

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Have you ever noticed there seems to be times when your dog just doesn't want to train, or the opposite, that your dog is so distracted by something that you absolutely can't get their focus on you or your training? Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shape by Dog. And today we're going to talk not only about why that's happening, but what you can train first, when you see it, and what's the best time to train a dog like that.

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I promise there's going to be a lot of 'aha' moments, some palm slaps, and I bet the odd epiphany before we're done here. And if you're watching this on YouTube, here's what I'd like you to do. When you get one of those moments, I'd like you to share it in the comments, because then you can do what I'm doing, helping people you've may have never met before. Understand dog training just a little better.

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And if you are watching this on YouTube, go ahead and hit that like button for me before we get going. The reason dogs sometimes seem so obsessed with something that they can't listen, or that they don't want to do anything, all comes down to their emotional state. And the emotional state is common not just in dogs but in people too.

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Have you ever heard the term of an athlete being "in the zone"? That means they're at the peak of their emotional state, peak performance. They're in the zone. "Oh, Susan. I don't want to be an athlete. I don't care about being in the zone." I promise you. This is monstrous for anybody doing dog sports. But it's absolutely important for anybody trying to train or educate a person, trying to train a dog. Hugely important.

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Because our emotional states go up and down based on stress. Now you might be thinking, "Oh, stress. That's bad, right?" Not all stress is bad. There is such a thing as good stress. It's what gets us out of bed in the morning. Without any stress to get us out of bed, we'd all be sleeping forever. All of this comes from a theory that was put forth back in 1908 by a couple of dudes by the names of [Yerkes and Dodson](#).

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But guess what, that theory is still valid and talked about and shared about today. Think about a bell curve on a graph that is yours or your dog's emotional state. At the very bottom on the left-hand side, let's call that zero. Because your dog is sleeping or you're sleeping, your emotional state is non-existent. There's zero stress on your body.



Episode: #86

How to Train Unmotivated or Overexcited Dogs

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Now go up one notch and you're just on the rising curve of the graph. And we'll call that an unmotivated state. Think about, you're sitting just in a room and there's nothing going on. And you're taking everything in. You can hear the cars honking out there.

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You can hear your dog scratching. You know, when nothing's going on, you can hear them licking their paws. You can hear everything. When your stress is low, as it would be in an unmotivated state, your focus is wide. You take in everything around you.

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Now if your buddy knocks on the door and says, "Hey, you want to come outside and throw a ball around?" "Uh, no, I'm, I'm really unmotivated. I don't really feel like throwing a ball around." Now picture your dog. They're chilling in the sun and you go, "Hey, let's go and train!" "You're kidding me, right? No, go do that with someone else".

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So as the stress rises, the arousal of the animal goes up. We get to stage number two. That's where you're feeling comfortable. Your focus has narrowed because you found something to do. Maybe you're watching TV and you're kind of engaged so your focus is a little narrow, but you can still hear the phone ring. You could still hear people outside.

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It's good stress, right? That's got you from unmotivated to comfortable. And that's where your dog would be walking around and sniffing the ground and checking out what's going on. They're up and going, but they're not really driven.

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Now if you're in the comfortable zone, watching TV and your buddies go, "Hey, do you want to go throw a ball around?" "Hmm, nah. I'm comfortable". Your dog is just kind of sniffing and investigating outside and you go, "Hey, you want to train?" "Not really, I'm comfortable. I'm good, you go on".

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So now we go up and we are going towards the peak of that bell curve. We are on the uprise right near the peak. So now the good stress has made us a little more interested. It might be a state we could call interested or curious. So, you're watching TV, but you hear them having fun outside. So, you look out your window and you're like, "Hey, that that looks like fun. I could get into that. Yeah, I think I might go on outside and throw the ball around".

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Your focus is now for that game. You're playing with another dog and they're going, "What are you guys doing over there? Um, I could maybe do that. I might have a go at that." The excitement level, the stress level is getting a little bit higher, so your dog is more likely to go, "What's happening?".



Episode: #86

How to Train Unmotivated or Overexcited Dogs

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Remember, as the stress goes up the focus narrows. So, your dog's like, "Yeah, I don't really notice the smells anymore. I'm a little curious about what's going on over there." Now we're at the peak of that curve. That is obviously where an athlete is in their peak performance. That's where they're in the zone. This is where you're super excited. So, your focus is really narrow when you're playing that game of ball.

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You are catching every ball and you're dodging everybody coming at you. No one can touch you. I'm at a world championship. And I'm in the zone. When I come to the line and the announcer announces, "Representing Canada! Susan Garrett!" and that could get you too excited, but I don't even notice it.

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I don't notice the crowd cheering, I'm in the zone. I'm focusing on my dog and I know what I'm about to do. I'm excited. My focus is narrow. The good stress is up. I'm in the zone. It's peak performance. This is where we want our dogs to be when we're training them because they have tuned out, "Oh, there's another dog walking by." They don't notice that.

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That they notice you, and the game, or the "work" that you've got going on for that dog. Their focus is entirely for you. They only notice you and what you're doing. So that is the ideal time that we should be training our dog.

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Now, go on a little more, the stress might get to be a bit too much and we're overexcited. So, this is when we're playing ball, we may have caught three in a row and the fourth one's coming at us, we're super excited that we're going to get this one, but we can't focus on the task at hand as well and we might fumble the ball a couple of times.

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Because we are a little excited and we want to do our best, but things don't happen because our focus has gotten too narrow. Now we don't focus on how we're running and the arc of the ball. Because we've got to catch the ball. "Where's the ball, ball, ball, ball, ball?"

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And our dogs, when they get a little bit too excited, that's where they might be playing and they might nip you by accident because they're a little bit too excited and they're really focused on what you want, but they're a little too excited. Now, the number six stage is a same place as number five but depending on the dog's temperament, where they are, the confidence level of where they are, or the athlete, that good stress turns into anxiousness, anxiety.

