

Pro Dog Training Tip To Improve Your Dog's Focus

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Hey, everybody. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett. And I have a question, have you ever watched a professional dog trainer, like an elite level dog trainer train their dog? Maybe you've seen one of my videos on YouTube of just me training my dog and you'll notice the dogs got this attention for their owner.

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They could have finished the exercise and maybe the owner's walking back to start a new exercise and the dog's just like, they're just excited and engaged and connected. Have you ever seen that kind of connection going? "Wow, I wish I could get that with my dog." Well, today I'm going to share with you one of the most important things that you might be doing that's hurting the possibility of getting that. And how you can fix it. That's what today is going to be all about.

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But I want to ask you if you've ever been in this situation. You're at a party, you're talking to somebody and they're kind of like gazing around the room while they're talking to you. And every time they do it, you feel this pit in your stomach like you're not good enough and sure enough they go, "Oh, excuse me. I'm just going to— I see so-and-so just stepped in the room and I'm going to, I got to go talk to them." And don't you feel like somebody's sloppy seconds like you just weren't good enough to have a conversation with this such important person.

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And there's a little bit of shame involved. And let me just tell you, there should be no shame on your part. That is completely on them, but I digress. That feeling of being dismissed, I'm not sure our dogs don't feel it from us. Stick with me on this. Because today's podcast is all about inadvertent time outs. Now before you hit pause and go, "well Susan, wasn't [Episode 34](#) about time outs?" Yeah it was. It was about the use, the effective use of time outs. When I would do them and how I would do them.

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So, it might be turning my back on a dog, maybe if a dog's jumping up or it could be just taking my attention away from the dog, or it might be as much as taking the dog to the kennel. And what we're doing is we're saying to the dog, what you're doing right now is not appropriate behavior. And I would like you to change your behavior. And we're hoping for a change of behavior. That's why we give the dog a time out, but I'm not talking about the intentional use of timeouts in training. Today is all about the inadvertent time outs. The ones you may not even be aware that you're doing, but your dog is.

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Picture this, I've seen this time and time again, you're in class and you're doing something with your dog and then your teacher wants to give you some feedback so you take all that focus and good energy that you just had on your dog and you go, "wawa? A wawa." And she goes, "wawa wawa." And then you go, "wawa wawa wa?" And then she goes, "wawa wa." And you go, "wawa." And then you look back at your dog and go, "okay, let's train again."



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And the dog's going, "yeah. I left you about two 'wawa' ago." Like you can't just expect the dog to be on when you want them to be on. And then when you turn your back on them and leave them hanging, expect them to pick right up. They're not machines guys. They're animals. They're like you at the party when you were left in the dust by somebody who was talking to somebody more important. Now your dog doesn't know what's going on. All your dog know is, you are on a roll, you were doing something good and then you disengaged. You saw somebody better come into the room.

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So how can we fix that? How can we fix these inadvertent time outs? And it doesn't matter, you might be saying, "Oh well, I don't really go to classes. This isn't about me." Don't hit pause or flick away because I have seen so many people lately walk down the street with their dog on leash and they are scrolling through their phone.

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Hello, your dog, like just, I'm not saying when you walk your dog you have to have like your eyes on them and constantly, but you know what? Get your head up, get your nose out of your phone. Enjoy the nature around you. Be grateful for what's going on. Talk to your dog from time to time. You know, he might not want you to babble at them the whole time because he's got pee mail to read right on this route. But be present for the dog because when you're not, you are giving them that time out. You were saying this little box that I'm carrying in my hand needs me more than you do.

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I see it a lot in the sport of dog agility. So, somebody might turn the wrong way and the dog doesn't read that and the dog goes off and then they give them the big sigh. That big sigh is saying, I am so disappointed in you. And you know what? We're human. When we're training our dogs, there may be times that we get frustrated and we get disappointed and I be willing to bet the disappointment really isn't about the dog. It's about, you're disappointed that you didn't do better or didn't make the right choices or didn't have the right training plan.

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But what that dog hear is this big sigh and your energy change. You can't let the dog know. So, what I do, for example, I was training some puppies today. Puppies are going to be seven weeks old and sometimes with the, when you get them this young, you don't, I mean, somebody at my level doesn't even know the exact right thing to do all the time. And I'll see that a puppy has lost confidence. And to me, that's like a dagger going through my heart. My job is to raise your confidence, never to lose it.

