Speaker Key

SG   Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG   In the world of dog training, there's a lot of people trying to train their dog focused solely on the use of reinforcement. Yet there's a great disparity on the success people have when you look at say the success I've had with my dogs. Today we're turning the microscope on that. Why is it happening and what can we do about it?

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome back to Shaped by Dog. Before we begin, if you're watching this on YouTube, go ahead and smash that like button like you're smashing a piñata filled with great karma for you.

You know there's an old saying, if you can't be a glowing example, be a tragic warning. But sadly, a lot of the other folk on the other side of the reinforcement-based discussion, they point at the people trying to train their dog in a program that doesn't use physical corrections or verbal punishment.

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And they point fingers at the people that are trying but failing and they say, "look at that tragic warning that proves that you need to use a physical corrector." Is that a word? Sure, it is. A physical correction or the dog's just not going to be successful. The truth is I don't believe that that is the truth.

My mentor, Bob Bailey says there's really only three reasons why dog training or animal training fails. Number one is **timing**. Number two is **criteria**. Number three is **reinforcement**. Now I further broke down the reinforcement to the **rate of reinforcement**, the **delivery of your reinforcement**, the **placement of your reinforcement** or the **value of the reinforcement**. RDPV: rate, delivery, placement or value.

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Today, we're going to take that magnifying glass and we're going to look at something that it rarely gets looked at. But it's critically important. But I knew we needed to talk about it because when I've talked about "rank your reinforcements", I get a lot of people who say, "Why? Why do I need to rank my reinforcements?".

It's a big part of the success that I have with my dog training. Because here's the truth. In dog training we have people who believe, and I'm not saying who's right or who's wrong, but you know what side of the fence I'm on. People who believe it's kinder to use something like a shock collar or a collar correction to get information to the dog swift. That that's kinder than living in a world where you're using games or reinforcement only to train the dog.

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And when I say reinforcement only of course we use punishment occasionally in the form of a time-out, but not physical punishment or verbal corrections. So, there's people who strongly believe one way and there's people who strongly believe the other. Now this isn't to discuss who's right and who's wrong, but here's the spoiler alert, if you're listening to this, chances are you have decided that you believe kindness lies in teaching your dog through games and or reinforcement.

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If that's the way that you're going to train your dog, you have to get brilliant at the use and the understanding of reinforcement. I want you to get that brilliant and it's going to start today. So, let's just discuss right off - what do I mean by value? What's the value of the reinforcement you're using? It really is motivational currency to your dog. So, if I asked you, "Hey, I want to, I've got 55 really heavy tunnel bags in my building. I'd like them all to be moved from one end of the building to the other end of the building."

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"I'll give you this commemorative coin that is worth nothing if you would come here and take two hours of your time and move all those tunnel bags." The motivational currency is a commemorative coin. Now maybe some of you would do it. Highly unlikely. What if I said, "If you could come and do that, I will give you a thousand dollars an hour and a thousand dollars an hour for any travel time that you have."

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All of a sudden, the motivational currency is a lot higher. Our dogs operate the same way. There are some reinforcements that have a higher value, but it goes beyond. I've actually got a formula that I'm going to share with you today that takes it beyond just saying, "Well, I could give my dog, you know, this dried-up kibble that I found at the bottom of my purse. That's been there for a few months. Or I could give them a nice, rare cut of steak. Which one would my dog value more?"

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Motivational currency is pretty obvious in that case for most dogs. Correct? It goes beyond that. I'm going to share the formula that I use in my own training. I'm going to share that later. But you need to understand, that just like for us, dogs have a hierarchy.

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I'm going to tell you about a story, years and years ago, I was training a class here and there was a woman with a, actually it was a young couple. They had a Golden Retriever puppy. I think it was about seven or eight-month-old puppy. Typical Golden Retriever, very happy, very wiggly. They were not having great success with their training.

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So, I asked him, "What are you using to train this dog?", and their answer - I remember it like it was yesterday - Bil-Jac, which is a very common, I would say it's a higher value reward. It's kind of like ground beef that's cooked. I really don't know what's in it. It's, I don't know. And I thought, well gee, you should be having more success than you are.

