

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG Hey, everybody. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett, and I've got a super important podcast today. You know what? They are all important. I feel very passionate about what I'm going to talk about today. And I got so many things to share. I hope I get it all out. It is all about confidence. About what is confidence in a dog and how can we grow it and why do we need to grow it? Why do we even care about growing it? I'm going to give you three things that are the big contributors to bringing out the most confidence that you have in your dog.

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I'm really going to be talking about the puppies because I've got puppies on the brain right now. But what I have to share with you, you can use it with any age dog that you have with the three big areas of focus that we have. First, I'm going to start with a story. I had a Jack Russell in the early 90s and her name was Decaff. She was actually three quarters Jack Russell, one quarter Border Collie. And some people might describe her as a less confident puppy. She sometimes would be environmentally worried. I'll give you an example. When she was about 10 months old, I was very excited. I was going to Florida. I was going to train her on contacts. I think she was maybe 10 or 11. She was almost a year old because she turned a year in February.

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I was super excited because I was going to get her in a new environment and away from home and I had this great end of contact behaviour at home and I was going to try it on the new contacts there. We got out of the motor home and she started jumping around because like the grass in Florida is this wide leaf grass and at home it wasn't. And even when it was, I mean, it was snow at home. And she walked around like a dog that had boots on for the first time. And that didn't stop, like the next day. She always was environmentally sensitive.

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When she was born, we had a dirt floor in our arena and probably when she was seven or eight months old, we changed to a rubber floor. For the rest of her life when she would go into the arena, she would play with me, but when we would stop, she would find the cloth shoot so she could stand on because she didn't want to stand on the floor, which was different from the floor she knew. She just had environmental challenges. Well, I think that one became a habit with her because she overcame her environmental challenges.

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So, from Florida, I went, and I taught a workshop in California and it was in an olive orchard. There were dead olives all over the ground. I would get her out to do a demonstration. And again, with the 'oh my gosh, I've got boots on my feet. I couldn't possibly walk on this' behaviour and I was able to overcome all of this and I will share with you at the end what I did.



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And from there, I was in Houston at a trial and it was a dirt floor and the same thing, like 'ew... I've never, I'm not familiar with this'. It was, they called it hog fuel and it was something she'd never been on and so as she got older. Now, Decaff was my fourth dog in a long line of US national champions. So, they were amazing agility dogs, phenomenal. I would hear the room mumblings behind me when she was a two-year-old or a little less. They started calling her Deke the Freak. Because I called her Deke for her name was Decaff, but often I called her Deke. It's a move. I was a hockey goalie, and Deke is a thing.

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Anyway, people behind me you know, actually friends would call her Deke the freak and because of her responses. Those were labels that people put on her. But the strategy or the process that I'm going to share with you today, those three key things are what kept me and allowed me to overcome everything, all of these challenges with Decaff, she went on to not only be a US national champion, but also to be a two time world champion.

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And when she won her first big event, one of the people who spoke not so highly of her initially wrote me an email. And said, "Respectfully Susan, I always knew you would overcome some of her issues, but I never thought she would be a great agility dog." And I just wrote her back one line. "When I look at my dogs, all I see is brilliance and it's up to me to be able to bring it out for the world to see."

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And so that's what confidence does. It shines what's there. What's there that's now cloudy that we have to bring it out. Why do we have to bring it out? It's not about winning. It's allowing the dog to have their best life. Because a dog who is showing signs of stress or anxiety, they're not having their best life and confidence can replace that stress and anxiety.

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You know, I hear people say, they use this term, 'he is my once in a lifetime dog'. And I personally have had 10 once in a lifetime dogs. Because I work at bringing out confidence in my dog. And when confidence comes up, I've heard people say to me over and over again, "Susan, your dogs have so much character and personality." It's because when you allow confidence to seep out, the true self of the dog comes out, and all this big personality is there for the world to see. Because they are confident.

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So, it's not about winning. Although confidence allows the dog to be faster in the agility ring. But for me, it's about that dog having their best life. So, there's, as I said, there's three ways we're going to start. The first one is, I talked about this in [episode 8](#) of Shaped by Dog, is the belief loop. It is your belief in your dog. Briefly, what I talked about, is that the beliefs that we have, that is what controls the thoughts that we have.

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So, if we believe our dog is a scaredy cat dog, or is a freak, if I bought in to what these so called experts were saying about my young dog, that she's a freak, that she's never going to accomplish anything, that those beliefs create thoughts for our brain.



