



Episode: #50

Can Your Worst Challenge Make You a Better Dog Trainer?

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG When I was 12 years old, I experienced the most humiliating event of my then young life at the hands of a doctor who was actually trying to be helpful. That event changed who I was, that event changed how I process information and that event led me to become the dog trainer that I am today. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett, and welcome to Shaped by Dog.

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Before we dig into today's episode, I'd like to share with you some love because there's some of you who keep giving me reinforcement, particularly those of you on YouTube. I see some of you consistently leaving me a comment, giving me feedback on what you thought of that episode, and that is not going unnoticed.

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So, I want to give a shout out to Nancy Hooper and Carolyn Miller and Sherry Knechtel. I don't know if I got your name right Sherry. And many others of you who are leaving comments and smashing the like button. So, before we go any further, if you are watching this on YouTube, please hit that like button. Because the way the interweb works is that YouTube looks at how many likes these podcasts get and that's who they decide should we share these with more dog owners or dog lovers. So far, we're trending in at about 3% of the people who watch, hit the like button. I'd like to get that up to 30%. So, if you're watching this on YouTube, please hit that like button.

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If you're watching this over or listening to it as a podcast, please share it like Jay's neighbor did. I'm just going to read this. This just came in this week. This is from Jay. He wrote this on YouTube: *"Hi, I'm a new subscriber. I love your approach and I love your podcasts. Yesterday a neighbor told me about you, and I've been watching your videos ever since."* Thanks Jay. *"Changing the questions we ask ourselves not only are great for dogs and great for working with our dogs, but for the rest of our lives. Great relationship advice in general and well-timed for me. Thank you, Susan."*

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Thank you, Jay. Again, reinforcement builds behaviour. I love to get that feedback and hear how you guys are using and what you think of each and every episode. So, thank you in advance and go ahead, share it, share it with another dog owner. I know you're going to be changing a life. And that leads us to today's episode.

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What if the things that we look at as our greatest challenges of our life were actually sent to us to be our biggest blessings? And you know, of course it doesn't seem that way when they're in the midst of that but when we can look back on our life, it's amazing how that happens. For you to understand that episode of what happened to me as a 12-year-old, I need to take a few layers back and share with you what I was like as a kid. So, when I was four years old, I barely remember this episode, but my brothers talk about it a lot to this day.



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When I was four years old, now I'll remind you if you're a first-time listener, I come from a family with six brothers and two sisters so there's nine of us. The brother ahead of me, Brent, when he was 18 months old, fell out of his highchair, hit his head. He cried, my mom put him back in his highchair, ate the rest of his lunch, the next day he had his first of many seizures as he had damaged his brain with that fall.

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So, Brent was always a special needs child growing up. Now he's pretty independent. Now he functions at about a grade three level in some areas of life and maybe a little advanced in many others. But when I was four years old, my older brothers decided they were going to teach Brent who was then eight, how to ride a two-wheel bike.

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And so, they had this little red two-wheel bike. They took it out to the front of our house where there was this big grass boulevard. And so, my three brothers were running alongside Brent and holding the handlebars. There was no such thing as a training wheel, or we certainly didn't use them. And they were trying to get Brent to pedal and go and they'd let go and Brent would fall down. And this went on for, I don't know how long until finally they said, "All right Brent, we're going to try this again later. So, let's go inside and eat." And I said, "Hey, wait, I want a turn." And they said, "No Susan, you're four, you're too young for this just yet. You know, you keep riding your tricycle."

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They went inside and put the bike at the side of the house. And I took the bike away from the side of the house. I brought it back across the street to the boulevard and I proceeded to ride the bike. And so, for my brothers, that was a moment of 'Holy crap. This kid is very determined'. And they would talk about my determination like I was a bit of an alien. So now let's fast forward to when I'm 10 years old and I was a ferocious reader. I loved to read Nancy Drew books. Some of you may be familiar with Nancy Drew mystery novels.

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My teacher at school, she would challenge us to read a chapter a week. I would try to read a chapter a day. I tried to read a book a week and I went through the entire whole encyclopedia of Nancy Drew books. And then one day it happened, I was reading the book and then all of a sudden, it's like something snapped in my eyes. And as I read a word, it grew on the page to cover the entire page. And I had to wait until that word got small before I could read the next word.