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And I said, "Well, what do you use at home?" "We told you, we use Bil-Jac." "Use Bil-Jac at home and Bil-Jac here?" Okay. Well, it's not that the Bil-Jac isn't exciting enough, it's that, you know, if I ate a chocolate chip cookie for every meal of my day, for like a month, I could lose interest in cho— what am I saying? That's not possible. Okay. Forget that example. But seriously, you get what I mean? Like if a dog sees the same thing all the time, the value is going to be lowered. So, the frequency of the reward, you need to change things up. And that's why we have to understand what's the value. Why are we choosing to use this reward? It's about being intentional with your training. What is it that you're doing and why? Why are you doing that?

SUSAN GARRETT's
ShapeD
By
DOG
PODCAST

Episode: #59
Why Your Treats Aren't Working for Your Dog

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Okay. So, let's talk about all the rewards that I might use and that you could use. I mean, I'm not— there's probably a katrillion different pieces of food that you could choose to use, but let's just group them into general categories.

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So, there's fruits and vegetables. So, I might use cut up pieces of carrot or blueberries. Possibly freeze dried, possibly fresh. I have used frozen blueberries as well. There's other, fruits and vegetables like maybe green beans. It depends what I have on hand or apples. Now I will rarely train my dog with a just fruits and vegetables.

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They might be mixed in with other things. And you have to be careful because some of these fruits and vegetables are pretty high in sugar. And then there's meat, which is what dogs really want let's face it. And there's various forms of meat. So, you can get freeze dried meat, which is like a lot of times you'll get things like beef lung. It's kind of like the old sponge toffee that we used to buy as a kid, not at all alike, but it's the same texture as what I was getting at. There's freeze dried meats, there's dehydrated, which I think are more attractive generally than freeze dried. Freeze dried, often you might get freeze dried liver, freeze dried lung.

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I mean, we have a freeze dryer, so we freeze dry any kind of meat. So, there's freeze dried, there's dehydrated, there's cooked meats, which we commonly we use. And then there's fresh raw meats, which I rarely use, but I have used on occasion raw stewing beef. You have to be careful, hygiene, washing hands, washing all the surfaces. You know what I mean?

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So those are the typical presentations of the meats. So also, I will cook meat, when I say I it's the royal I, somebody here will cook like tuna brownies is a favorite. We have all different recipes. We'll [leave a link](#) in the show notes if you'd like a recipe to some of the normal rotational cookies that I use in my training. But it might be the fish that I might use. I would more often put them into some sort of treat like anchovies or canned sardines or canned tuna. Those are the things that would go into a training. And again, my dogs love those too. So, I would use, you know, any kind of meat you can think of.

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Beef, turkey, chicken. We use bison and venison is what Swagger - one of Swagger's highest value rewards. Buffalo, you see kangaroo a lot now, not like around in the backyard, but you can buy it. So, there's all different kinds and something like kibble, or we use some freeze-dried dog food. It's like raw food that's been made into these little kibble presentations.

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So those would be probably above fruits and vegetables, but nowhere near anything that's more of a meat form. So, the order for my dogs, freeze dried is the lowest and then it goes dehydrated, cooked and fresh or raw. All right. So those are the hierarchy. If I was giving the motivational currency to my dogs, I know that's what it is. Now I know tripe is the king for my puppy in particular. But for most of my dogs, I won't touch tripe. It's disgusting.

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I will however, train with some freeze dried, or you can buy some trait training treats. They smell rude, but they're like Nirvana for my dog, so. That's what I'm talking about. There's all the different types of treats that you can use. And I would guess in this household right now, if I was to go around to the various training bulls that are in this household, I would probably find it least 10 different types of treats. Some are refrigerated that only come out for actual training and then others that are around the house for kind of instantaneous training.

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Okay. So, I don't train with one kind of treat because I know I've seen the downfall of that. Now let's jump to that formula that I spoke about. The motivational currency of your reward. So, let's say the **reinforcement value**, your **RV**. Not to be confused with recreational vehicles. Your reinforcement value of the reward that you're using has to be greater, not greater than or equal to. It needs to be **greater than** these two things added together.