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So, this is where an athlete might be in the "choke zone". They might be overthinking. The stress is getting to them, "What am I doing here? I shouldn't be, this is crazy." So, for a dog that gets scared in different environments this is where they go, "I can't do this. What? No, no, no". They start to withdraw. They start to go within and they don't want to play with you at the same, oh maybe a little engagement and then now "what's going on" and they start looking around.



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Number seven, now we are way beyond our peak performance. We are red lining. And this is when we're out playing with our friends and the stress has got us so focused on the ball. We don't see or hear anything else. We don't see that tree that we're running towards. We don't hear our friends say, "Look out for the tree!" cause you're just like, "I've got to catch this one!" You're so overexcited.

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This is where at a big event people don't do their best because their stress has got them over aroused. This is where a dog is chasing a bunny and you are calling them to come, and they can't hear you because their stress has narrowed their focus so much. All they see is the bunny. And all they hear is the thoughts in their head saying "bunny, bunny, bunny, bunny, bunny". They are way over the top.

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Now, if the stress has turned to a bad stress and the dog is a little worried, they were anxious before, then they quickly go way over threshold and they're now terrified. People as well. You might've been a little worried but now, "Oh my gosh, I've moved from a little bit worried to terrified." Our dogs can get there as well.

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So, what do we do when our dog is let's say, unmotivated or just comfortable, or may be curious? How do we get them up the ladder to the point where they are in the zone and they do want to play? If you go back to [episode 84](#), my interview with the great Greg Louganis. Greg shared with us an amazing line where he said, "fear is just excitement minus breath".

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So, if our dog is overexcited or they're anxious, ideally, we want to get them to change their breathing. And a good thing you could do, is try to get them to eat something. Will they eat? Now if they snap at you with that cookie and they eat it really fast, they're getting close to red lining. If they refuse the food, then they are telling you, "You got to get me out of this environment because I am over my threshold."

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But if the dog takes the food, the next thing you do is you start moving the food. You, maybe toss it and get them to chase it because the way we get the dog up is by changing their physiology. So, if I have a dog who's at one, two, or three, I might start a game of tug. "No, I'm not really wanting to play." So, then I'll change their physiology. I'll get them to chase me. And when they change their physiology, "Oh, I could maybe grab that for a second or two."

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They grab it for a second or two. They do a little bit of tug and then all of a sudden, I'm all in. I'm getting closer, but what happens is people get their dogs and they go, "[Oh yeah, I should be training today.](#)" They get the dogs out of the crate or off the couch and then they immediately go "sit", "down", "stand", "do something with me".



Episode: #86

How to Train Unmotivated or Overexcited Dogs

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And you've got a dog who's focused on too many things. So, if you're outside and you get your dog into your car and say, "let's train" and you don't do anything to engage them and bring them into the zone of their peak performance they're going to go, "Oh yeah, there's kids playing baseball over there. Oh, look I see dogs over there". Their focus is too wide. We've got to add some good stress when they're down there to help bring their focus on you.

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Now, if they are too high and they can't do the job properly, what you need to do is get them to breathe. So, I might move from toys to giving them food, to help them to just calm down more.

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Now let me share with you something that's super interesting about this. That bell curve is going to change. So, my dog's bell curve will be far more to the right of your dog's bell curve. If your dog has not gotten clarity through training.

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And so, what happens with your dogs further to the left, they're going to go from zero to 60 and over threshold just like that. So, people will say, "Oh yeah, my dog, red lines." Actually, your dog might just be telling you, "I'm confused. Your training has not brought me clarity and I don't know how to disengage from that bunny and come when I'm called".

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And so, the good news is what you're seeing right now doesn't need to be a prediction of what you're going to see in the future. What it's saying is, get some clarity with your training, create a way for your dog to have successful rehearsals. The way that athletes do their best at important events is they've rehearsed what they need to do over and over and over again.

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As Greg said, it moves from a left brain thought, "Oh, I hear my owner calling. I must come now." to a right brain behavior meaning "I don't know why, but I heard my owner call and I'm going to immediately turn and come back". So, if you don't have all of those rehearsals in place and the history, your dog is going to jump into the red line and stay there much, much faster.

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So good training, clarity in what you're teaching, and many rehearsals in a lot of different environments, is what is going to help your dog. So, what should you be training? You should be training activities that brings your dogs into peak performance.

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Either calming behaviors that are more stationary and you're rewarding with a lot of food or engaging exciting behaviors, like chase and tug that's going to move the dog from an unmotivated state, to one of ["I can do my best work now"](#).



Episode: #86

How to Train Unmotivated or Overexcited Dogs

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So, when are you going to train? You are not going to train if you see your dog is unmotivated, comfortable, or even just curious. You're not going to try and train something important like sit, down, or [come when called](#) because the chances for success are very low.

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"I'm going to train recalls when my dog is only in a comfortable stage", you're going to get your dog that's going to be sniffing and sort of coming to you, and sort of getting there. You don't want that kind of rehearsal. You want rehearsals of success. I say "Rover", you go, "I'm coming here I am. This is awesome."

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So, you get those rehearsals of success when you first get your dog into that state of peak performance. That's it for Shaped by Dog. Be sure to leave me comment. Let me know about what you think about this. What were your epiphanies, your exploding brains, your palm slaps and your "aha" moments? I'll see you next time.

Resources:

[Yerkes–Dodson Law \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 84: Disappointment in Dog Sports: Mindset with Olympian Greg Louganis](#)

[Podcast Episode 60: When You Don't Feel Like Training Your Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 57: Why Balance Breaks Fast Track Your Dog Training](#)

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



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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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