

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG Hey, everybody. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I'm Susan Garrett and if you aren't ready for a paradigm shift, you might not want to listen to this episode. I'm pretty confident that for many of you, after you hear today's episode, you are going to completely shift the way you think about this particular aspect of dog training.

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And the idea comes to me from one of you listeners, Hound House, thank you for sending in the request that I address this topic. I'm going to start though with two questions. Number one, how would you define an amazing life for a dog? What would that look like? What would, if you could detail out an amazing life for any dog, what would it involve?

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Now some of you might think, "Oh, an amazing life for my dog just might be being able to eat all day because that's all my dog loves. My dog just loves it eat." Now that could be true. There may be dogs out there that their big event of the day is the chance to eat. Now, my dogs love to eat. However, I know they'd like to do things with me more.

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So, a lot of times dogs, their big joy in life is eating because they don't get a chance to do a lot of other things. And why is that? Some dogs, my dogs get to go places and do things with me. A lot of times it is because of the way the dog behaves in public or behaves when they're around other dogs or people or whatever.

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And so, an amazing life really depends on how much training has gone into that dog, which allows them to do things with you, like off leash hiking, or playing fetch in the park field with other dogs or squirrels. So, what does an amazing life look like for a dog? And how can we get that? My second question. And this is the topic of today. What does the word criteria mean to you? How would you define criteria? Now for those of you who are fairly new to dog training, you might think, "well, I've never thought of what does criteria have to do with owning a dog? I don't, I don't get that." So, let's take it outside of dogs.

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What does criteria mean to you in any setting? If you were interviewing for a job and somebody says, "I'm sorry, you didn't meet our criteria." What would that mean? Uh, that would mean that you didn't meet their expectations as a candidate. Maybe they had a rule that this job will only go to somebody who has a minimum of a master's degree or a minimum of 10 years experience in the field. And you don't have a master's degree, or you don't have 10 years in the field. So, a lot of times when we're talking about criteria in dog training, we mean what are your rules for your dog? When you ask your dog to sit, what's your expectations? So, somebody, I asked my dog to sit, it, I just mean put your butt on the ground.



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All right. So, they can just put their butt on the ground, but their front feet can move, and they can turn from side to side. They can spin in a circle cause their butt is still in the ground. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's... I need them to sit and keep all their butts on the ground and their front feet, um, pointing in the right, the same direction so that their head can be looking everywhere.

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So, criteria are your expectations and the more criteria you put on a behavior, the more consistency you can see from that behavior from time to time to time. So, if sit means butt on the ground, front feet, hold still and your head can look wherever you want, it doesn't matter. Then, you know when you say the word sit, you're going to get the same thing every time with your dog.

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Now, if your criteria is sort of going that position but just kind of crouch then you're not going to get the same behavior over time. So, the more criteria you have on a behavior, the more consistency you have on a behavior. The downside of that is the more criteria you have on a behavior, the more work it is for you to maintain that criteria.

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I want to suggest, we look at the word criteria not from our point of view, but from our dog's point of view. What does criteria mean to your dog? If I was to ask your dog, your criteria for a sit, what would your dog say? Well, I look around and there's nothing better to do than I can lay on the ground or sit or do what I want. I don't know, what is it? Here's the way I look at the word criteria. Criteria is defined by what brings my dog joy in this instance. And my job is to build up all the pieces I need to bring my dog joy in that setting.

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So, for example, if I asked my dog to sit at the start line in agility and my dog would rather just go, I don't want them to think they have to sit. I want them to think, I want to sit. I get joy from sitting. How do we get that? There's four defining elements of how I get that joy in criteria for my dogs. Wacc. WACC. Wacc, I don't know if it's wacc. I don't know. You guys, you guys can make up your own. It... the letters just came together.