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And so, if I was reading a sentence, it would kind of go like 'the dog was super cool'. I couldn't read two words, I had to, I could only read one word because it was so big on the page. Now needless to say, this was a little bit frustrating. And so, the first time it happened, I just stopped reading. Sometimes it would happen after I was reading for 10 minutes. Sometimes it would happen when I was reading for 10 seconds. I tried to see if it was because I was more tired. It just, there was no rhyme nor reason until finally I went on like this for quite a while until I told my mother what was going on.



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And imagine if your child comes to you and tells you this kind of grandiose story. And I don't remember what her reaction really was, but she booked an appointment for me to see an ophthalmologist. We were bypassing the optician. We were going right to the ophthalmologist. And that led me up to me as a twelve-year-old finishing the eye exam and I remember the doctor spinning the chair around. My mother was at the back of the room just behind me and the ophthalmologist. It's funny how you remember these events.

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I can remember it with such clarity. It's like, we all know where we were when we heard the news about 9/11, or I know exactly what I was doing and where I was when I heard about Robin Williams death, those things are so clear. This event was that clear to me. He put his hand on my knee and he looked me in the eye and he said to me, "Susan, what would you say if I told you there was nothing wrong with your eyes?"

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And I remember the tone he was saying and I remember how he glanced away from my eyes at the last moment and looked over my shoulder at my mother, you know, as if to nod and say, "Yeah, Susan, what would you say if I said, we all know you're lying." And I remember at first the feeling, the blood drained from my face. And the embarrassment and the shame at "Wow. I was lying. That's bad. I'm a bad kid." And like panic and almost like getting a tightness in my throat. And then I remember thinking, "But I'm not lying. This is what happens. I can't read a book. But this man says there's nothing wrong with me."

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And so, there was this confusion. So, at first when the frustration and the shame it turned to "Well, if I'm not lying, I must just be weird. I'm a freak. I guess that's what I am." And so, I never spoke about it to anybody for the rest of my young life. I just decided to try and figure things out. I don't ever remember my mom and I ever speaking about it.

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And so, what I would do is I would experiment, I would take a piece of Kleenex and I would tape it over one eye to see if that helped the words from not growing. And I would tape it over the other eye. And I would try to read with virtually no lights on, or I tried to read with a flash. Like I tried everything, and it didn't change. There was no way I could predict what was going to happen. And what as you can imagine happened is, the amount of reading I did fell off dramatically.

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There's an anonymous saying that says "We don't grow when things are easy." And through that experience of not being able to read, I had to grow. And it wasn't a conscious thought. I wasn't going to say, "Well, buck up there Susan, you're a determined young kid. You can just figure this out. Try harder." No, I just experimented. And what happened was the amount of reading I did dramatically decreased, but my powers of observation dramatically increased almost like how somebody's senses, when they lose one, just sharpen dramatically.



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A blind person can pick up sounds that maybe we would never be able to pick up. And so, for me, I started to observe and learn by asking questions and by mimicking and by taking notes. Those were the big three for me, observing, asking questions, taking notes. And observing, it was mimicry. If I was learning something that was a physical skill, I could just observe every nuance of what I was meant to learn rather than reading the instructions of what I was meant to learn.

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And that's how I evolved as a young person. I don't think my friends even knew that I had this struggle with reading. Now let's fast forward to me in university. Now for those of you young folk that listened to this, this was before computers and keyboards. And so, we had to type out on a typewriter, our assignments to hand them in to the professors.

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What I would do is I would hand my assignment to somebody else to type. I was great at typing, but I knew that I would get the words and the letters changed around. And so, I would give somebody else my handwritten notes and they would type up my notes. And I did pretty good in university, especially considering I was, you know, dealing with this problem and the challenge of not being able to read. I was taking a Bachelor of Science.

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In my second year, I had to take a course in English. It was the only English credit a scientist had to take. And it was just my luck that the professor of that English course happened to be the head of the English department at the university. And so, for this one course, I didn't type up my notes because it was just 'just get through this class'. And we really love science and math, let's just get through this class in English.

