

Does Your Dog Love You? Let's Talk Relationships

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Believe it or not one of the most googled questions about dogs is “How do I get my dog to love me?”. And that brings to mind the number of people who write things on some of my posts, like “Why do we have to train dogs anyway? Why can't we just let dogs be dogs?” It's like one end and the other, and believe it or not, both of those questions come down to the same thing.

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It's the relationship you have with your dog. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. If you're watching this on YouTube and you're getting value from the information that I'm sharing, please go ahead and hit the like button now and be sure to subscribe to this channel so you're going to be notified when a new podcast gets released.

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I look at the relationships that we have with our dogs and they aren't dissimilar to the relationship that a child has with a parent. And although I have no children of my own, I have a lot of nieces and nephews and believe it or not, I was a child once with a parent. So, I understand what that relationship looks like, from one point of view anyway.

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It's also similar to the relationship a business owner would have with their team. And I've categorized it into three different types of relationships and truthfully, they may be parts of one or the other. I like to think mine are predominantly the last, but the three types of relationships would be one that you demand, dominate, and control, or you bribe, cajole, and cater to. Or the third would be that you give choices, reinforcement, and you grow towards autonomy.

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So, three very different groups of words to describe three very different relationships. And I believe they go across all three of those different relationships, dog and their owner, parent and child, business owner and their team. And some people would call them employees. I just don't really like that word.

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Let's talk about the relationship where you demand things, you dominate, and you control. And there are very strict rules, and when the rules are broken there is a blame like “Who did this? Why are you defying me?” It's big ego. If you are living this life you might say, “Well, I'm not full of ego.” You may not be consciously full of ego, but this is driven by ego. Because an inappropriate choice needs to be punished. That punishment may be striking, I hope not, but it could be some level of force, if it's a dog it might be a collar correction or worse, escalated, depending on how defiant that animal was.

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It could be as simple as a [time out](#), which is still punishment. It's “a rule was broken therefore somebody needs to pay the price”. The words, “because I said so” may come out of your mouth if you are living in the world of demand, dominate and control. The downside of this well the obvious, is stress on the person who's being demanded of and dominated and controlled, but it's constant.



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You as the leader always needs to be there to watch over every behavior. That's where somebody might put cameras in their business offices to watch their employees when they're not around. It demands a lot of work from you and for the person, or the creature, the animal being demanded of, the lack of punishment actually becomes the reinforcement. Because behaviors change due to reinforcement. And when you're not getting in trouble, it's like, "Oh, thank God. Oh, shoot. Phew."

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This kind of approach to leadership creates a lot of opposition. It creates resistance, and it creates rebellion. The subject learns to be sneaky, or they learn to be fearful and paralyzed. Think about any time in your history when you've ever felt controlled by something or somebody. Even if it was your perceived control. So, we all went through our teenage years and we may or may not have felt controlled by somebody and thought, "Well, when I get my own place, I'm going to do this." or "When I'm a parent, I'm going to do this."

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And how do you feel? It's frustrating. You get this bottle of anger which you may not be able to express depending on the authoritative person that's looming above you. But there definitely is feelings of anger and frustration, and maybe resentment. Let's take a behavior, a simple dog training behavior, like getting your dog to retrieve. You throw something out and if the dog retreats it slow, or maybe they get distracted, they're going out and they go, "Oh, this smells really good." Or they pick it up and they run away.

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If you are somebody who is training with any form of demand and control, you are going to blame the dog, "Hey!" You're going to maybe go and correct them. Some people might pinch the dog by the ear and say, "I told you to get that!" There's a lot of teeth grating when you're training with ego.

So that kind of relationship is exhausting for the person who is at the top, who has to give out the demands because nothing gets done without your say so. And it's very frustrating for the person that's at the other end of it.

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Let's go to the second relationship. And that's one of bribery, cajoling, and catering to. This is where a lot of people, who believe dogs should just be allowed to be dogs. They'll fall between number one and number two mostly. It's a relationship of "I promise you this if you do that".

