

5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG Hey everybody, welcome to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett. And today I'm going to share with you how you can make your dog training a lot easier, a lot more effective, a lot more efficient. I want to teach you how to supercharge your dog training. And it's going to be the same regardless of where you are in your dog training journey.

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If you're a professional like me, if you're a competitor in sports - something special for those of you who compete in the sport of obedience - it doesn't matter if you're brand new or if you don't even have a dog and just waiting. This is something you can take note of. And that, when you get your new dog or puppy, it will make a massive difference when you train.

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To start, let's get a base level. All training is a transfer of value. It doesn't matter what you're learning or what behavior you are doing, whether you are a dog or a human being. There's a transfer of value that occurs. For example, you're listening to this podcast. You might happen on it the first time, maybe just because you googled the word dog. But you would return to it, ideally, you're returning to it because it brought you some value. My goal is to bring the value of information, education, and entertainment. I got the double E, that's what I'm looking for. I'm hoping to entertain you, but to give you some great dog training education.

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You go to work, there's a transfer value. You do a behavior, you get a paycheck. If you didn't get a paycheck, would you still be going to work? You might. If you got the value of doing something for others that, that filled you with joy. Every behavior is a transfer of value. Our dogs will do agility with us, or they will walk by our side or they will, um, retrieve a toy for us because of the value we brought to them when we were training them to do those behaviors.

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All right. All training is a transfer of value. How are we going to supercharge your training? How are we going to make your training more effective and efficient? By looking at the value. Let's say we start with a piece of roast beef and it has a value to your dog. So, pick something that's got a massive value to your dog.

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The dog says, "this is my, Ooh, I love that." Now we need to take that value and transfer it into the behavior. But the process of dog training loses some of that value. And how is the value lost? By our mechanics as dog trainers. And so all that we have to do is improve our understanding of how to improve our mechanics in order to maintain the value of roast beef is a value of 10 to your dog. We want to transfer that 10 and get a value of 10 at the end of the behavior that we're training. Regardless if it is 'sit', 'down', 'chase a toy', 'keep your feet off my guests', 'don't beg at the table', 'don't bark when you're alone'.



5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster

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Whatever the behavior is, we want the transfer, we don't want to lose the value by when we're training. That transfer value, our training is most efficient and effective if we can hold that 10 value for the roast beef all the way through. That's the difference between a professional like me, somebody who has excelled at the highest level of dog sport and had success because my transfer of value is more effective and efficient.

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I'm going to help you get yours there right now. There's four things. First of all, I'm going to share with you my mentor, Bob Bailey, he has this great a mantra and it is that "reinforcement is a process, it's not an event". Meaning when your dog sits and you say, "good boy, here's a cookie", the reinforcement isn't the cookie getting to the dog's mouth.

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There is a reinforcement process. And if you understand it and you start respecting it, that process is how we get the transfer of value from the roast beef of 10 to stay and not lose any value, not go down on the way to getting into the behavior. Why do we want to keep it that way? Because if your dog loves roast beef and we can transfer that love for roast beef into something like lying down when I say, your dog's going to lie down fast and they're going to lie down excited, they're going to do it every single time. That's how you know you've got a great transfer of value.

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And so, let's look at training itself. First, we're just evaluating the responses that our dogs get, our dogs offering, our dogs are doing and then we see the one we like. Let's pick the 'downs' as we were talking about that. You have to know what is the criteria of a down? What makes it a down? Is it when the dogs, you could say well the dog's no longer in a stand or sit? Alright, so their stomach is on the ground, but their elbows are off cause they're excited. Is that a down? Hmm, let me think about that. You shouldn't have to think about it, you know your criteria. Because you can't train it if you don't know it.

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Know what your criteria is before you get into that. Now your training is evaluating what your dog is doing until you see what it is that you want to reward. Now, let's say your dog understands a down and you want to reward, you know, faster downs or whatever. The first part is that you are able to look at all the responses and see the one you like. So that's step number one in the reinforcement process. Remember reinforcement is process, not an event.

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The first is picking out what you like. The next is marking it. Now you don't always mark all behaviors, but let's assume most of them you do. It could be marking with a clicker. I like it. It could be marking with a word, "good." Could be marking with a different word like, "yes." I mean the shorter the word the better. That's part of the reinforcement process. All right. So, we've— first step is acknowledging or recognizing what you like. Boom. Second is marking. And there's a gap between seeing what you like, picking out what you like and then marking it. That's part of the reinforcement process. The third is delivering the reward. That's part of the reinforcement process, the gap between you marking what you like and you delivering the reward.



