

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG Hey, everybody. Welcome back to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett and today's topic, it comes from one of you listeners who wanted to know, how would you go about becoming a professional dog trainer? And Susan, what was your path? They'd been googling how to become a trainer and they got a wide range of answers.

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So, before I jump into that, I want to share a memory I had from, I think it was third or fourth grade. When the teacher asked, "what do you guys want to do for a living?" Now, how romantic would it be if I said my answer was, I wanted to be a dog trainer. In fact, I'm doing what my answer was, but I'll get back to that.

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There was a little boy sitting, who is at beside me, Brian, I think his last name— I'm not going to even tell you his last name in case he listens, who knows. Brian said very confidently, "I either want to be a garbage collector or a minister." And the teacher said, "Wow, Brian, those are two really different careers. Why do you want to be a garbage collector or a minister?" He said, "because they're the two things I can think of where you only have to work one day a week." Obviously, that's not true. I remember thinking at the time, "gee, Brian, what are you going to do with the other six days? You don't got things to do?" That was my thought.

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Now my answer was I wanted to be a teacher, which lo and behold that's exactly what I am. Why am I telling you that story is because although from the outset it might look like if you are a garbage collector or a minister, you only work one day a week. The truth is there is a lot more to it than that. And that my friends is how I'm going to open the answer to that question. "I want to be a professional dog trainer. How do I go about doing it?"

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It's not just training dogs. That isn't, that actually is just a small bit. That actually is more like your qualifications more than what keeps you going although the love of training dogs should be, in my opinion, ideally, a big part of it. If you want to make a career of dog training, that means you want to run a business. And if you want to run a business, yes, you've got to be a great dog trainer. You've got to be a great problem solver. You've got to be good with technology, making videos, social media, but you also got to be phenomenal with people.

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You've got to know how to you approach teaching from a point of kindness and confidence building of the person, because you are teaching as a professional dog trainer, you're teaching people. Unless of course you have a career like training dogs for television and movies, which you still got to be good with people you're just not teaching them.



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So, there's so many things that go into having a successful professional dog training business, and that, maybe that's a story for another time. But I just want you to consider it isn't just training dogs all day. It's actually mostly engaging with people. So, you need that love of dogs, that love of people. And I would say your third thing that you really need is to be a lifelong learner. You know, the things that I have had to learn as my business has evolved, I've had to learn how to approach people and how to get the best out of people. How to inspire people to want to jump in and be successful and do what it takes to bring out the best in their dog.

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I've had to learn how to be a leader of people who work for me. How to lead a team. That's another part. I mean, at first I had to learn how to book keep and how to, you know, do my own balance, my own taxes and all those things that a solo entrepreneur would have to do. But as it grew, as my business grew, a lot of things changed.

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So, how did I get started? For me, you know, I would love to say that when the teacher asked that question back in grade three, I said, yeah, I want to be a dog trainer, but I didn't. I liked dogs. At that time, we had our family pet Tina and I did train her how to do tricks. From there I evolved to my older sister was showing dogs in confirmation and I would tag along with her occasionally. I actually got a job helping a professional show handler in the summer he bred Basenjis and Shih Tzus or he and his wife.

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So, yeah, my evolution was a long one and it went from liking dogs to loving dogs, but that I don't think is enough for you to become a professional dog trainer. You need to be crazy about dogs because when you're crazy about dogs, you want to investigate how to make life absolute best for a dog. Because there's so many different ways to train a dog. There's so many different approaches that people take as professional dog trainers.

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There's a lot of schools you can sign up for that I would strongly advise you not to go anywhere near. Do not waste your money because you're going to have to unlearn some of the things that they're teaching in some of these schools, how to be a professional dog trainer. There are professional dog trainers out there who have a really great handle on the science of how dogs learn. They just don't know how to apply that science, which makes some of the lessons that they're teaching, not as effective or efficient and in the long run could cause harm to the dog or to their owners.

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There are other people who completely ignore the science. When they're training dogs, they rely on history. "Well, this what worked for the last 10 dogs, this is what's going to work for the next 10. And boy, oh boy if it doesn't, I'm going to get that square peg and I'm putting it in the round hole. Cause I'm bigger, I'm stronger, I'm smarter and they need to do it."

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You know, somebody was telling me on the weekend, I was having a massage on the weekend and the therapist was telling me about a friend with a little Shih Tzu puppy who did something wrong, like chewed something while he was there.



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And they, they were doing what they were taught, which was rolled the little puppy on his back, pin him down and yell at him until he looked like he felt bad. That is somebody they're taking lessons from and probably payed a lot of money to learn from somebody who is completely ignoring the science.