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So, if we want our dogs to come, we might show them a cookie or rattle a cookie jar or squeak a squeaky toy or if the dog's distracted, sniffing something, you might slam a toy on the ground to get their attention. It's a promise of "If you do this for me, I will give you this". And you get your dog excited by showing them something they really, really, really want.

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If you're a parent, it might look something like, "Hey, if you help your sister do her homework, then I'm going to let you watch TV an extra hour tonight." "If you turn off the TV now and go to bed, I'll let you have an extra 30 minutes on the computer tomorrow." It's a transactional relationship. "If you do this, I'll do that".



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If you're training a dog and the dog doesn't do what you want you, "Mommy's got a cookie!" Or you might "atta boy" them. So, going back to our retrieve example, if the dog gets distracted you might say, "Come on! Come on! Get it! Get it!" and repeat the cue in a very happy voice.

If the dog's picking up the toy and running around, you might try and cheer them to back, "Come on, come on, come on! Come to mommy! Come to mommy, come on! Come on! Bring me! Bring me! Come on, come on, come on, come on!" There's a lot of attas. There's a lot of cheering.

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Or if you think your dog is going to run away, you might show them another toy. "Come and get that! Come on, come on!" And so, it's transactional. There is bartering that happens.

I've seen it with kids myself when the mother asks them to do something and they go, "Well if I do it can I watch TV for 10 more minutes?" And there's always a negotiation. It's got to be an exhausting way to live.

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For those of us who own a dog, we're asking the dog to make their decision based on what they can see or smell on us. That the value, they have a lot of things that they love, but they are going to go through this decision process "is the cookie she's got more important than chasing the squirrel? Mm, no. Chasing the squirrel!". Thus, there's always this process of evaluation because it's like being at the Saturday morning market and you're like, "Well, I'll give you \$5 for that." "Well, I really want 10". There's always a back and forth.

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It can create lazy and uninspired dogs, but it definitely will create dogs who lack freedom. I would say dogs who have been dominated, controlled and demanded of, probably have more freedom than the dogs who've been bribed, controlled and catered to, because the dogs above may have freedom, like with a shock collar on. "You're allowed to go and run in the woods because I know if you don't come back, I'm going to shock you". They use more friendly words, like "stim", they're very friendly words so that you're not actually shocking your dog, in your mind.

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So those are two different approaches. And if you were a business owner who is demanding of your employees, then when you're not there to watch them, it's highly unlikely you're going to get the same kind of effort from them. And the same is true if a parent, right. If they go away for the weekend that's when the crazy parties happen because, you know, "Thank God no one's around to try and control me".

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Now, the third approach, what I mentioned, of choice, and reinforcement, leading to autonomy. Now for my young folks that are listening to this podcast and I know there's a lot of you. Thank you.

Autonomy means you're taking care of yourself. You're in charge. You're making good decisions, even when no one's looking, you're self-governing. That's what autonomy means. Now with training this way, everything is a choice. So, if you refer to episode number 44 here on the podcast, it was called ["Using Coincidences and Positive Associations in Dog Training"](#).



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And I walked through the progress chart that I use in all of my dog training. One choice is a domino to all the others. So, everything we do starts with the ItsYerChoice game. And if you aren't familiar with ItsYerChoice and you'd like to learn more about it skip back to [episode number 78](#) where I give people an opportunity to learn more about ItsYerChoice.

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So, with choice-based training, the reinforcement isn't produced until the choice has been made. The dog makes a choice and then they get reinforced for that. And it's been scientifically proven that when dogs are trained this way, when they make that choice point in the decision-making process, they get a dopamine release. When they make the choice that they know is going to lead them to reinforcement, there is a dopamine release.

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There is no dopamine release when you're using lures as bribes to get your dog to do something. Dopamine as you know, is the feel-good drug. So, dog training this way can be addictive to the dog because they get this dopamine release. Training this way creates trust, and that trust is what gives you massive influence, even at times when you're not around.

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Now, we're not going to take a puppy, play ItsYerChoice, and then give them the freedom to run around outside and expect that they're going to listen to us, because they've made one good choice. It's [layers of learning](#) that lead to this autonomy for the dog that they have the freedom, because I know they're going to make the right choice. It's consistent effort on your part that leads to that self-governing on the dog's part.