5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster

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And the final thing is the placement of the reward. And I shouldn't say the final thing. There is one other thing, and that is the release from the behavior, giving the dog permission to move on. So, let's say there's five things. All right. Seeing what you like. Step number one, know your criteria and then evaluate it and the gap between seeing what you like and acknowledging it. And you need to be non-emotional. All right?

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Because remember podcast [episode number 16](#), the thing before the thing. Well, the reinforcement process, the dog picks up the thing before the thing very quickly. So, if you are training and you're like all intense and your head's all cocked to the side, and then when the dog's starting to get it, you start moving cause you're going to move towards your cookie. The dog recognizes you went from intense to moving towards reinforcement and they will stop the behavior, or they will cut it short.

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There is a, an old turn of the century behavior study with a horse called Clever Hans. And it was in Germany, this fellow could give the horse any kind of math problem, division, arithmetic, um, a multiplication or addition or subtraction, anything, all kinds of math problems. I think there was actually even word problems and the horse, like over 80% of the time got it right. I think it was 87% of the time got it right. And so that was astonishing to these behaviors and other people like could ask the question, not only the fellow who owned the horse, other people could ask the question, the horse got it right.

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What they - long story short - they found was, the horse picked up tells like poker tells, right? So, my hallucination is, at first Hans' owner might have been looking at his feet really intently and when the horse got it right, he put his head up and then the horse knew, 'Oh, I'll get a reward because his head's moving and that's the first thing he does before he rewards me.' Eventually the horse was just looking at people's eyes. So, he would just keep pawing the ground, like what's five plus five, he'd start pawing the ground. And when he'd see that people were starting to lift their head, he'd slow the pawing the ground down, and then when they turn their head a certain way, he stopped pawing the ground.

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That is the thing before the thing. That is going to influence your training and it's going to make it less efficient. So, when you were evaluating step one, when you're evaluating the criteria you're seeing, you need to be unemotional and not be moving until you've marked it. Now the gap between seeing it and marking it is important because let's say your dog is doing something and you go, "Oh, that was good. I think that's the one I liked. Yeah. I going to get my clicker. And then I'm going to, I'm going to click, Oh, the clickers upside down. I'm going to turn it up right side up and then I'm going to click it."

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Well that gap, what you're rewarding now is not the behavior, you're rewarding the duration. So, let's assume the dog went into a down and stayed into a down. You are now marking the stay of the down, not the actual "Oh good you're almost at the ground. I liked that." Or what might else have happened, your dog might have gone into a down and while you were fumbling with your clicker, he might've gone up out of the down and then gone into a sit and then you click the wrong thing, making your training inefficient.



5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster

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So, step number one, going through in unemotional picking out what you want. Step number two, marking it. Step number three is the delivery of the reinforcement. So, you've marked it. 'Good. I like that.' And then you go into your pocket, and you put out a lot of cookie and then it's like, "Oh, that one's too big. Okay. I'll break that one in half. And then I put these ones back in my pocket, and then I'm going to give you the cookie, but maybe I got a couple extra— other in my hand and I'm going to pull that away." So that delivery was crap. Right.

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The time it took to reach into your pocket and just sift through what you have and to break them up because they were too big. So that took time away from the gap, remember, you're getting very inefficient and then you deliver the cookie with other cookies in the smaller, your hand and the pocket of your hand. So, the dog gets one and sees 10 going away, "Wait a minute. I can do math. That sucked for me."

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So, when you're delivering the reward, deliver it fast and efficient. One cookie goes in and you give the one cookie because a lot of dogs are going to see the value being taken away. And that little one you give may become more of a punishment than a reward because, "Hey, what about the other ones?" It could cause some angst in your training. Now some dogs will learn to live with it, but I know training Terriers. They are not happy when you take away the value.

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So, the delivery is important. Have your reinforcement ready. Maybe have it in your hand or have it in a, I always have one cookie in my hand when I'm training so I could be boom, boom, boom, boom. You want to cut down those gaps. See what you want, mark it, deliver it. Boom, boom, boom, boom. Super quick. Little more boom, boom. Again, a little more, boom, boom into your dog training. It should be the name of this episode maybe. I digress. The fourth element is the placement. "Well, Susan, you just said the deliveries, isn't that the same thing?" Oh, nay nay. The placement is secret sauce guys. It's secret sauce.

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So, let's say you want your dog to go into a down. You mark it, you said good, you go to deliver it really quickly. And as you deliver it, your dog kind of comes up to reach you. "I'm just going to meet you. So, I'm going to help facilitate you giving me that cookie by meeting you part way." And then they take the cookie and they go right back into the down.