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So, we start looking for the dog to stress or to break, shut down or to do what it is that a scaredy cat, freak, fearful, anxious dog does. We believe that's who they are so now our thoughts look for opportunities to see "Oh yeah, there she is, yeah that's who she is. She's, you know, she's not going to be one of my good ones. She's going to be one of those stressy dogs." That controls our emotions because, you know, even my body language, when I just talked about the stressy dog. Like I'm not proud, I'm disappointed, I'm frustrated.

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And that controls our actions. So maybe we're not going to go to as many places, or we're not going to put all that effort into training because really, you know, she'd rather just stay on the couch and that would make her happier. So that creates our actions and that gives us more outcomes, which is the dog is exact, doesn't really move, it doesn't really stay there.

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And when people see this, and the reason I bring this up, I'm going to just change speeds here is I have four puppies right now, four eight-week-old puppies. And last week I was training them. I brought them to a new environment, and I was training these four puppies, four completely different reactions.

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So, the one puppy came in and would engage with me a little bit, but then would alarm bark, like she heard something, or she saw a ghost. Then she'd come back and engage with me a bit and then she would engage and I'm just going to say she for all these puppies, cause I'm not going to tell you which one was which.

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And then the next puppy came in and wouldn't engage with me at all. Just wanted to sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff. Where am I? Sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff, wanted to check out every corner of the environment. And then she would come back and work with me. And then the next dog came in and right away, came in and played with me and you know, we had a great old time.

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And then the last dog. Oh, was very, very low in her body language and came in and was timid and played a little bit and then looked around and then played a little bit. And it's not like I took them to a freeway. It was just a new environment that they hadn't been before. They were just maybe not quite seven weeks old. Now somebody getting one of those puppies. It would be easy to say, "Oh, let's label all but one of them, we're going to label the one as the ones that are lifetime dog and all those other ones are going to be labeled as anxious or stressy, or worried, or scaredy cats."

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That allows you, that gives you a lifelong excuse. "Well, I did the best I could, but remember when he was six-weeks-old, he was a scaredy cat. Yeah." So, you've got that excuse. Or you could say, "Well, that's what I'm starting with." It doesn't matter if you have a six-week-old puppy, a six-month-old puppy, a six-year-old dog, this is your today.



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This is your starting point. That is the clay you have to mold what's happening next. Now granted, it's easier to start with a mold of six weeks, but it's not impossible at six years. You can still make it better than it is today. It starts with your belief. And if you can't believe that it can get better, then draw on stories of other dogs who have. Go to our [Recallers Successes page in Facebook](#), there's all kinds of stories there of dogs who have overcome challenges. The story I just told you about Decaff, who was an amazing dog. She won so many things in the sport of agility, but started out as a dog who was very, very worried.

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So, it starts with your belief. That's number one. Number two, the strategy you choose to adopt, to overcome, to get you from where you are right now to where you want to be. And I would encourage you to buy into play small in order to play big. That's the strategy that I took with Momentum who showed a lack of confidence as a young dog. Play small to play big.

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I'm going to come back to that, but let me share with you what most people, when they see a dog or a puppy that's shy, that's alarm barking or worried, they'll often do things like give cookies to the person that their alarm barking at and say, "can you feed my dog?" But that's a flawed strategy. Because the dog is still in a high anxious state of arousal, and now it's kind of going in and coming out and coming in and going in and going into, I don't know if I should take it and they grab a food. And the thought process is, if you do this enough the dog will overcome it.

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You know, a better way to be is just ask that person to ignore the dog, just ignore my puppy. And instead of saying things like, "Well, this is strategy number one. I'm getting ahead of myself." So, we have belief, we have the strategy, the approach that you take, and that is play small to play big. Don't ask people to feed your dog. Don't correct the dog for being worried. You're going to play small to play big.

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I look at those four puppies and I will consider confidence a bag of marbles. So, every new experience, new experience or new training session I take them to, I start off with 50 marbles in my bag. Now that one that I took them to, it was an experiment. I videoed it and only one puppy came out with more than 50 marbles. The other three puppies came out with less than 50 marbles because the training, although they all ended on a good note, in my estimation there was some fear and anxiety that happened during the training for three of those puppies, just a little bit, maybe more for one.

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And I made a vow to those puppies we're going to train every day and we're going to come out with more than 50 marbles in every single session. "And how do you do that Susan?" I played small in order to play big. I focus on one, what I call marble building behaviour. So, the strategy would be, I would like you to choose a trick or choose a game or for me that's tug. Motivational or life coach, Tony Robbins says, "In order to change your emotion, you need to change your motion." So, in order to change the dog's emotional state, you need to change their physiology. And for me, tug is it. Now before you turn it off and say, "Oh, my dog doesn't tug. I can't do that." There's other ways you can do it. But for me, tug is the easiest.