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I'm relying on history, years and years and years ago, I was teaching classes at a school in Toronto and I was in, happened to be in the reception area where somebody picked up the phone and they were troubleshooting this person on the other end had an 11 week old Golden Retriever who was biting there are children and they wanted somebody to help them.

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And this is how the receptionist answered it, "You have to find a behaviourist. We don't do behaviour. We just teach obedience." Guess what? You have to be passionate about your love for dogs and dig deep into their understanding of how their behaviour works.

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So, you're going to have to absorb all you can about learning the science of behaviour. Because whether you're teaching obedience or agility or fly ball or schutzhund, or search and rescue, whatever it is, science is your friend. Science will bring out the best in the dog in the kindest way. So, you need to be passionate about wanting to know more.

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I would say the number one question or answer you need to hold very close to is, "Hmm. That's a great question. I'd like some more time to think about that and investigate it." That's the best thing you can do. Because the worst thing that people do as dog trainers, when they're put in a place of authority and they're teaching people is they feel like they need to know all the answers. And so, they give one that may not be the right answer. And the wrong answer is far, far, far worse than, "I'm not sure right now, but that's a great question. And I'm glad you have trust enough in me to come to me with that question. And I am going to seek out a great answer for you."

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So, humility is such an amazing attribute as you are learning to become or excelling as a professional dog trainer. Do not be afraid to say, "I don't know." Do not be afraid to say, "You know what? I gave you a bad advice, let's go back and look at it again." No, you don't have to say bad advice. "I gave you the best advice I could at that time, but I've got better advice for you right now." Right.

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So, for me, I was, I trained our family pet tricks, and then I worked for a professional handler in the confirmation ring. So, something that I've really not done since I was a teenager, but I learned a lot. I think it was Vince Lombardi who said, "Excellence is just the mastery of the fundamentals." So, you need to immerse yourself over and over again in the fundamentals.

I'm going to give you another great quote from my mentor Bob Bailey, "Dog training is a mechanical skill. So, to be a brilliant dog trainer, you need to be brilliant with the mechanics."



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Now there are people who will say, "Well, I don't need to be a brilliant dog trainer to have a great dog training business." I don't think you have to be the best, but you have to want more than what you had yesterday. You need to be humble and hungry to learn how to hone your own skills. I see so many people running dog training businesses who don't train their dogs every day.

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And if you don't, the third group of people are the people that are learning the science and applying their science in their dog training. Those ones are the ones that are going to get the results that people go, "Wow. That's amazing what your dog can do." If you are getting the 'wow, that's amazing what your dog can do.' You're on the right track to being a very successful professional dog trainer.

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Now you have to be, you know, hungry for learning all those other things I talked about from running a business and doing books to, you know, doing PR and Facebook ads and all the rest of that, or having a team that can do a lot of those jobs for you.

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So, I don't want to scare anybody away. I'm going to throw another quote at you. I don't know who said this one, but it was, I think it was Bill Gates. "People overestimate what they can do in a day and underestimate what they can do in a year." What I'm throwing at you might sound like, "Oh, that's so much work. Oh, maybe I don't want to be a dog trainer." And I think Bill might have said, people overestimate what they can do in a year and underestimate what they can do in 10 years.

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So, if you have a hunger to be better than you were yesterday, you will get there. For me, I went from training a family pet to working with professional trainers, and then I went to university and I really was out of dogs for a quite a stretch of time. And I got really involved with farm animals. I was in love with cows, my number one love, and I still hold a very warm spot in my heart for cows. So, I trained cows. I helped the local forage.

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I had a cow, we had a little calf that was six, so I named him Rover, tied him to a tree at the end of the lane. Long story. I won't tell you, but I trained him to come when called. I trained him to speak. And then I evolved to actually riding horses and I spent a lot of time competing in the sport of Dressage. I did a little bit of jumping and so all of the, this cross training allowed me to learn how different animals respond to different stimuli and unfortunately reinforcement-based training was not huge back in the 70s and 80s when I was involved with horses, but I did the best I can cause I loved my horse and I didn't want to hurt him.

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And from there I came full circle from horses, I got a Jack Russell because they just kind of went hand in hand. And after teaching at a local school for a year, not even a year, I think it was six months they said, "Wow, you are very talented. Would you come" I don't think those were their words. I'm paraphrasing. I'm making this up to make it sound good for my podcast. They offered me to teach for them. Would you please be an assistant in our classes? I think I started off with, as an apprentice for a first rotation and then assistant and then I was head instructing their classes and that's how I got there.



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So, from there I got an interest in sports and a hunger to do brilliantly, and then I've been blessed to have a lot of success in the sports of obedience and sheep herding a little bit. I mean, a very little bit. I went to one competition and I did very well at it. And, but it was just another way to understand the brain of a dog in a different Avenue than what I do today.

