

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG Hey, everybody. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett, and today is a topic we have had a lot of people request. It is the topic of counter surfing. Or the ability for your dog to get up on the counter or the table and steal food that you would rather he not be stealing. I want to share with you why it may be happening and how you can turn that around.

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I'll give you the spoiler alert. It really all comes down to your dog isn't learning what you are teaching. And it's always the dog that knows what we're trying to teach. So, we have to adjust that and I'm going to show you how. First, I'm going to share with you a couple reviews. You guys take the time to leave me a review, and I want to, from time to time, reinforce you for doing that because I love, love, love reading the reviews that you leave me here on Shaped by Dog.

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First one is from Orangelint who writes, "I...", now, I got to admit I had to look up one of the words in this review. Not because I hadn't heard the word before, but I'd never seen it in print. So, I'm like, is that what I think it is? See if you guys are more clever than me. **Learner-Centered**, "I really enjoy Susan's style and her use of mnemonics, like TEMP..." See, even Swagger had to put an exclamation point around the word mnemonics. "...and other strategies for remembering content. Susan uses great analogies and is obviously passionate about her work. Susan is interested in her listeners as learners, not as consumers. Shaped by Dog is informative and engaging." Thank you so much, Orangelint.

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And from MartiMagic, that's a cool handle, who gives a **Five Star Rating for a Five Star Trainer** is the title. "Can not recommend these podcasts enough. Excellent for "on the go" dog owners. Excellent advice and guidance on so many levels by an experienced down to earth dog owner and international trainer, Susan Garrett. Listen and learn how to create a rewarding environment for your dogs at your own pace, no matter what level of dog ownership is. Thank you, Susan."

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And that is a beautiful segue into today's topic. How to create a rewarding environment for your dogs? Because dogs who get on the counter to steal food, that is a frustration. And you know, as I've mentioned time and time again, there's three approaches we can take to any dog training challenge. The first is hope training. Basically, you ignore it and hope it gets better. That may have been what you've been doing so far. You know what, at the end of this podcast, going to tell you a funny story about counter surfing and hope dog training.

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The second is that you manage. And that is you lock the dog away whenever there is any thing on the counter, or you try to lock the food away. Now I'll share a funny story right now about one of my students from Australia, her and her husband, their dogs were counter surfers. So, they would leave food defrosting.



# How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!

00:03:16

They would put it in the microwave when they went to work. And they would come home, and it was gone. And so, they set up a camera to see how it was done. And if you're listening to this, when you get home you might want to watch the YouTube version. I'll put the video of her dog actually navigating both the counters and the microwave to get them. Well, in this case there was no roast in there, but her dog was just checking to see if there was. True story. Managing, you just have to get more clever than your dog.

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And finally, there is training. We're going to fix those dogs that are counter surfing. I'm going to help you today. I'm going to give you the solution that is going to take care of it, but first, why? People say, "Oh, he suddenly just stole food from the counter." Rarely, if ever, it is sudden. There's always a gradual climb to the crime. The challenge is as dog owners sometimes we're not present for what happened. So, we don't notice that our dog, when we're loading the dishwasher, likes to lick the dishwasher door. "Oh yes Susan, yeah my dog likes to do that."

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Or your dog likes to lick the counters. If something has fallen down the counters, they might lick the cupboard doors. "Yeah. I think I've seen my dog do that too." Or they just start scavenging in the kitchen when tidbits are falling on the floor and they just start eating from the, you know, scavenging. "Yeah, my..." So you've turned your dog into a scavenger who can hunt for their own food in the kitchen. That could be one of them, but quite honestly a lot of it is, that there aren't clear boundaries. There aren't clear expectations on the part of the dog.

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And you may say, "Oh Susan, I just want my dog to be a dog." But I'm going to ask you this. If you have a five year old kid and you took him over to a friends' place to play with their child, and on the way out the door you see your kid with an armful of LEGO and you go, "Whoa, what are you doing?" "Yeah, I really, he's got Lego I don't have, so I'm just taking this." That wouldn't be right, would it? You wouldn't allow that. You're, "no, my kid would never even dream of doing that Susan." What if your teenage daughter comes in with some fancy new clothes? "Where did you get the money for that?" "Yeah. Um, I just found a big envelope of cash and I was looking through your underwear drawer and I found a big envelope of cash." "Yeah, my daughter wouldn't do that."

