

# Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG If you've ever tried to deal with your dog when they're super excited and they just can't seem to listen to you, and you've gotten frustrated by that, then today's podcast is for you. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. What I'm talking about are dogs when they are walking at the park, and they see a big swimming hole with other dogs swimming in there, and they just go crazy. Or they know you're about to take them for a hike or a car ride, and they're just bouncing off the walls, or maybe their favorite person is walking through the door.

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And all of the good training you've given to them is gone. They can't seem to listen when you ask them to do a simple behavior that they should really know how to do. Today I'm going to give you the tools to fix that. And it's actually going to be easier than you think. I'm also going to talk about a problem that I've been having with my nine month old puppy. It's been happening since she was young.

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If she's outside with my other dogs, it's like I don't exist. It's like she can't listen. I'm going to walk you through the step-by-step process that I did. And it's based on contingencies. Two important words when we're talking about contingencies in dog training and they are, *if* and *then*. *If* you sit at the door, *then* I will open it, and you can run outside and rip around with the other dogs.

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But there's criteria about that. You have to hold that sit while I open the door and while I let the other dogs go out first. If you can hold your sit, then you get to go outside. In scientific terms, it's called the [Premack Principle](#). And just stick with me; there's a little bit of science here. The opportunity to engage in a high probability behavior can be used to reinforce the animal participating in a lower probability behavior.

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For example, I will throw the tennis ball if you retrieve it, right in my hand. So, the opportunity to get what you want, which is me to throw the tennis ball, will happen if you give me what I want, the tennis ball in my hand. It's "if behavior one, then behavior two" will happen. Super simple. Think about all the things your dog goes crazy for and just loves to do.

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As long as they're things that you would be happy to have them engage with. Like my dog loves to chase cars. We're not going to use Premack to help fix that problem. While the podcast is going on, just think about what are the times when your dog gets so excited.

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If you've listened to [episode number 86](#) here on Shaped by Dog, it's a time that you might think my dog is redlining. They're so focused on what they want; they can't function. They can't listen to anything that's coming out of my mouth. A very cool thing happens when you use these contingencies in dog training.



# Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value

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And that is the value of the second behavior, the chasing the ball, going for a swim, getting hyped to go for a walk with you, the value, the desire that dog has actually gets put into the behavior that you ask them to do beforehand. It's amazing.

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Let me share with you an old example. I had a dog, an amazing dog who lived to be almost 18 years old. His name was Buzz. I actually wrote a book about Buzz called [Shaping Success](#). It won Dog Training Book of the Year back in 2005 and is still a very relevant book today. Buzzy loved to swim; I mean, he was crazy about swimming.

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The very first time I ever let him go into the pond, he was about nine months old, and I thought I'll just see how long he wants to stay in there. After 45 minutes, I had to call him out. Crazy about swimming. By the way, I would never recommend you let a dog swim for 45 minutes straight. That was my flawed thinking back in 1996. When Buzz was around water, he couldn't think, all he wanted to do was swim, but I needed him to listen to me.

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I started with a dog who had a brilliant recall. He would come out of the water anytime I'd ask. So, I started by having him sit, and when he would sit at the end of the pond, I would click my clicker and say, "go for a swim." And he would dive into the water, and as soon as the droplets settled, after one or two seconds, I'd call him back out.

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And he'd come swimming right over, jump out, and get back beside me. After one or two repetitions, I didn't even have to tell him to sit. He was ready. He sat, he was staring at the water, and I would give him the cue "go for a swim." Now at first, "go for a swim" meant nothing; he'd never heard it before. But after me saying "go for a swim" and clicking, he learned that meant I could go and do what I wanted.

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I built up from a one second swim to a five second swim to a ten second swim. He learned to swim for short distances and come out of the water. Eventually, I built up to let him swim for one or two minutes, and then I built up to letting him swim with another dog, which added to the excitement for him.

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But what happened over time is the value of swimming actually got put into the cue, the [permission](#) to go for a swim. So instead of wanting to stay in the pool or the pond for 45 minutes, he would only stay in for a minute or two, and then he would come out and come and sit beside me. "Go for a swim" had magical powers.

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And what's even more awesome is the value of swimming went through me. The chance to do it needed me. So now I was borrowing some of that value that he loved, and it went into our relationship together. And that's the really cool thing about Premack if you are consistent. What do I mean by consistent?



# Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value

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Number one, your low probability behavior, behavior one, the thing that I really want, the thing that I ask the dog to do has to be something that is achievable. It's got to be an easy behavior. You can't start off with, "you must heel and watch me and don't put your eyes on the pond and walk around the pond for 20 minutes before you get to go in the pond."