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You get a puppy and that's all I focused on for the last two weeks with these puppies. I've trained other little things, but I focused on no matter what environment I take you to, you grab onto this tug and you have a good old time and that is our marble building behaviour. So, any environment that, that puppy, might be just a little worried about, no, I'm not going to take them into an environment I know would be super scary for them, but we're going to play tug. And so, they learn that anytime we say tug, it's going to be a great outcome. We're playing small.

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Now I'm not going to take those puppies to a playground filled with kids. Although a couple of them adore children. Because there might be bicycles and there might be skateboards and there might be kids screaming and there might be who knows what. Eventually I will get there with them tugging, but it might be, for me this is what this last week looked like with these puppies. I would come up to my office and I would just corner off a little section with an ExPen, and we're going to play tug in that.

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And we're going to play various forms of tug with different tug toys and little rounds and you know, from [Recallers](#) or [Home School the Dog](#). And then we're going to go into a cornered off section of my bedroom. And then we went to a cornered off section of the gym. And then we went to a cornered off section of the apartment across the way. And we got rehearsal of success after rehearsal of success after rehearsal of success. We played small. I had very little expectations. I wanted you to play tug with me, and then I played various games with the tug. Right.

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So that allowed these four puppies to flourish. The confidence is oozing out of them. And now as they're getting ready to go to their new homes, they're going to be going in a different state and their owners are going to go and do the same thing. Play small to play big. You're not going to take the puppies to like, you know, a trucker stop when they might not have built up the layers to allow you to put them in an environment with that much noise.

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So, play small to play big. Every new environment or situation, you start with 50 marbles. Your goal is to come out with a hundred. But if you have a dog that has a less than positive experience, you may be coming out with 40. Now, guess what? When you go back to that environment, you're not starting with 50. You might be starting with 40 and you might be starting with less because the dog may have had time to think about what went on and get more worried about it.

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I see this a lot in the performance rings. We see dogs who their owners didn't play small before they played big. They put their dogs in this environment, in the agility ring and the dog was not equipped. There was no marble building behaviour that they could go to, to say to the dog, "Here's how you be confident in this environment."

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And so, the puppies or the dogs, excuse me, the agility dogs, they show their lack of confidence by maybe running around obstacles or running off and getting the zoomies or going to visit the ring steward or just shutting down and starting to sniff.





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They are showing this lack of confidence. Unfortunately, a lot of times those dogs then get labeled as the scaredy cat behaviour or the scaredy cat dog. And that brings me to the third thing that you're going to do to help build that dog's confidence, is you are going to focus on your language. What comes out of your mouth, you can define the behaviours by what's real, but you need to define your dog or your puppy by what's possible.

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I'm going to say that one more time. Define the behaviours by what's real. My puppy, when I was tugging left to sniff the environment, that's real, but I'm not saying my puppy is a shut down, scaredy cat, environmentally sensitive dog. That puppy is a superstar. That puppy is a gem. That puppy is amazing. You define the behaviours by what's real, but you define the dog by what's possible.

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That's what's going to allow you to bring out the absolute best in a puppy. That's what's going to allow you to bring out the absolute best in your dog. It's a three-prong approach. It's your belief, it's your strategy and it's your language.

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Now, if you're unsure what that strategy looks like, I encourage you to go to our website, [DogsThat.com](https://DogsThat.com), look at [Home School the Dog](#), or look at our [Recallers program](#). Quite often, we have little mini workshops that you can get access to. Some of them are for free and some of them have massive discounts, [Home School](#) in particular, because we want people to have the strategies to be able to bring out the best in their dog.

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So, go to [DogsThat.com](https://DogsThat.com) right now, see what strategies are available for you, because that's what's going to make the difference. How many marbles are you adding to every new experience? Or to repeated experiences that left your dog less than positive. How are you going to be adding marbles until your marble bag is over full? We'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

### Resources:

[Blog Post: Is There a Difference?](#)

[Podcast Episode 8: Get Your Dog in the Belief Loop of Awesome](#)

[Susan Garrett's Recallers Successes Facebook Page](#)

[Podcast Episode 22: The Invisible Bubble of Pressure and Your Dog](#)

[Vlog Post: Where is Your Dog on the Circle of Fun?](#)

[Blog Post: Improve Your Dog Training by Playing Like A Dog](#)

[Home School the Dog](#)

[Recallers](#)

[DogsThat.com](https://DogsThat.com)



### 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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