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Or you start hiding your cash better and they come in with new clothes and "Yeah, I found your bank card and I just, I cleaned out your savings. Yeah. That's how I got it. It's great." That wouldn't happen. Why? Because with your kids, you've set up clear expectations. But with your dogs, you haven't. And so that envelope of cash is the roast defrosting on your counter. So, let's change those expectations. But first, I want you to remember these numbers: [11](#), [16](#), [20](#), [27](#) and [32](#).

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I'm going to say them again: [11](#), [16](#), [20](#), [27](#) and [32](#). Now that isn't the combination to my bicycle lock. Those are previous podcasts that I've recorded here on Shaped by Dog that are going to help you with this challenge. I want you to review those five previous podcasts because they will be of massive help to you.



# How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!

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What happens when dogs get up, get food or steal from the counter or the table or wherever? They've received reinforcement either unintentionally from you that you've given, and you didn't realize it, or they've just gone out and stole their own reinforcement. So, I've talked about how they might be stealing your own reinforcement by licking the plates off as you load the dishwasher or scavenging in the kitchen or things like that.

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But there might be, the way that you've been reinforcing it. And you thought you were doing a good thing, but unintentionally we're doing not such a good thing. And that goes back to [Episode 16: The Thing Before The Thing](#). For example, you get some food out of the fridge and you start making yourself a sandwich and the dog comes in and puts their paws up and you go, "Oh, hey buddy. Yeah, I'm making a sandwich." And you might give him a little tidbit. Or you might even say, "no, I wouldn't do that, Susan. I know that would be wrong." So, you tell him "Off!" and he gets off and then you give him a little tidbit. Or you might say, "yeah, he's begging, so I tell him go in your bed." And he goes in his bed and you give him a little tidbit.

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Now, what would be the appropriate thing? If my dog is interested in food, they come running in the kitchen, they see I'm preparing something, they go to their bed automatically. So, the thing is they see me preparing food, the response is I just go to my bed outside to the kitchen, right? It's different. The behaviour chain that you've created is you see food you want, and you come in and try to steal, I give you a cue to do something else. Remember [The Power of Permission](#), that was [Episode 11](#), you are telling the dog this is the chain, you try and steal and then I tell you a word and you get off and I'll feed you.

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Or your dog just is air scenting and smells some steaks that you have on the counter that you've seasoned, and you'd give them the word 'off'. Now, what you're telling your dog is this isn't the appropriate time to be hunting for food on the counter because I can see you. The word 'off' could be changed. You might say "off", your dog gets off and then you say, "good boy", and you give him a tidbit.

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So now there's a behaviour of chain of "I have to be bad in order to be good". I get up there, I get told a cue that means I get a cookie and I run and get a cookie, but I have to be bad in order to be good. Got to change all that. Right? So, there's behaviour chains that have been established and it could possibly be that you've used the word 'off' to tell your dog this isn't the appropriate time to be hunting for food from the counter. When I leave or turn my back or go outside or go in the car, that's the time. And then you can escalate that to as Katie's dog, learned to get food out of the microwave. If you're super very, very clever.

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Alright. So that could be the escalation as to got you in the position of your dog becoming a world-class counter surfer. What we want to do now is change all that. So, the first part to change is, as I mentioned, being present for what's happening. What are those little things that might be leading up to your dog counter surfing? There's a great mantra, irritation is motivation.



# How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!

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You need to be irritated by the little things, because that will make you say I got to train this, and it will prevent them from leading to big things. Irritation is motivation. So, there's a series of games as you can imagine, I'm going to teach my dog to not counter surf all through games. And if the best way to do it is to prevent it from ever happening. Don't wait till you have a problem. I'll tell you when I recorded [the episode on how to prevent dog bites](#) recently. I sent it out, I told a really good friend of mine who has three kids, I said, "listen, sit your kids down and get them to listen to this episode because it's really important knowledge that kids need to know." And he's like, "yeah okay. That's great advice."

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Well, two days ago he sent me a text. Can you give me the name of those episodes again? Because yesterday my middle child got bit by the neighbor's dog. So, when I tell you prevention is good, you know, a lot of the times it goes, "yeah, I'll get on that, Susan." And it maybe, you really need a bite to the face before you do. But the best thing to do is not wait till you get the bite to the face.

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I'm going to give you a great formula to prevent your dog from learning how to counter surf. It's the same formula that is going to work for you who already have a dog that counter surfs. However, it's going to take a little longer because we have to combat the history of reinforcement your dog already has.