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You actually have rewarded them for breaking criteria. So, the placement of the reinforcement needs to contribute to your goal. Whatever your goal is. So, for you, obedience people out there, a lot of people in obedience, we have a retrieve and the dog has to retrieve something very specific. It's like a piece of wood or plastic dowel with bells on the end, it's called the dumbbell. And so, the dog retrieves it, they get rewarded when it comes out of their mouth. So, a lot of dogs don't want to hold it. Now, when I train my dogs to do this, I actually deliver the cookies to them while they're holding it, they actually get cookies in their mouth and then I take it out. That's process all on its own, not really in the scope of this podcast.



5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster

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But my point is the placement of the reinforcement, does it tribute to your ultimate goal? My ultimate goal is to have my dog hold the dumbbell. I will reward him with his mouth also holding the dumbbell. When you're training in dog agility, you want your dog to stay on the See-Saw. Are you rewarding the dog when they are on the See-Saw? Or are you saying, "Oh, good boy", and he walks towards you and gets his cookie walking towards you.

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Does the placement of the reinforcement contribute to your ultimate goal? Super important. The other part of placement of reinforcement, number one, does it contribute to your goal? Number two, is it the same proximity to you? So, for example, you want your dog to just hang out in his bed while you eat dinner so he's not begging at the table. And every now and again, you get up and you feed him in his bed. And you keep doing that day after day and you believe the dog's learning to stay in his bed. Here's the thing about behavior only the dog really knows for sure what we're training. We may think we know what we're training but we don't know.

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The dog always has the last word. So, maybe in the dog's mind, it's all about staying close to you to get cookies. And if the table gets too far away, the dog's going to start moving closer. What could you do if for example, I wanted to teach my dog to, to run in a straight line away from me? I wouldn't call him back to me to reward him. I'd either use a remote feeder out there, or I would throw a toy to reward him for running out in a straight line.

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The placement of the reinforcement is important and the proximity to you. What does that look like? If you want a dog to learn to not bark, when you leave the room, then you can't keep going back to the room to feed them. Either have somebody else go back to the room to feed them or invest in a remote feeder. Right. So, got to know those things, the— be able to see what you want to evaluate quickly, make the decision and the moment you see what you want and you've made that decision, you've got to be able to get in there and reinforce or mark the behavior if that's what you're doing, mark the behavior, and then deliver the reinforcement fast and effectively.

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And when you deliver the reinforcement, then consider what is the placement of the reinforcement and how does that contribute to my end goal and the end proximity away from me. And finally, you're going to give your release while the dog is still holding the position you rewarded. That is like supercharging the supercharge. Remember I talked about the [power of permissions](#) here, right on Shaped by Dog. In that episode, I said our words, our releases are as reinforcing into some dogs, more reinforcing than the cookies we are using in our dog training.

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And so, the final piece to this transfer of value in maintaining that high value of your food or your toys, if you're using toys, maintaining that value, the final piece is making sure that the dog is maintaining the criteria you've established when you deliver the release word. And of course, you are always, always giving a release word. So, you're not going to tell your dog down and then go to work. Because then you're going to confuse your dog.



5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster

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Always, if we give our dogs a positional cue: sit, down, stand, or in agility doing a target and stopping at the bottom of something or waiting at a start line, whatever we do, anything that requires a dog to hold a control position must always be followed up with a release word. And in what I'm suggesting is make sure the dog is maintaining criteria before you give that release word.

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So, if you want your dog to sit and he starts leaning forward and it turns into like his butt just starts lifting off the ground a little bit and a little bit in a little bit. You actually, when you, if you gave a release word, when the dog was doing that, you would be releasing them for what? That's right, I heard you say that while you're driving in your car, you would be releasing the dog for breaking your criteria of keeping your butt on the ground.

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Now, I hope this wasn't too overwhelming for those of you who are just getting ready to get a new dog. It's super easy to be as successful in these foundational behaviors as any one of us professional dog trainers. All that you need to do is recognize the value of the food or the toy that you're using. And are you maintaining that value and ideally supercharging your training by being mindful of those five points. See what you're going to reward, mark it, deliver it, placement of reinforcement and give a release.

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Hey, if you're finding value in this podcast, would you do me a favor? Would you share it? With one other dog loving person, or maybe more. Share it on your social media pages, I would forever be indebted to you because my goal is to help dog owners worldwide better understand their dogs and to help dogs worldwide to have the best life possible. And I thank you in advance for contributing to that goal.

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

Resources:

[Video Blog: Learning from Cats and Seagulls ... Chat with Bob Bailey](#)

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

[Clever Hans \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Blog Post: The 3D Model for Dog Training: Duration, Distance, Distraction](#)

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



5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster

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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