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And so, my abandoned mission is I just drop what I'm doing, and I put my face on the floor because I know puppies love to jump on me and pull my hair and bite my glasses. And let's make all things right in the world. It doesn't matter that I'm not going to have success with what I'm training. Right now, let's just get back on track. Now that change of tact might be, I'm just going to throw a handful of cookies in the crate, put you in the crate and regroup. That might be what happens instead of the big sigh.



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So, don't turn your back on your dog to talk to an instructor. Don't scroll through your iPhone when you're walking down the street. But also, if you're walking down the street with your dog and you're having a great old time, you're saying, "Hey buddy, you got some good smells there." And then you see your neighbor. "Hey, did you see Netflix last night? I was watching—" "Yeah. I was watching that." Again, pick up with your neighbor, you're disconnecting with your dog. How fair is that?

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Like, I've been to agility trials and I'd be walking in with a puppy and people go, "Susan. Oh, is that your new puppy?" Yeah, I'll just keep walking and you know, pretending I'm a little bit deaf. Because I'd rather, this is a little secret. Cat's out of the bag right here on my podcast. I'd rather be a little bit disrespectful to a person than I would to my puppy. Not that I want to disrespect anybody or be rude to anybody. But if I have my puppy out, they have a hundred percent of my attention.

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Now, if there was somebody that said, "Hey, Susan", and they directly wanted to talk to me, no problem. I would pick the puppy up. Maybe give them a little tug toy to play with while I said, "Hey, I'd love to catch up with you, but I'm training a puppy right now. Can I catch up with you later?" And then boom, before I give them a chance to answer, most people are saying, "sure Susan, I forgot, you know, sorry." And I'll just get right back and play with my puppy.

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All right. So, I want that focused attention from my dog that I spoke about at the beginning of this podcast. To get that focused attention from your dog in work, you give that focused attention from your dog. When you go back and write your records of that little session, you write down how you did with respect to keeping your focus and attention on your dog.

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And if you have to talk to an instructor, "wa wa", all that you're going to do is either it could be as simple as take the dogs collar and give them those scratches behind the ear or pat them while you're— So, your hands can be doing this thing while your brain is listening to this, not this thing, this instructor. Or you might ask the dog to lie down.

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All our dogs should be able to lie down for a minute or two while you talk to somebody else. Just say, lie down, maybe give them a cookie and talk to instructor. I've seen people just continuously feed the dog. I don't think that's necessarily a good thing. But giving them a cookie if they're in the down position or a sit position.

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Or you could tug with the dog. Now that might be a long tug but do something intentional with that dog before you disengage from the dog to talk to that instructor. So, the dog knows they're not getting a time out. I've seen this when people have a great run in agility, and they turn, and they go across the finish line and they start celebrating with their friends. "Yeah I did it! I did it. I did it!" And the dog's going, "excuse me. You did it? Was, was I not in the ring with you right now? And why aren't we celebrating together?"



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If you're running agility, no matter it was a good run or a bad run, you need to celebrate with your dog first and foremost. Not be disappointed. Celebrate so that my goal is that the dog doesn't know what kind of run we had when we leave that ring. Because in the ring is just an evaluation. It's not like you're curing cancer or solving world peace. It's an evaluation of what you've taught your dog. And if it doesn't go well, you celebrate and go back to the drawing board.

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Do not give that dog an inadvertent timeout, a punishment because you're disappointed. All right. My mentor, Bob Bailey, he says, and I've said this before. One of the big reasons why training fails is because people expect way too much of their dog and way too little of themselves. You need to be focused when you're training your dog. And it's not just the 10 minutes you might train during the day. It's the other 23 hours and 50 minutes of the day. I'm not saying you have to give your dog a zeroed in attention all that time. I'm saying that you need to be intentional about what that dog is doing or where you're going to be in your role in that dog.

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So, here's another inadvertent time out I see all the time. I'll be teaching a workshop and I'll say, "okay guys, we're going to do this, this, and this now go get your dogs." And they run and they open the crate door and they put the leash on and then they go out to do and they go, "Oh crap. I forgot my toy." And then they go back then they grab their toy and then they're on the way out. "Oh, I don't have his favorite cookies." So, then they go back, and they grab their favorite cookies. Have you ever, have you ever done that?