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I've been on world championship teams, many world championship teams in the sport of fly ball. And obviously, I've won many world championships in agility, which is what I'm probably best known for. What about today? You know, we have a number of students who have come through our [Recallers program](#), who are now making money teaching people, because I said, 'excellence is a mastery of the fundamentals.'

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And in Recallers, it's the fundamentals of what would make a phenomenal family pet. And for me, lay a great foundation for a phenomenal sport dog, whatever sport you would want to do, whether it's obedience or agility or fly ball or schutzhund or search and rescue or... Recallers is that great foundation.

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So, there are 40 games in Recallers. And what I find is the students who throw themselves in and they ask questions and they post videos and they get brilliant mechanics. And then they go out and they go, "Hey, I'm going to volunteer at my local shelter. Susan, is it okay if I teach some of these skills to these shelter dogs that are up for adoption, make them more adoptable?" I'm like, "That's brilliant." Because that's what I did. I taught a lot of other people's dogs long before I ever owned my own.

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So, in 1988, I got my first Jack Russell Terrier. I had trained probably a dozen dogs for people, some living in my home, others just going to their home and training before I ever owned my own dog. And that allowed me to gain so much insight into different breeds and how they work. My first dogs that I trained were Sighthounds and understanding their brain. So, having a hunger and honing your mechanical skills by videoing what you're doing, training as many different dogs as you can.

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So, my Recaller students, people would see them out in the park and go, "Wow, your dog is well-trained. Do you train classes?" And they'd be taken aback. "Oh, well no, I'm just... no, I don't." "Would you come and just teach me one thing?" And so they picked up 1 on 1 stuff. I started teaching 1 on 1 or actually, like I said, trading other people's dogs and then going into people's homes 1 on 1 that grew to small classes in my backyard which grew to teaching I think the largest group I've ever spoken in front of was 7,000 people.

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It just grows and grows and grows. I see people who get into dog training because they love dogs. You've got to question, "Do I love people?" because you're really teaching people. I see people getting into dog training because they want to have an impact and it could evolve.





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I got into dog training. I had another full-time job. I was in the veterinarian pharmaceutical business, and I was doing the dog training teaching seminars on my weekends. I'd jumped on a plane on Friday night. I'd go teach a seminar somewhere. I'd get the red eye home Monday morning, and then I'd go back to work for five days a week. I did that for a number of years until I couldn't juggle it anymore. And I love my job in the pharmaceutical industry, but I had to leave it and come full time training dogs, because the demand was just too big, and my body couldn't take it anymore.

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So that was my evolution. But back to my Recaller students, if you get mastery of these fundamentals, people are going to take notice. And I would say that's one of the best ways to start your evolution. You can start because you love dogs and ideally you at least like people and are curious, then you have to evolve to, "I am a coach." because that's what dog training instructors are.

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You're coaching people to help them to bring out the best in their dog. And then for me, it evolved to "I want to have an impact on this world." I want to make the world better for dogs all over the world and for their owners. So, their owners are less frustrated and that dogs don't have to put up with the kind of treatment in the name of training that that little Shih Tzu did that my massage therapist was explaining to me on the weekend.

So, I'm driven by impact now. Now there are people who get into dog training because they think they can make money there. And I think those people are going to come and go pretty quick. They're not going to hang around. I think starting with a love, growing your curiosity, staying humble and hungry and always be a lifetime learner. You may evolve to impact. You may just want to help people in your local area, it doesn't matter. You may just do one on ones. Get good at the fundamentals.

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Find a mentor that you would like to learn from. There are some online dog training programs that are worth investing in. Jean Donaldson's got one called [The Dog Training Academy](#). It's a very, very good program. I'm not familiar with all of them. I know there are others that are worthwhile, but you don't have to invest \$10,000 or \$5,000 to be a dog trainer. You can do it by just becoming brilliant at those fundamentals, staying humble, staying hungry, staying curious.

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That's it for Shaped by Dog this time. Hey, if you have a topic you'd like me to cover, then just drop us a line. Leave me a comment from wherever you're listening to this. Or you can send us an email at [wag](mailto:wag@dogsthat.com), got to do the motion if you're watching this on YouTube, [wag@dogsthat.com](https://www.youtube.com/wag@dogsthat.com). We'll see you next time.

### Resources:

[Blog Post: Dogs are Amazing and Will Do Everything You Want If You Have Cheese!](#)

[\\*Recallers](#)

[Blog Post: How To Embrace Videoing Your Dog Training](#)

[The Academy for Dog Trainers \(Jean Donaldson\)](#)

\*Recallers is CEU approved with CCPDT and IAABC



### 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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