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So, the W is it needs to be worth the dog's while, it needs to be worthwhile. If I asked my dog to sit and I'm in the kitchen, I might have like a piece of cheese in my hand. And so, there's no other distractions around, "Hey, it's worth my while I'm going to sit, boom, my butt's hitting the ground. Yeah, I'll do it. I'll do everything you want." If I take that same dog and I take them to, like out in the woods and there's squirrels and rabbits and chipmunks, and I asked them to sit, it might not be worth their while because there's too many other good things going on. So, you might not get that sit.

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Does that mean it's impossible, my definition of bringing the dog joy to get a dog to sit out in the woods with all those distractions? No, it is possible, but you need to build it up layer by layer. Can a dog find joy sitting where there's squirrels around they want to chase? Absolutely, just like my dogs can find joy in sitting at the start line in agility when there's nothing on this earth they'd rather do than run agility.



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It needs to be worth the dog's while whatever it is you're asking. Now does that mean you always have to have a piece of cookie on you or, or their favorite toy? Absolutely not. That's what good dog training is about. But it needs to be worth in your dog's mind they've got to say, "Hey, this is good." Criteria is currency between the dog and I. And they go, "yeah, I like it when she asked me to do something, that's great." W – worthwhile. Number two, the A, it needs to be achievable. What you're expecting of your dog, what you're asking of your dog is something that they are able to do. So, I couldn't take a dog off the street and expect them to be able to run an agility course flawlessly.

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That's not achievable for them. They've never seen any of the equipment. I would need to break all of that equipment down into small pieces, small skillsets, teach them all the little elements of each skillset before they'd be able to run an entire agility course. So is taking a dog like tater salad when he first came here, he didn't have the understanding of very much and... he loved chipmunks, if we were to take him out in the backyard and ask him to sit, would that be achievable? Not likely because he really didn't understand what sit meant and he loved to chase chipmunks. So, it needs to be achievable with the education your dog has at that point in time in the environment that you have put him in.

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This first C is your expectations need to be clear to the dog. They need to be black and white. There's an obvious, this is correct, and this is incorrect. It can't be, this is correct for now because here's the thing, some time is anytime to a dog. So, if you have a rule that your dog isn't allowed on the couch, then they can't be allowed on the couch sometime and then other times you get disappointed or frustrated or angry because you've just come in from a hike and they're muddy and they jump on the couch. Sometime is anytime to a dog. Now, does that mean, "Oh, I should never let my dog on the couch." No, it just means you need to manage your expectations when your dog is muddy.

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Do you want your dog on the furniture? Have at it, just don't give them the free will to come in when they're muddy and jump on the couch. You don't have the right to get mad. The currency of the criteria has been spent. You've said you're allowed on the furniture. I would like to have dogs on the furniture, but I understand I want clear criteria, so my dogs aren't allowed on the furniture.

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Okay. Sometime is anytime to the dog. It needs to be black and white. I'll tell you what, a little pet peeve of mine. You're learning a lot about my pet peeves here on the podcast. Is when somebody comes to my house and they start training my dog, which is a little cray cray. Why do you come to a professional dog trainer's house and start training their dog?

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So, they'll say things like "sit-down" to my dog. Those are two separate behaviors with two sets of criteria that are in complete opposition to each other. It would be like me asking you to, could you run over there and stand still right here please? Well, those are, those are two different behaviors, Susan. Yeah, I know exactly. Sit and down are two different behaviors to my dog. Criteria needs to be clear. You will gain the dog's confidence. The dog will be able to achieve your expectations on a more broad basis, in more locations and more environment, the more clear you are with those expectations.



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Now, what about if I have rules in my dog and I'm super clear with my dog, but somebody else in my family who lives with my dog, doesn't have those same rules. That's not a perfect setup, but it's okay. So, my late husband, he didn't follow the same rules with the dogs that I did. And so, the dogs learned with him, they could keep testing. So, all... sometimes I have to sit at the door and sometimes I don't, they were constantly testing him.

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They didn't constantly test me because they knew, criteria is the same. That criteria is currency and our understanding is, when I ask you to do something, you do it every single time. Now maybe we get a little jealous. Well, why don't they listen to you? Because, especially because he was the one who fed them their dinner every day and had nothing to do about whether they liked me best, it had to do about the clarity to which I lived my life with my dogs.

