

The Secrets of What Your Dog Really Knows

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG Think of a time you cued your dog to do something and he did the exact opposite. Like maybe you saw him running out of the kitchen and he's got this plastic cheese wrapper in his mouth and you say drop it and he like gulps it as fast as he can. Or you let them out in the backyard, and you notice somebody left the back gate open and you call him "Rover come." and he looks to the gate and beelines through the gate. Or maybe you compete in dog agility and you leave your dog at the start line and you say stay and they blister by you.

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There's two school of thoughts that describe what's happening here. The one is that your dog heard the cue, and he won't do what you've asked. The other is the dog heard the cue and for whatever reason, he can't do what you've asked.

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Which one do you think you migrate? There's no right or wrong answer. There's no judgment. There's just, we're just peeling back some layers here. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today we're going to look at the impact of what you think of your dog. There's an impact. And we're going to deep dive on that tonight.

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But before we begin, go ahead do me a favor. Hit that like button, like it's a piñata filled with amazing, awesome reinforcement for your dog. Go ahead smash it, yeah. Your dog is waiting. Smash it. If you've seen there's a video on YouTube, I think it's got like 25 million views. It's called Fenton in Richmond park. And it's a video that it opens with this scene.

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Whoever's got his iPhone out or his whatever phone. He's videoing this peaceful scene of these deer, just grazing and hanging out in this park. And then in the distance you hear a man's frantic voice yelling, "Fenton! Fenton!" and then a few minutes later you see a herd of 40 deer or more. I don't know. There could be 50 being chased by this black lab and this anxious man, you know, chasing after the dog. Stress all around. Stress to the deer, stress to the dog, or maybe happy stress to the dog. And of course, stress to the man.

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So does Fenton say, "I won't come"? or is Fenton saying, "I can't come"? Let's look at the difference between those two. So, if you believe the dog is saying I won't come, there's got to be reasons. Like, why is the dog saying that? Is it, do you believe your dog is stubborn? Do you believe the dog is willful or headstrong or he thinks he can get away with it? Or your dog's lazy. Some people believe, this is a new one on me, that when your dog pushes through the door, he's trying to dominate you.



The Secrets of What Your Dog Really Knows

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Some people just think my dog is blowing me off and that's why he won't come when he's called. That's why he won't drop that paper. He's just blowing me off. He's ignoring me. He's on his own agenda. And some people actually believe that the dog knows what he should do, but he's choosing the opposite.

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And that you can tell because he gets this guilty look on his face. I can share with you that is an untrue assumption. That guilty look on your dog's face is just an appeasement posture that all animals, including humans, right? You get yelled at, you're going to hunch your shoulders. You could likely dump your own garbage on the kitchen floor, bring your dog in and go through your routine if it's one of those, "What did you do?!" Your dog will get that appeasement posture. Pinning his ears, getting low, tucking his tail, licking his lips, looking at you like, "Please. I didn't mean to."

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Even though you're the one who did it. Okay. That's for another day. I want you to think about what goes through your brain when you believe your dog has heard it, but says, "I won't". The opposite, if the dog is saying "I can't", this could be some of the reasons the dog might say I can't. It could be "I'm afraid." And that afraid could be like anything from avert fear to just I'm a little concerned here.

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Just this week, I posted a video on social media where my puppy, you know, she's in the typical fear period for a puppy and she started alarm barking and bolting off towards the cars in a distance. So, it was very safe. If I had told her to come right then, highly unlikely she would have. Fear would be a reason why the dog just can't. Conflict. There could be some conflict in past history with you.

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So, for example, if you've told your dog to come and he's never really had to, then the word 'come' comes with options because sometime is anytime to a dog. Right. Or it could be that you've told your dog to get off the couch and he looks at you with these big puppy dog eyes like "Really do I have to?" and you go, "Allllright. You don't have to get off the couch." Right. So, there's conflict. Like sometimes you've let it slide.

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It could be that the dog's in pain. Maybe they just don't feel well. That could be a reason why they're not doing what you asked. Or they can tell your mad and now they're a little bit worried and they're a little paralyzed to move.

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Some dogs may look like they won't listen because they're over aroused and they haven't learned to function in an over aroused state. A lot of times we see that with agility dogs. A lot of times the dog is telling you, I've never learned this when that. Okay. So, you may say, "Oh no, Susan. I've taught my dog to come when called." Your dog may have learned come when called when she's got a tug toy or come when called when you can smell roast beef or chicken on her. Or come when called in the living room, kitchen and dining room. Or maybe even in the backyard, but in this scenario right now, Fenton has never learned come when called when you spot a herd of deer.



