that would be a distraction to your dog, tennis balls bouncing, other dogs. So, I'll play this when I have a puppy with other dogs. So, my other dogs are out running. And I will let my puppy off leash, and I will call them.

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And if they don't come, then I lowered the distraction of the movement by telling all my other dogs lie down. All my other dogs lie down, the puppy will either come back to me because it's bored or I'll go in and I'll take the puppy and I'll put them on a leash, and we'll start the game again.

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So, I might let my dogs be loose running and I'll play it right by the front door. Can you tug with me by the front door? The puppies' like, "no, no, no, no, the other dogs are running, and I want to chase them." So, then I'll go in the house. Can you tug with me? I've increased the distance away. I've eliminated the sense of sight and I've eliminated the motion because they can't see the motion.

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Episode: #24

Distraction Intensity Index: Help For Dogs Who Chase Chipmunks, Bicycles, And Neighbor's Cats

Can you tug with me? Oh, I can play. I can play tug in the house. And let's go back on the porch. I increased the distance only marginally, not much just the thin slice of the door, but I've increased the sense of sight. The sense of hearing the dogs barking when they're running, can you play with me? And let's go back and forth.

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I only work on one element of the intensity index at a time. That's the way you're going to get your dog ignoring distractions. That's the way you're going to get the value of the distractions to go through a game that you're going to play with your dog and to you. And that's where you're going to have a dog who's going to lose their focus on those other distractions and have focus only entirely on you.

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Trust me, this will work one step at a time, be consistent. Don't give them access to the reinforcement value of the distractions. That could be dangerous. So, you're going to keep them on leash when they're around those other distractions.

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And you're going to build up the massive value of reinforcement for making the right choice by coming up with all different distractions that the dog would love that you can use in your training. You do that and you're going to be coming back to this podcast and going, "Susan, you're a genius! Oh my gosh. This works." See, almost said a bad word there. We'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog everyone, sweeps weeks. Remember, leave me a good comment. Podcast sweeps weeks. I just made that up.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 18: 4 Puppy and Dog Training Games for Acquired Bite Inhibition](#)

[Podcast Episode 2: Reinforcement](#)

About Susan

DogsThat.Com



Distraction Intensity Index: Help For Dogs Who Chase Chipmunks, Bicycles, And Neighbor's Cats

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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