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Brené Brown I believe said, clarity is kind. You want to lead with utmost kindness with your dog, always be clear. And that leads me to the second C and that is consistency. You need to always consistently apply your criteria. It needs to be the same always. So, if you are the kind of person who comes in the house and lets your dog jump on you, "hey! Hi, I'm back! Hi!" Then when you're 98-pound grandmother comes over and your 110-pound German Shepherd plastered her against the wall, you can't be upset. You can't get mad at the dog. Because the rules have to be consistently applied. Whether it's your 98-pound grandmother, a toddler, or you. Sometime is anytime to a dog.

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So, the criteria has got to be, "what is bringing my dog joy?" Whatever it is I want to train my dog to do, whether it be retrieve a ball. Now it's obvious. The criteria can be very clear. You sit, you wait till I throw it. You go out when I tell you to get it. You bring it all the way back and you put it right in my hand. Why is that worthwhile? Because you get to do it again. Now if your dog brings it back part way and spits it out and backs up and stares at you and you walk out and pick it up. You've made it worthwhile for them to only bring it back halfway. I'm a tad, maybe tad little more lazy than you are, because I don't want the game of retrieve to be, I retrieve partway and you retrieve partway. I want it to be, you retrieve right to my hand.

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And so, I make it worthwhile. The currency of criteria between my dog and I is you do this, you get that. Right. So, know in your brain exactly what you want it to look like. Now earlier today I was Googling. Try this, this is kind of fun. Go into your browser and type in the words, 'how do I get my dog to', don't put anything else. Just see what you come up with.

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So, I put those words and I got these sentences. Google will populate what the most continuations of that sentence are. And so, I got, how do I get my dog to stop barking? How do I get my dog to stop barking at strangers? How do I get my dog to drink more water? How do I get my dog to stop biting? How do I get my dog to stop whining? Stop chewing his paws? Stop licking me? Do you see criteria that is worthwhile, achievable, clear, and consistent here? People are Googling, how do I get my dog to stop? That is not something that is criteria that you can create joy for your dog with. So how do I get my dog to stop barking at strangers? How about, how do I get my dog to target my hip?



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And so, I will teach my dog, when we're out walking, you see a stranger target my hip. That can earn you worthwhile reinforcement. You can't be barking at a stranger when you're targeting my hip. Criteria, whatever it is you're looking to hope to transfer that knowledge to your dog. It needs to be clear.

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Now I'm not saying that every single challenge you have in dog training, you need to train. There's really three different approaches that you can take. You can choose to ignore some things and it might not hurt you. For example, if you have a, a little puppy. Late week-old puppy that maybe they get goofy and they start running around the house crazy. I might even enjoy that.

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I'm not going to try and train it or stop it because I'm pretty confident that as they grow up and we develop more of a bond and we, I give that dog more productive ways to use their energy in engaging games with me and long walks and games of retrieve. That running around crazy around my house is going to stop.

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So that's a behavior I will ignore, or I might redirect it by giving them a bone to chew on. You may choose to manage behaviors. So how do I get my dog to stop raiding the garbage? Could be one of them. Now you could just manage that by putting the garbage on your counter every single time you leave the house. Or you could train your dog to ignore garbage cans, right? So, you could ignore behaviors or dogs do. Now, if those behaviors are reinforcing, you can't ignore a dog getting into the garbage bin every day, because it's reinforcing for them to get in there. They're going to find some treasures and they're going to keep trying it.

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So, you could ignore behaviors that are seemingly innocuous. You could manage them like the garbage can or you could train them. And if you're going to train them, you're going to need criteria. And in my books, criteria is defined by what brings your dog joy. And I hope for all of you listening from now on that's your criteria for your dog as well.

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I'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

### Resources:

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

[Podcast Episode 21: The 5 Critical Dog Training Layers for Confidence with Anything](#)

[Blog Post: Criteria is . . .](#)



### 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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