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And I'll be honest with you. If you have a dog that's been stealing food from the counter for 10 years, that reinforcement may be overwhelming. It, you can make it better, but you may not be able to completely eradicate it. Okay. Let's get down to the fix. It starts with number one, manage. "Susan, I thought you said that was kind of one of the bad things when training." No, we have to manage our dog's environment so that we prevent the rehearsals of what they are getting right now in order to create new rehearsals in them. All right.

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So, whenever we're undoing a challenge, manage is always going to be part of this. It's always going to be the number one step. Manage the environment to remove those rehearsals of the unwanted behaviour. Number one is going to be manage. Number two, [The Game ItsYerChoice](#) is huge here because your dog is making a choice. His choice is to steal food from the counter. We just need to alter the choices your dog is currently making to make sure that the choice he wants is the same choice you want.

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So, [ItsYerChoice](#) is a game that is a foundation of everything I do. I'm going to leave you a link in the show notes that will help you to understand the ins and outs of how to play it. And it's a game that you are wanting to play it early and often throughout your dog's life. We're going to start playing daily rounds of [ItsYerChoice](#), five, six, seven times a day. It might start outside of the kitchen. Just it's your choice, a cookie in your hand, open the hand, the dog makes a choice to back away you give them cookie. And then we're going to go to Game #2, The Hot Zone, and that is teaching your dog to want to lie in a location outside of the kitchen that you have deemed reinforcing.



# How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!

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So, for my dogs, most of my dogs, it's a dog bed. Some of my dogs, it's just a location outside of the kitchen. They know if I'm in there cooking, they can earn reinforcement if they stay in that Hot Zone. What I love about the Hot Zone, my dog who is going on 17, and we play this at five o'clock every single morning, she hears me out of bed and she goes and runs into her Hot Zone and she knows that's a place I'm going while I go about my morning routine, I'm going to give her reinforcement in the Hot Zone.

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Right? So, we've got to have clear expectation of what we want. When I'm in the kitchen you don't need to be in here. It's none of your business here in this kitchen. Now my dog's water bowl is just outside of the kitchen, but they don't need to be in the kitchen particularly when I'm preparing food. Drives me cray-cray when dogs are under foot. Hot Zone, number two. Now you might play ItsYerChoice beside the Hot Zone and wait until the dog jumps when you open up your hand, exposing the food, you wait until they jump into the Hot Zone and you give them cookies there.

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Now ItsYerChoice is going to happen near a counter. So, you're going to drop a tidbit of food from the counter, the dog is going to dive in on it and you're just going to cover it with your foot. And you might keep doing that until they back away. And when they back away, pick up the cookie, go near their Hot Zone, play ItsYerChoice near the Hot Zone until they jump in.

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And what we're trying to connect is: food falls from the counter, you don't dive at the food, you go for the Hot Zone. Cause if you go for the Hot Zone, you're going to earn reinforcement. Now, if you've got more than one dog guys, you have to separate them while you're playing all these games. Eventually it happens for all of them, but it's like juggling cats and chainsaws. It's just not going to work. It's probably not a humane thing to do either. And with the chainsaws, it's probably not good for you either.

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Alright. So, ItsYerChoice is step number one. Step number two, and step number one and two are kind of muddled because it's Hot Zone. While that's going on, I want you to two or three times a day we're going to put our dog on leash and we're going to make sure the counters are clean and you're just going to walk around your kitchen. And if you see your dog look up to smell, then you're going to just pause and wait. And when they stop, you're going to praise them. You're not going to give them a cookie. All the cookies are going to happen outside of the kitchen, but we're going to praise them, "good job".

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I want them to learn what's up on the counter, is none of your business. All right. So, walking around and waiting for them to make a choice of not looking on the counter. And gradually over a week or two, you might start putting good smelly things up there. And waiting for them to look up at that, and then when they looked down, we're going to go to the Hot Zone, and they can get reinforced there. All right. So, we've got number one is Manage. Number two is ItsYerChoice. And number three is Hot Zone, and then we're going to work on the walks around the kitchen to help them understand that the food up there is not for them. Now, the Manage part is ideally you have no food anywhere on the counter or any reason for the dog to put their paws up. No essence of food when you are not around.



# How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!

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When you are around, if your dog puts their paws up on the counter or lifts up to see what's up on the counter even if they don't touch it, you are not going to say anything to them. You're going to quickly grab them by the collar and walk them outside of the kitchen, into their Hot Zone. All right. And that's all. You're not going to give them a cookie out when they get out there. But if they stay there, they can earn a cookie a minute or two later. Remember if you chain, you put your paws up and I'm going to put you in the Hot Zone with cookies, they're going to learn I have to be bad in order to be good.