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And rather than training from a place of blame, all training is a question. So, when I say to my dog "sit" what I'm really saying is, "can you sit in this environment with the education I've given you on what you understand the word sits means?".

Everything I ask of you is a question. So, when I throw a toy and I say, "bring me" what I'm really saying is, "have I educated you well enough in this environment that you're going to run out as fast as you can pick that up and run back as fast as you can".

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If you're slow, if you get distracted, if you choose not to do it, if you run off, the first thing I'm going to do is, "Hmm, what have I missed?". Second thing I'm going to do, well maybe the first thing I'm going to do, is control the reinforcement for the dog so that they don't get into trouble. So, can I control that dog who was running off with my toy? Maybe, maybe not.

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If the dog is in a safe environment, I might just ignore them and turn my back, and do something else. And they will eventually come. If they're slow or they get distracted, I'm going to say, "Hmm, my training needs to be better". There isn't enough drive and motivation. There's a layer that needs to be tweaked. "What have I done? And what can I do to make that different?". A lot of my friends will ask me parenting advice because they know I understand behavior. I had two friends of mine, they're husband and wife.



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They're both doctors. They have a pretty large family. Their oldest is 17, and at the time they came to me and they said "She wants to, when she finishes school, take a year off and not go to college. She wants to get a part-time job now and get a job for part of the next year and then travel around the world before she goes to college. And we don't want her to do that. Plus, we don't like the way she's been dressing. And so, we've told her, you know, it's our house and our rules and she needs to set an example for her brothers and sisters".

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And so, all of that is trying to control. You may love your kids but you're trying to control them. Coming at it from a point of questions. "Why do you feel you need to? What college, have you picked a college?". At the end of the day if she wants to take a year off, she couldn't take a year off. So how about she takes a year off with your support leading towards something that you've agreed on together?

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"You're going to travel here, maybe I'll meet up with you. Maybe it'll be a family adventure. A couple of times when you're traveling" traveling is a good thing I believe. So, when you're creating a relationship from choice and reinforcement, you create a relationship that always questions. That is the key to the success of that relationship.

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You question yourself and when there's something you don't like about what's going on with the other person, you question them. For example, the way that I lead my team, they have complete autonomy in their roles, in their work. I don't know what they're doing at any point, and actual fact, they tell me what I'm doing this week.

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So, they'll come to me and say, here's a list of the things we need from you as they are running their own little businesses in what we call a team. So, there is no "what did you do?" and blame. There is, "if something goes wrong, you take risks". Maybe things don't go right. If something goes wrong, we say "What can we do to fix this now? What can we do to make sure it doesn't happen in the future?" And we have processes for that.

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So, it's a great way to live. Most people are doing a combination, or a mix-up of this. If you believe dogs shouldn't be trained, you're probably not listening to this podcast. But if that's your approach, chances are you're doing a mixture of probably one and two.

Because your interaction, your relationship with your dog, is the training. The questions you have with your kids, the questions you have with people who are on your team, that is your relationship.

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And if you want what I want, where my dogs flourish on their own because they've made good choices, then take a look at some of my past podcasts here and see how these layers of learning come together. So, you do end up with a dog who absolutely loves you, but they love you because of the freedom that you've provided for them. That's it from Shaped by Dog. I'll see you next time.





Episode: #80

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Resources:

[Podcast Episode 34: Time Outs for Dogs: Does Your Dog Need One?](#)

[Podcast Episode 44: Using Coincidences and Positive Associations in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 78: How to Train a Rescue Dog with Behavior Problems](#)

[Podcast Episode 21: The 5 Critical Dog Training Layers for Confidence with Anything](#)

Study References:

[Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviors](#)

[Does training method matter? Evidence for the negative impact of aversive-based methods on companion dog welfare](#)

[Bad dog? Think twice before yelling, experts say](#)

[Dogs' Sociability, Owners' Neuroticism and Attachment Style to Pets as Predictors of Dog Aggression](#)



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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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