The Secrets of What Your Dog Really Knows

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Now, does that mean you have to train every single experience? No, it doesn't. I'll get to that later. I just want to establish that there are won'ts and there are can'ts. I'm going to show you a little video clip. This happened, I don't know, a couple of years ago. I was teaching an agility class. I ran a sequence with Momentum and somebody in the class said, is it all right if I put a little target on the bottom of the dog walk for a running dog walk? And I said, yeah, that shouldn't bother anything. And it had been there through the class, but I hadn't been doing much with momentum in that class. So, I took her out to do the final sequence. And in this video, you can see she comes down the dog walk and sails and the whole class goes "woo!"

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Like that look like a dog that says, 'I won't hit my contact'. 'I want to go in the tunnel'. 'You said tunnel early, I'm going in the tunnel'. It's easy to believe that that's what went on. But if you are in the dog saying, 'I can't', then you would examine this a little differently. So, let's just look at those two schools thought. If you remember in [episode number 8](#) here on Shaped by Dog, I talked about the belief loop.

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So, what is the belief in both of those camps if we just take Momentum's example? If you believe that she knows she should be hitting that contact, she's just blowing me off, or she's just saying, "I like tunnels better" then the belief that's guiding you is she knows this. Now, if you're in the can't camp, then your belief might be 'she knows this. What? That's so weird. What's going on here?'

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And then the next part of the belief loop is your thoughts or assumptions. The assumption might be, 'she just saw that tunnel and she just wants the tunnel. That's where she's going. She's just blowing off that contact to get in that tunnel'. Now, if you are in the can't, it would be 'that's so different for her. I should do this again and evaluate what's going on'. Or 'I should look at the environment and see what's different for my dog, because that's just weird'. And what's the emotion that you're feeling with those beliefs?

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So, if you believe that the dog is blowing you off and just go wanting to dive in the tunnel, your emotion might be frustration. It's never going to be pleasant. It's going to be frustration, disappointment, and possibly anger, right? It depends on where you are with your dog missing contacts. Now, if you're in the camp can't, if you believe that the dog is saying, "I can't do that job" then your emotion will be one of compassion and curiosity.

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"Gee, I wonder, wonder what's going on here? That's just so bizarre. Why would she not hit the contact?" So, then your emotion sparks your action. Now, if your emotion is that of frustration, anger, you know, disappointment maybe, I don't know, resentment, I don't know. Then your action might be to yell at the dog to punish her, to maybe drill, "You know how to do this! You keep doing this!" And if you're what is of compassion, then it might be, I might say "I got to do that again. I want to see what's going on here." And then I'll evaluate after the second repetition. For me personally, I may possibly do a third repetition, but I've got a rule of three here. I believe my dog's actions. My dog's actions are telling me what I've trained or what they believe I've trained.



The Secrets of What Your Dog Really Knows

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So, in this case, I did ask Momentum to do it again, and it was utter confusion. She missed the target. And then she was, you know, frantic and obviously worried because she was confused. She didn't know what to make of what was going on. And so, the result of that action, I just said, "Okay, that's it. We're not doing any more here." I'm just putting her away.

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Now, instead of doing it again, I could have taken her back and said, "Here's the behavior I'm asking." And that behavior has components. One of the components is to do a target. I could have just taken her to the bottom of the target and said, "Just hit that. That's all I needed you to do. Just hit that." And done a few of those and then ended it and come back another day and tried the whole thing. I tried one more and then I said, that's it. Okay. The result of those two tasks, if you say 'you should do this. I know you should do this' and you drill the dog until they get it.

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Here's what might happen. This is worst case scenario in my opinion. You punish the dog. They go back and do it and they get it right. Any idea why I think that's worst case scenario? Because your beliefs, your assumptions, your emotions, and your actions based in anger and blame just got reinforced. Worst thing that could happen and I've seen it happen time and time and time again, where people put a lot of pressure and punishment on a dog and then the dog turns around and does it exactly as they asked.

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I'm like, "Oh man, you just set the table for the next five years yourself. It's not going to be nice." Because, and that's just showing the brilliance of dogs. Right. They're just, they'll just do it for us. They'll just do it. They take it, they take what we got to give, and they'll just stand by us and they'll be loyal.

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The result of what I did, I went back the next day and I said, "Ah, I don't think she's really done a contact with a target in since she was like a year old." I'm going to take that target off and see if it's any different. And lo and behold, absolute perfect contact. So, by assuming the dog is wrong, you run the risk of losing the confidence in the dog in that environment.

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Maybe they would do that dog walk, but they get very slow and worried. You hurt your relationship. With what I did, let's just shelve it. I didn't get to do the sequence, big deal, but I saved my dog's confidence. I got a brilliant performance and there was nothing I needed to go back and worry about.

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There was no relationship to rebuild. There was no relationship with the dog walk for Momentum to rebuild. She knew how to do her job. Just "take that thing out of my way" because she's a little sensitive and "what's that doing there anyway". I want you now to consider what's the downside if I'm wrong, what's the downside for my dog if I always believe when she doesn't do something I cue her. She's just telling me I can't and I need to get curious. I've said this before in the podcast, a good friend of mine, Dr. Ellyn Bader has this great quote 'when you're feeling furious is time to get curious'. So, what's the downside of thinking the way I do about your dog?