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Remember I asked for something simple, "come and sit beside me." It's got to be achievable. Now you can grow that as I did, but it has to begin with something achievable in order to start the contingencies. Number two, the boundaries of when his behavior is successful has got to be clear to you, and you have got to know what it means when the dog is wrong.

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So, for example, if I'd asked Buzz to sit and his butt went to the ground, and then it started creeping up, and I said, "all right, go for a swim." I would have muddied the waters. I would have not been clear, and he would start to push the envelope of, "well, what if I'm in a sit but I'm creeping towards the edge." or "what if I'm in a sit, but I'm crawling towards the edge."

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You have to be clear on what is correct and what is incorrect. And you have to maintain that clarity because, as Brené Brown says, "clear is kind," and we need to be clear for the dog to be successful. Number three, about your contingencies, about the "if this then that," is behavior one has to have a history of success in many different environments and with all kinds of different distractions.

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So, I've asked Buzzy to sit as a nine-month-old puppy; I'd asked him many, many times. I'd asked him in many, many environments. I knew he could do it. I knew he'd be successful. It's got to be not only easy and achievable but something that has a history of reinforcement behind it before you asked for it right in front of the thing that the dog really, really wants.

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Number four, that first behavior can involve force from you, can involve coercion. So, if I asked the dog to sit and they don't sit, and I pull up on the collar and push them into a down, that wasn't their choice. So, if I asked them to sit and they say, "I can't. I just see the pond." then I would just lower the intensity of that distraction by backing them away from the pond.

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Maybe twenty-five feet, maybe 50 feet, whatever it takes for the dog to say, "yes, I can." and sit immediately. And then I would say, "you can go and swim." And eventually, I would work on ping ponging that distance, saying, "all right, at first you have to be 50 feet away from the pond." Now, tomorrow I might try 40 feet away from the pond.

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Then I'll go back to 50. Then I might try 20. Then I'll go back to maybe 60, making it super easy. In addition, you can't force the behavior; you can't re-cue it. So, if I ask you to sit and you don't sit, I can't then say "no, sit, sit, sit." Because now we're teaching the dog that the criteria is, after the fourth time I ask you, your butt has to hit the ground.



# Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value

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Again, if the dog doesn't do what you want, you just lower the intensity of the second behavior, the one that they really want, by getting further away. And the fifth consideration for your success with this, is the contingency of "if this then that" has to be consistently applied. You can't say, "if sort of this, then that."

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It's got to be "here's the clear criteria that I've established. When I ask you to do it, I will then reinforce you with what you want". And I'm not saying you can't grow, that to "you need to sit and then down before I release you into the pond," but you have to be clear and not waiver from it and lessen it just because, "Oh, I tried, and it didn't work. I'm letting it go."

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If you're patient, consistent, and persistent, this will work for you and your dog, but you have to be clear about what it is that you want. And know that checklist, "Has my dog had a success of doing this before?" "Is it super easy for the dog to do it?" Let me share with you the situation with my nine-month-old puppy This!.

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Now, this started a long time ago. I believe at Christmas I was able to walk This! in the field with the other dogs, and she listened to me every time; it was beautiful. She didn't interfere with the other dogs. She was amazing. She had a great old time running in the field. By the second day over the Christmas break, when I did this, I noticed that she wasn't coming back immediately on the first call.

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She sometimes took two calls. By the third day, I was very clear we can't do this anymore. At Christmas, This! would have been a four-month-old puppy. Today she's a nine-month-old puppy. I can walk her with the rest of the dogs routinely. Let me tell you how I got there.

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The easy achievable behavior was, I want you to be in Reinforcement Zone. Reinforcement Zone is on my seam. If you check out any of the podcasts that I've done here about getting your dog to walk at your side, then you know I want my dog at the side. So, I've built up a history of her [being able to walk off leash or on leash](#) in Reinforcement Zone alone but in many, many different locations.

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Check number one; that's what I'd like. The second thing is I needed my puppy to have [a brilliant recall](#). Now, at four months old, she did have a brilliant recall, but not under all environmental conditions. And so, I kept throwing more distractions at her. And by the time she was eight months old, she had a really super kick-butt recall.

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I knew when I called her name, and I called it once, no matter where she was, she would come running. So, I've got a great recall, I've got great understanding of what Reinforcement Zone is, now I'm going to start to build the behavior so that I can integrate her back to the pack. So, walking alone, what I would do is I would allow her to go for a run because next to chasing other dogs, the number two thing that my puppy loves to chase is birds.



# Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value

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Birds up in the sky, not on the ground. She's not interested in chasing them when they're on the ground. It's the ones up in the sky. So, I would call her back from chasing a bird, and I would ask her to sit. Much like I did with Buzzy at the side of the pond. Sometimes just for sitting, I would click and say, "go play." and go play meant "you can do what you want. You're on your own."

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She of course, would beeline it. Like she was shot out of a cannon in order to go and see if there were more birds up ahead. Very quickly, what I did now, I'm going to add to the criteria. It isn't just sit, I want to involve coming into Reinforcement Zone. And so, what I would do is I'd ask her to sit, I'd move ahead one step, and I'd say "break" and see if she would come into Reinforcement Zone.

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And the first time I asked her, she didn't; she just went off. She said, "Oh, break must mean go and find my birds." So, I'd have to call her back again. And this is when I started game number two. Because I instantly realized asking you to move into position to Reinforcement Zone is different than all the fine Reinforcement Zone I'd done today.

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So, I changed the game, and I created a new game, and I'm calling it "*I Think You Must Be Lost.*" And here's how I played it. I would let her go for a run and chase the birds or go play. And when she got far enough away, I would call her back. As I called her back, I changed my direction. So up until now, we're both walking in the same direction.

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She runs off after the birds, and I'm still walking in the same direction. Now I recall her, and I changed direction to start walking in the opposite way. As she comes running in, as soon as she gets beside me, of course, she's running at 3 billion miles an hour. I might exaggerate it a little bit. As soon as she gets beside me, I turn towards her, and I start walking in the opposite direction.

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It takes her a while to even notice that I've turned. But of course, my dog loves being with me, so she wants to be running in the direction that I'm walking. She might've gotten another; I don't know, two or 300 meters ahead and then noticed I changed direction again. And she came screaming by me again.

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And I kept up this game. I didn't walk more than one or two steps in any direction before she would notice and turn, but she would never stop at me. She kept running and running by me until finally, the first time, let me tell you, it took about 25 changes of direction on my part before she started slowing down when she came by me. And I would still change direction.

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It wasn't until she finally stopped near me and looked at me like, "Uh, what the actual snickerdoodles is going on? Are you lost or something?" And I clicked her and told her, "go play." And then I would call her back, reward her, send her, and every once in a while; I started the *I think I'm lost* routine.





# Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value

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But the cool thing is, it didn't take 25 repetitions of her running one way and then running by me the other way and running. It only took about 15, and before our walk was done, as soon as I would change direction, she would come right in Reinforcement Zone and walk one step before I would click and [send her off to go play](#).

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All I wanted was you moving beside me one step in Reinforcement Zone, and that earned the click and the right to go play. So, I started the game with her in a sit before I told her to go, I worked by using the game "*Mommy must be lost*" to get one step moving, and then I ping ponged that one step.

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So, then I'd ask her for two steps. Then I go back and click her for one. And when I got up to her doing five steps with me, I then went back to asking her to sit, moving ahead one step and then saying "break," and she came right into Reinforcement Zone because I had allowed her to choose Reinforcement Zone on her own all those times.

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If she chose to run by me, I just acted like I lost my snickerdoodle, and I was walking the other direction, and then I'd walk in the other direction until she finally slowed down. It was so cool how that happened. So now, I've got a dog who will actually walk 50, 60, or a hundred steps beside me. And she won't leave Reinforcement Zone until I click and say "go play".

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It was time to add the other dogs back. So, what I did was I kept her on leash with all the other dogs around, and we would walk half of what our maximum was. I would take off the leash, take a step ahead, and ask her to come into Reinforcement Zone. And when she did, I would click and say, "go play."

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And she would run off, and just like with Buzzy, as soon as she ran off a short distance, I called her back. As soon as she got back to me, I reinforced that super-fast one call recall by clicking and saying, "go play" again. And I kept doing this until guess what happened? The same thing. She now doesn't wait to be recalled back.

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She'll run up ahead and sometimes and just circle back on her own. For a chance to be told, "You got it. Go play." That's how Premack works. It's super simple, but it sometimes isn't easy for you to apply. What you need to do right now, if you haven't finished it, is make that list of things your dog goes bonkers about; they love it so much. Now make a list of simple behaviors your dog can do.

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Sit might be one. A hand target is a good one. It actually is even easier for a dog than a sit. So, if you haven't taught your dog a hand target yet, check out my video here on YouTube on [how to teach a hand target](#). And if you're listening to this podcast rather than watching, jump over to YouTube and check out this video while you're here. Give me a thumbs up on this video if you're thinking this is really something that you could apply with your own dog.



# Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value

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So, what are those easy things? It could be a trick your dog is really good at. I might ask my dog to spin one direction before I allow her to do something if I'm working on Premacking, something she really loves. Because a lot of those dogs, if they're super excited, they're not going to take a toy. They're not going to take food from you. Because what they want is what they're looking at.

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And so, I'll Premack that. This! would never eat or tug on a toy when the other dogs are around. But now, instead of walking in Reinforcement Zone, I will get her to eat a cookie and then say, "go play," or I'll get her to tug on a toy and then say, "go play."

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Why do I want to do that? Because remember what I said at the beginning, the value of getting to do one thing gets put into the behavior we ask them to do before. So, the value of getting to chase the other dogs gets put into tugging with me or taking a piece of food from me. It jacks up the value of taking food when I ask and tugging on a toy when I ask.

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So, it just makes them far more valuable when I'm doing my everyday training. It's so cool how this all works. So, what's your list? A simple trick, a hand touch, come into Reinforcement Zone? Maybe if the dogs go crazy when someone knocks at the door, it might be getting into Hot Zone.

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Maybe if it's them, you don't want them to go crazy at the door. It's being quiet before I get up and go to the door. Maybe it's when I'm feeding my dogs; they have to be in their crate before I feed. Or they have to not have their feet out, or they can't be barking at me. No matter what you want, you can Premack. If it's something, that dog is really, really anticipating.

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This works for kids too. I had a friend who their kid was just so anxious and excited about playtime after dinner. And for some of you, it might be that your kid loves to get on the tablet, or the iPad, and they lose their focus about eating. What my friends tried to do is say, "If you eat your dinner, you can go play".

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But remember what I said about our rules, behavior needs to be achievable. The only tweak I had to make was make that dinner into four small dinners and put one meal down. So, if you're doing this with your kids at home, put that small meal down and wait until they're hungry; they're going to eat that small meal. It's not much.

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And then you're going to tell them before dinner; you can say, "If you eat your dinner, then you can have the tablet for five minutes." They eat that small meal, and they say, "Can I have the tablet now?" And you say, you know, their plates empty. "Did you finish your dinner?" And they're going to say, "Yeah." And you're going to say, "Are you sure?" Come on, have some fun with it. Don't just say, "Oh good! You finished your dinner. Aren't you a good boy?" No. Have some fun with it. "Are you sure?" And they're going to go, "Look! Look at the job I did." They're taking ownership of that.



# Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value

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And then you're going to go, "Oh my gosh! You did finish your dinner. You can have the tablet for five minutes. Let's set a timer." And the timer goes off, and you're going to call them back. "Hey, there's another little dinner for you." They finished that. They get it. And then, after a week or so, you might increase the volume on the plate and increase the time they get on their tablet or whatever it is.

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It works the same for kids; it works for you. Let me tell you what, I've got an infrared sauna that I love, and I've made a contingency. I'm not a big fan of aerobic workouts. I love doing weights, but my contingency is I can't go on the infrared sauna unless I've done my cardio that day. Win-win right?

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Play a game with yourself because you know what, you can make up your own rules. Back to our dogs. Remember that first behavior starts out simple. Hand touch, a sit, a trick, coming to Reinforcement Zone, the leash must be loose before I take it off when you're at the park. Whatever it is, make sure those five considerations for success are there.

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It's simple, it's easy, you know the criteria, and your dog knows the criteria, and they can achieve it. You have a history of the dog performing successfully in multiple different locations, under many different distractions. You haven't forced the behavior, or you haven't re-cued the behavior, and finally, the "if and then" contingencies are applied consistently throughout your relationship with your dog.

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Listen, have a go at that; remember to be patient and persistent. Your dog will tell you if you've jumped ahead too far, but whatever you do, don't say, "Oh, you have to eat your dinner or you don't get the tablet." and they eat part of it. "Can I have the tablet?" "Oh, you can have it this time." No. Be consistent in applying your criteria, and you are going to get that transfer of value. It's going to be so freaking cool when you see it.

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Come on back to YouTube, leave me a comment. Let me know what you think of this podcast, but more importantly, I want to know how your dog training is going once you try it. That's it for today. I'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

### Resources:

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

[Premack's Principle \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 86: How to Train Unmotivated or Overexcited Dogs](#)

[Podcast Episode 53: Stop Your Dog Pulling on Leash and Start Walking Together](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 11: The Power of Permission in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 68: 3 Easy Tricks Every Dog Should Know](#)

[YouTube #shorts Video The Thing Before The Thing \(Walking with This!\)](#)





# Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value

### 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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- Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/SusanGarrettDogsThat/>
- TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@dogsthat>
- LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat>
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