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So, you're just going, what we're going to do is you want to minimize that because that is punishment. Taking them by the collar and putting them in their bed even though the bed has got lots of reinforcement. And if you've used [Collar Grab](#), which is game we've introduced here in Shaped by Dog, that those are reinforcing. But the reinforcement is now allowing us to use it as a bit of a timeout. I'd take you by the collar and I walk you quickly outside of the kitchen into the Hot Zone. We don't reinforce there. If they maintain some duration in the Hot Zone, then you can give them a reinforcement.

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Alright. Those are the steps you're going to take. Now, the thing that I haven't mentioned, a lot of dogs just get into trouble because they haven't had enough exercise. So, I should have said that right off the top. Dogs need daily exercise. And if you haven't been exercising your dog enough, you know you should, or maybe the situation is that you can't, be sure to refer to [Episode 32](#), where I give you 20 games that you can play with your dog that will help them exercise their brain and their body when you can't get outside to do it.

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All right. So that is your rehab program. We've got: Manage the behaviour - you're not going to leave any food on the counter. You're going to change your behaviour - if you're eating a sandwich, you're not going to break a piece off and give to your dog. You're not going to chain the 'I'm preparing food for myself therefore I'm going to give you the food'. We are going to make it clear, just like your five-year-old packing LEGO, leaving your friend's house.

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This is unacceptable behaviour. That's really not a cool way to behave. Checking out everything in my kitchen environment, my dishwasher, my floors, my counters, my tables, me eating at the coffee table. Checking me out. That's not cool behaviour. You want to earn reinforcement, you're going to do it by hanging out in your Hot Zone. That's where dogs earn reinforcement. ItsYerChoice, Hot Zone. Manage unwanted behaviour. Stop chaining with the word, 'no' or 'off'.

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Just be swift and deliberate. Go in, take the collar, replace them in the Hot Zone. You're going to do that for two weeks. And let me know, I'd be willing to bet it dramatically improves that once dogs learn that there's no reinforcement to be had by air scenting the kitchen counters or the kitchen table. Once they have clarity of the expectation you have for them, when you're eating or preparing food for them to be in their Hot Zone. Don't do it because remember I said, dogs are always doing the best they can with the education we've given them, in the environment that we're asking them to perform. Okay.



# How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!

Funny story that I told you about off the top. About hope and ignoring. Many, many, many years ago. I think I was a university student.

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I was at my friends' place for dinner. Now let's call my friends Fred and Wilma. And back then I actually ate meat, which I know I haven't done for decades. So, we were having roast beef. And in the midst of dinner, Fred looks up in a really calm voice just says, "yeah, Wilma, Dino's got the roast again." Wilma puts down her fork and knife and rolls her eyes and kind of has a deep sigh and calmly gets up. Now, Dino is on the floor with a roast of beef between his paws and he's just calmly just taking one piece off at a time. And Wilma gets up, takes the roast from Dino, puts it back up on the counter, comes back and starts eating dinner.

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And later after dinner is over... Now, there were two things that were a tip off that this wasn't a new behaviour to me. Number one, Fred saying the word again in conjunction with Dino's got the roast off the counter. And number two, the calm way Dino went about his work with the roast and the calm way that Wilma went about removing the roast from Dino.

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And the funny part about this story is near the end of dinner Fred says to me, "do you want seconds? Or is it Wilma says, "do you want seconds? We got more." And I'm like, "yeah, no, I'm good." And then Fred says, "well, if you want, I can lie to you like I do to my in-laws and say we had more cut before it hit the floor." I'm like, "yeah, no, I'm really I'm good." I might've become a vegan right that night. I'm not sure.

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Ignoring and hope doesn't help you train anything. It just allows the dog to continue to do what's reinforcing him before you know it your dog's packing LEGO away from your friend's house. That's it for Shaped by Dog, please leave me a review. I love reading them. I love reading them more on the air. I look forward to reading your review and getting your ranking here on Shaped by Dog. We'll see you next time.

### Resources:

[Podcast Episode 11: The Power of Permission in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 16: The Thing Before Your Dog's Thing](#)

[Podcast Episode 20: Bridging the Gap Between Blame and Kindness in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 27: Do Dogs Need Rules?](#)

[Podcast Episode 32: 20 Easy Ways to Exercise Your Dog at Home](#)

[Game: Learn how to play ItsYerChoice \(IYC\)](#)



### 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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