The Secrets of What Your Dog Really Knows

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But what's the upside of thinking the way I do about my dog? The upside is you will get curious. You will look for different ways to help your dog. You will create a deeper bond with your dog. I personally believe by removing the stress of the emotion that we feel when we feel our dog is blowing us off, we add not just years, but quality of years to our life and [quality of moments to our dog's life](#). Because we're removing that stress between us. We're removing that anxiety and it's proven that stress is a big contributor to disease and health issues. But the bottom line is it's contributing to a better relationship with you and your dog.

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At home when they're learning, if you're doing a sport like agility, when you're doing a sport together. And more than sport, more than anything is the quality of time and the years you have when they're long past retired. When they're just your family pet. Like that's just so important. So how do we get then a dog that ignores that herd of deer?

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Like I said, okay, I can come when I'm called when I'm in the kitchen, I can come when I'm called in the living room. I can't come when I'm called when there's a herd of deer. In [episode number 5](#), I talked about shaping behavior and how we have amazing high value reinforcement. We put it into the thing we want and when we get the dog understanding, when I say down you down. Then we start building a history of success.

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Anytime I asked my dog to down the dog downs. And I start by doing it maybe in my living room. And anytime the dog doesn't down when I asked him to down, I go back to getting curious. Hmm? What's different? Have I been luring you to a down and suddenly I've removed the lure? Wow. I've just realized you didn't understand that behavior.

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I'm going to go and investigate Susan Garrett's YouTube video on the [six steps she uses on training a dog with a target stick](#). I'm going to use that to teach a better down. Maybe that's it. But you get a good quality down. You've shaped a behavior. You have a history of consistent success. So, you've got that consistent success.

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And now you generalize that. You generalize that behavior so no matter where you are, no matter what you're doing your dog will do it. And you start simple. It might be like I said, living room, kitchen, dining room, bedroom. And then it might be living room, kitchen, dining room, kitchen, with another dog. With two other dogs or with you throwing balls or with you standing on your head or— yes, I've done that. It's true. Or with you doing jumping jacks.

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So, we're starting to generalize the behavior. We're building a pattern of success, so your dog gets high value reinforcement for doing what you want and we're starting to create a habit. So, when I hear this, I always do it. And how many generalizations does it take until a dog like Fenton doesn't go and chase the deer? I don't know.



The Secrets of What Your Dog Really Knows

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I know that for my dog Encore, I've walked very close to deer. And as I mentioned in [episode 63](#), what is loud noise to Fenton, "Hey there's deer! Let's go chase them!" is white noise to my dog. It's like tree, rock, grass, deer. Oh yeah. Cool. It's that's just wait it.

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I'll tell you what, Encore when she was younger, Encore is 17 and mostly deaf right now. But when she was younger, I remember one time I let her outside and generally my dogs do their business and come right back inside but she didn't come back inside. So, I called her, and she didn't come. And I said to myself, well, that's weird. I need to get curious. I'll try one more time. I called her a second time, and she came in the midst, in the tripod position, because she was trying to have a poop and the look on her face was like, "Oh, I'm conflicted. You told me to come and I'm trying to come, but I actually need a big poop." And I remember laughing hysterically because here's a dog who is such a rule follower that she's saying, "Can a girl get some privacy here? I'm trying to poop."

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But that's how well her recall had generalized, had I practiced calling her when she was pooping? No. But it had generalized. And so, you don't actually need to rehearse recalling your dog off of a herd of deer in order to know that your dog will recall off of a herd of deer. You just need to [keep rehearsing good behavior](#) and eliminating the rehearsals that they don't get it right. Because remember sometimes is anytime to a dog. That's how we generalize that great behavior. But it all begins with the belief that if our dogs could, they would. Because our dogs do the best they can, with the education we give them in the environment we ask them to perform.

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I'd love to read your comments. To know what you think of this. And did you start off as "No, my dog is saying he won't." And now we're giving it some consideration that maybe it's a 'can't'? Or did you start off as a 'won't' and think Susan Garrett is full of horsefeathers? I'd love to read your comments. I'd love to know what you're thinking. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

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

[Podcast Episode 62: 12 Keys to Helping My Dogs Live a Long and Happy Life](#)

[Podcast Episode 5: What is Shaping and How Can Dogs Shape Us](#)

[Video: Target Training for Dogs Part One - All About Targets](#)

[Video: Target Training for Dogs Part Two - Step by Step Training Plan](#)

[Blog: How Do I Train My Dog to Come When Called?](#)

[Podcast Episode 63: Why Some Dogs Just Don't Get It](#)



The Secrets of What Your Dog Really Knows

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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