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Partway through the year, she gave us an assignment in class. Everybody was writing and she said, "Susan, could I speak to you out in the hall?" And again, it was one of those events, like the doctor turning his chair and putting his hand on my knee. She said, listen, I am writing a book and I was wondering if I could use one of your assignments that you've handed in. And I remember thinking, "Yeah, well, I am a pretty good creative writer. Yeah. I could see that happening." And this wave of pride in how, "Yeah, you've got a good eye for talent, young lady."

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She carried on to say the book is about how illiterates have slipped through the educational system here in Canada. And I didn't hear the rest of what she said, because that sense of pride immediately turned to shame and embarrassment. And I knew because I didn't have somebody type up her assignments I just hand wrote them and handed them in myself, that maybe they came across as being written by somebody who actually was not a very clever person.

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I tried to explain it to her, but I said, "Listen, if you want to use my assignments, go knock yourself out." But at that moment again, I remember thinking, "This is who I am. And I've been judged as being not good enough. That I am different, and I am weird and I'm not normal. I'm not good enough."



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Those were the thoughts that went through my brain as I was standing outside of the hall listening to her go on about the book that I don't even know what happened next. I remember though, in 2005 when the dog writers of America selected my second book, [Shaping Success](#) as their dog training book of the year, that I really wish I could have followed up with that professor and let her know that I could write a thing or two.

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So, those are my experiences and I kind of made a pact with myself that when I graduated from university, I wasn't going to read another book. It was just too difficult for me. And the rest of my life, I get through university, I'm not doing this anymore. And then at the end of my first year of university, I was watching television avoiding studying as you do in university. And on the TV was 60 Minutes, the news journal television show. And they were talking about people that 5% of the population, when they are reading, the words might grow bigger and then get smaller.

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For some of them, the words they may fall off the page and they have a difficult time reading. And this is a group of people we call dyslexic. I remember watching this going, 'holy crap'. All this time. All these years, there is a group of people I belong to that I wouldn't be a weirdo to them. And in this broadcast, they talked about taking coloured sheets, plastic, and putting them over the things that you're reading and that helps to stop the words from growing. And for me, the colors were yellow and blue. They never grew again.

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And after reading with these yellow and blue sheets on my books for four years, I can tell you now it virtually never happens to me. And I've since learned that there's something called Irlen syndrome that may actually be what the challenge is and not dyslexia. I don't know. I don't care about the labels. All I know is because of that so-called disability, because I was told that I was weird, it changed the way I learned. It changed me into a person that observes everything. That asks a ton of questions. And that is very good at picking up how to learn mechanical skills.

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So why am I talking about this in a podcast? Just last weekend was Black Friday and Cyber Monday. And we had a lot of people join our online programs. 22% of the people who joined were under the age of 24 years old. And I want these people to know as well as everybody who listens to this, that just because somebody tells you that they don't know the answer that doesn't mean there isn't an answer. That doesn't mean the answer doesn't exist.

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Don't give anyone the power to make you feel less than. Embrace your challenges. Embrace your weirdness. You may not see it today, but the blessing is on the way to you. It will come. It will make itself obvious. And do you know that 5% of the world is dyslexic? However, 25% of the world's CEOs are dyslexic. And it makes sense to me because they're change makers. They don't accept status quo. They don't mind being different and they don't mind being weird. 35% of entrepreneurs of this world are dyslexic. And 48% of inmates in prison are dyslexic. Because they're misfits. They're misunderstood.





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Somebody put their hand on their knee and told them, "I know you are lying." Don't let anybody take away your right to be who you are and embrace that weirdness because there are dogs out there who need us. There are dogs who are misunderstood. There are dog training problems that I can't give answers to. But I know that doesn't mean the answers don't exist. And maybe I won't be able to get them, but somebody watching this who embraces their weirdness will get to answer those questions.

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You know my brother used to quote Scott Adams to me who is the creator of Dilbert. Scott Adams used to say, "[Everybody is somebody's weirdo.](#)" And my brother Keith used to say, "You know what? Everybody is somebody's weirdo, Susan. You just happen to be a lot of people's weirdo." And today I'm okay with that.

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So, I thank each and every one of you for being just as weird as I am, and I'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Blog Post: "Each of us is Somebody's Weirdo"](#)

[Book: Shaping Success by Susan Garrett](#)



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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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