The first thing is the **uncertainty of the dog** working at the skill you're asking, and that uncertainty or lack of confidence might come from the riskiness, like something as simple. I remember being in a hotel room, we have those two double beds, there's side-by-side and I asked Momentum to jump from one to another, should be easy. In her mind it wasn't, it was high risk, and she didn't want to do it. But if I happen to have a higher value reward, then boom, she would do it. So, the reinforcement value of the reward you're using must be greater than the **DU**, which is dog's uncertainty plus the **DV**, **distraction value**.

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All right. So, **RV needs to be greater than DU plus DV**. So DV is distractions. So, if you're training in your own living room and there's no other dogs around and there's no noises happening outside. The distraction value is probably zero. And if you're working on something that your dog loves to do and they know how to do it, then the uncertainty level of the dog is likely very close to zero.

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So that uncertainty level it's going to be about how risky it is that you're asking the dog to do. So, if I was teaching a young agility puppy and I put them on a wobble board and they'd never been on a wobble board, all of a sudden that uncertainty level might skyrocket. So, I better have pretty high value rewards if I'm training in that kind of an environment.

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The complexity of the skill I'm asking versus the dog's knowledge in that area also impacts dog's uncertainty as well as how many failures has your dog had in that training session. Because the degree of uncertainty is going up if you've had massive amounts of failure. All right. The reinforcement value must be greater than the sum of the dog's uncertainty and the level of distraction in the environment that you're training in.

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Now, don't go looking in any science book for this. This is a Susan Garrett formula. All right. So, it's something that I have used training my own dogs. So, everything I share with you is science. And when it is Susan's hallucinations, I want to point that out. I don't want you going in and looking at any, you know, psychology 101 books for that. All right.

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So, let's look at how do we rank the value of our rewards or the motivational currency of our rewards. At the very end, what we call a zero, the dog doesn't like them. This - you know what, I was putting this down on paper. It was like, what sprung to mind was my late husband's opinion of my cooking. It ranked from zero to 10. There was a lot of things he just didn't like, that was a zero. Can we make a zero into something higher? Absolutely we can. Maybe I couldn't with my husband. He was really picky. However, with dogs we can. We'll get to more on that in a minute.

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We have zeros, your dog just doesn't like it. So, of all the things that I've listed are of all the things that you can think of, that you could use as training rewards, there's some of you listening to that, that have got a dog that doesn't like any of it. They might have one thing. One thing, but "Oh no, my dog won't eat that. My dog won't eat that. My dog won't.

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So, we're going to write down all the things that you could be training with. And I gave you a lot of ideas at the beginning and we're going to rank them zero, don't like. Then we go to number ones and number twos would be a dog would be saying "it's okay." I can just visualize John going, you know, "did you liked it what I cooked for you?" "yeah, its okay." So that is a one or two. Like you know, I wouldn't cross the street to eat it again, but I'll eat it. It's here.

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So, these are, you could train your dog in the living room. The dogs really motivated that the DU, the degree of uncertainty is zero and they're confident with what you're doing. And the distraction is zero. You could throw in some ones and twos in your bag of training treats there. They quite happily eat those. All right. Now threes and fours. "Yeah, I like that." "Yeah. That's all right. All right." "Actually. Yeah." So, we're getting up a little bit.

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The dog's ears are perking up. "Yeah. We like those." So, for my dogs, well, let's face it, my dogs eat anything. For the puppy, the puppy is just growing to like everything. So that things like I would say kibble would be, she doesn't have anything that's just okay. I think maybe some of the fruits and vegetables would be okay, blueberries.

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Blueberries were a don't like, and they are now and okay. And kibble would be, yeah, I like that. Now we go to five, six and seven in that is gradually growing deeper in love. "Yeah, love that stuff. Mmm, yeah, I really love that stuff." All right. So, so you're ranking your dogs. Just know when you're ranking it's in your living room with no distractions. Let's rank them here.