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Alright. So here is your dog's point of view. You open the crate door and he's like, "yeah, we're going to do something." So right now, you and your dog are behaving just like I would with my dog. You've got that Ninja sauce of attention from your dog. You release your dog and he's like, "yeah, what are we going to do?" And you go, "I forgot something." And your dog's going, "Huh?" And then you're running back and you're getting this and you're doing that and you're doing this and you're finding— you, you're getting all your stuff and you know, a minute and a half later, you're ready for your dog and your dog was up here and now your dog has gone all the way down here and they're sniffing the floor.

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That's how you lose it. That's how you lose it. That's how elite trainers can get that kind of focus and desire from their dog. It's possible with anybody with any of dog, but it starts with you giving the respect and attention that you expect to get back from your dog. It's not going to happen overnight. You might start with just getting them in and out of the crate. [Crate Games](#) is a brilliant place to start off every session with an explosion of joy from your dog. And you grow from there. You might only do a ten second training session and build up to a minute training session.

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You know, you see dogs who are less motivated, they tend to get a lot of time outs because their person doesn't know how to deal with the lack of motivation. They do things like putting them in front of people or at a competition or around a lot of other dogs when they don't have that confidence to be there. And then the dog gets more withdrawn and then the person gets very disappointed in sighs and that's a time out.



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The other end of the spectrum, those high drive dogs, man oh man, do they suffer for time outs. Because what happens, they move so fast that a lot of times the trainers are challenged to capture the correct behavior. So, they either miss the chance to reward or they reward the wrong things because behaviors happen so fast.

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And then what happens is they think the dog is wrong so they either, they're disappointed or they give the dog a time out. That's the mistake I made with my high drive dog, Buzzy. The book [Shaping Success](#) I wrote about Buzz. And I learned some massively important lessons from Buzz. Dogs like Buzz who are high drive, the more mistakes they make, the more time outs, whether they're inadvertent or intentional, the higher they get, the more frantic they get, the more mistakes they make, the more frustrated you are because you feel like you're incompetent, because you can't train this dog and you guys are vortexing and spiraling and it's not fun. It's not fun for anybody.

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High drive dogs, they need you to accept them as they are. They need you to not try to make them Zen. You need to understand they can still be successful. They can still work well with you. Just you, one of the team needs to be focused and grounded. Take a deep breath. Be intentional. Short sessions, have some success, put that dog away and celebrate. All right. The high drive dogs, you think they can take it. Look how tough and driven he is. Inside they can't take it.

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They're trying so desperately hard to do what's right. And they get more and more frantic because they seem to fail and get another time out. So those high drive dogs, they need special grace from you. And in any partnership in dog training one pair of the team is going to be a little higher than the other.

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Now, if you've got a dog who needs motivation, your going to come in like, "Hey, how are you doing today? You know what we got for you? We're going to do some fitness! Are you ready? You get in that kennel and you come right back out here. You get in that kennel and you come— let's get that tug toy!" If you got a dog that's down here, you're going to come in with all the energy.

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Now, if you've got a dog who's up here, you're going to come in being the Zen master. All right. So, meditate before you come in, come in and be calm no matter how much that dog's bouncing around you be the calm one. Because that's where you bring yourselves to a place of balance where this energy here is met with this calm and intentional thoughtful training here and that balances each other out and that's when you get beautiful, exciting dog training happening.

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Think about after every training session or maybe at the end of the day, your interactions with your dog, did you give that dog inadvertent time outs? Is your dog showing more and more focus when they're training with you because you're not giving them those inadvertent time outs?





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If you start writing things down, you become aware of what you're doing. And any time out you give your dog will be because you are experimenting with, I think you know how to do this, I'm going to let you know that was inappropriate and I'm going to come back and let you show me how brilliant you can be. That's an intentional time out. They're the only ones that should happen. Remember, those don't happen that often either.

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That's it for me with another episode of Shaped by Dog. I hope you think about this one because it could make all the difference in the world and you could have that Ninja level of relationship with your dog, the way the rest of us do when we're training our elite dogs.

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We'll see you next time.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 34: Time Outs for Dogs: Does Your Dog Need One?](#)

[Crate Games Online](#)

[Book: Shaping Success](#)



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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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