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Because I recognize if your dog is like, like say they're fearful, everything's going to be a zero. I'm not eating anything. I don't like anything. I don't want anything. If they're really worried about something, they're in an environment, if they don't feel certain or confident, they're worried, everything's a zero. So, when I'm talking about ranking it it's in your living room, you know, no distractions, your dog feels a hundred percent at home there.

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So, we've got, don't like it, zero. Okay, one to two. Likes it, three to four. I love this stuff, that's five to seven. And then there's "Wow. You have got to make this. This is like Gaga. This is head flip. What was that?". Those are my eights, nines and tens. Eights, nines and tens. All right. So, there's my scale. Don't like it up to "wow, you've got to be kidding. What was that? I need it again". That's the ranking of your motivational currency.

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And you've got to know there is a multiplier for the currency. So, something that could change it, and I gave you a hint earlier on. And that is how frequently your dog sees it. So, if they don't see it very often, it skyrockets. If you withheld chocolate chip cookies from me for a really long time. I don't think they could be higher and motivational currency to me, but they, I don't want, let's not, let's not talk about withholding chocolate chip cookies.

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Okay. So, what makes it go next level is the frequency. So, don't let your dogs see it very often. So, for example, if I'm just going out to the building to do my regular training with my puppy, things that I'm building value for, I might have 10% of my training pouch has got threes and fours. And I might have a couple ones and twos in there because I talked about getting a transfer value.

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How do I get something that is currently a one and two up to be a five to seven? You just mix it in. So, I might put a couple of ones and twos mix it in with a higher value. And then I might have 10% that are three and fours. I'll have 85% that are five to seven and I'll have 5%, only 5% that are wows. I'm saving the wows for the super important thing.

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So, when my puppy was young, the wows were for recalls or [Crate Games](). That's it. And when my recalls and Crate Games got really good, I could start using some fives and sevens. And even now I could use some ones and twos for them. I mean, they're so good. I will still give her high values every now and again. But mostly I'm training with just, Oh yeah, they're good. I like them. Or they're okay.

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I keep my eights, nines and tens now only for my husbandry behavior. For my cooperative care, where she is lying on a side and letting me cut her nails or brush her teeth, look at her ears, things like that. Because I want that to be massively important to her. All right. So, you've got to decide on what's important to your dog. And then you're going to say, be very strategic about what three behaviors I like to do one - what is the most important thing I want my dog to know.

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When I'm training husbandry, a hundred percent of the rewards are eights, nines, or tens. Oh hundy, that's it. Just the hundy. Nothing else. Okay. And then I'm getting a transfer of value. So, she loves flying into that position because a hundy percent is eights, nines, and tens. All right. So, you get that transfer of value by sneaking in just a couple of percentage of the lower ones. If you're doing routine training that you know the distraction value is very low and your dog's confidence in it is pretty high, then you could use lower value.

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But if I was going to a high distraction area to train my puppy - now we're in the pandemic so I don't get out to a lot of higher distraction areas - but if I were, I'd probably have 50% eights, nines, and tens. And then I'd have, the majority of the rest would be five to sevens with a few of the three and fours mixed in.

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You've got to make your own magical mix for your dog. And it's dependent upon that formula I gave you. What's the confidence of your dog, the uncertainty level, plus the distraction value? And if those are low, don't waste massive amounts of high value awards. Save those for the important times.

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Okay. That's it for today. Please, if you haven't subscribed to this podcast, do me a favor and subscribe now because guess what? Your subscriptions, your likes, your comments, that's my motivational currency. Because I am motivated to make the world a better place for dogs and their owners. So, I will see you next time after I read all your comments here on Shaped by Dog.

Susan Garrett's Reinforcement Formula:

RV > DU + DV

RV = Reinforcement Value
DU = Dog's Uncertainty
DV = Distraction Value

Resources:

Podcast Episode 2: Reinforcement

Podcast Episode 34: Time Outs for Dogs: Does Your Dog Need One?

Tasty Treats Recipe eBook

Blog Post: How Do I Train My Dog To Come When Called?

Crate Games Online

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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.

Meet Us Online

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