

Fix Dog Training and Behavior Problems Before They Happen

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG You know there's an old adage in dog training "the absolute best time to fix a behavior or training problem with your dog is before it happens." And although that may be true, it doesn't help those of you who have a puppy, and you're right in the midst of a behavior breakdown or a dog training problem.

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And that's why today I'm going to share with you the systematic approach that I've laid out for myself and my students to tackle any dog training problem. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today, I'm also going to share with you how you can get my brand-new book, an eBook that I wrote specifically to [overcome dog training challenges](#).

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You can get that, plus I'm going to put a download in the show notes of a template to help you get things straightened out. Now, I'm going to start by reading to you a list of behavior challenges from one dog that was presented to me. So, this was a 50-pound dog, so not a small dog, just over a year old, and he was a chewer. But he loved to chew personal belongings, things that smelled like people, including furniture.

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He had a very high prey drive, loved chasing cats, but that turned into chasing any kind of critters and killing the ones he could catch. He was a great escape artist and would bolt any time he would get out of the backyard or slipped through the front door, and he was gone. So, zero need to come when called.

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He would play keep away with any personal items or things, even if they were dangerous that he would either try and eat them or he would just keep them away from you. And so that was problematic because there was nothing that made him want to bring it back to you. He was a biter, so he would bite people.

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But the good news on this is that it was low risk and there were never puncture wounds. But that was his number one reflex where humans were concerned; it was just to bite when he was put in a corner and wanted to do something else. Loved to get things off the counter. Food, or whatever he found up there.

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Very low appetite for food from a dog bowl, though, so he wasn't a regular eater—zero respect for personal space with humans or other dogs. So, with humans, he would push against you. He would take a toy and chew it against your body. With dogs, he would just run them over. So, because of that, he was actually thrown out of three puppy daycares. He had great anticipation of what was to come and so if he knew something was about to happen that he didn't want to have happen he had a great avoidance.



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So, avoidance for a crate, avoidance for going somewhere he didn't want to go. And he became an immovable object. He would throw himself on the floor and then would use his mouth so you can't interact with him.

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So with all of these, I think there's 11 or 12 dog training challenges. Where do you start? What do you do? The challenge is, people tend to try to get information on how to overcome dog training problems or behavior problems from Google, Dr. Google. But then you're getting random opinions from people you have no idea what their history is.

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You might go to just the local person or somebody who you know who has a dog who had some success, and everybody's got an opinion, that's the sad thing. You might get things like, "Oh, just put a cookie in front of his nose, and he'll do it anything you want." There'll be a lot of trainers that are trying in the kindness of their heart to do the best thing for the dog.

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And they'll just say, get a cookie in front of the dog when they're doing something bad, but all that you're teaching the dog is that in order to get something good, you have to be bad. Then you might come across a trainer who says, "That dog is being stubborn." or even worse, "That dog's trying to dominate you; you need to teach him to do it or else." And so, you get the trainers who have the "do it dammit" attitude, and they will forcefully make that dog do what he should be doing.

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Now, the approach that I take is that we need to look at all this behavior. And in order to overcome behavior challenges, we need to, number one, [inventory these challenges](#). And that's where the download that I have for you here today where you're going to write down all of those behaviors that frustrate you on one side of this page and inventory.

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And you might take several days to do this because you might've forgotten, "Oh, I forgot he always runs off with the kid's socks when he can get them." You might forget these things. Just write down this inventory because from that inventory what we're going to do then is to categorize these behaviors into dog training challenge categories. And there are three of them that I'm going to talk about.

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Because at the end of the day, the approach that I take hasn't just worked for my own dogs but now, after training dogs for almost 30 years and for the last 10 years, having tens of thousands of online dog training students, I have seen our approach work for all kinds of people with all kinds of history of having zero success in the past with their dog, to being professional dog trainers who've never thought of an outside the box approach and the same success happens dog after dog. And what we do is, give the dog the opportunity to make good choices.

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We want to create autonomy for the dog so that they become the controller of their life. That's where success happens.



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Whether it's a human or a dog where you get the ability, the freedom to choose what you want, that's when things get to be repeatable. It isn't dependent upon getting a bribe of a big meatball on your nose. It's not dependent on the intimidation of "you do it, dammit," and that only holds up when the dog is within your vision that you know they're doing something wrong.

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Growing that autonomy for the dog. Hold that thought; we're going to get to it. Now, back to categorizing these challenges. So, we have all of the challenges you're going to inventory for all the things that your dog does. And we're going to categorize them into three categories. And these are things that I just made up over the last 20 years of helping people with their dogs because it helps people to see the problems for what they are.

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So, the three categories, number one is sun showers. You know what a sun shower is, right? It's harmless; sometimes it's actually refreshing or maybe even entertaining to have a sun shower. But you don't want sun showers every minute of every day of your life. So eventually, you might want to enjoy the odd sun shower but then be prepared, so you don't get to see them all the time.

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And then there are icebergs. Now, as you know, an iceberg, you can only see 10% of it that sticks above the water and that 90% of it is below the water, and that's where the danger happens. Now, the third category is hurricanes. A hurricane is obvious, right? It's a massive, big storm that instantly strikes panic in your heart, and you're incredibly afraid for your life.

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But a hurricane, in a lot of cases, you can do a lot of things to prevent them. Icebergs, you can see them ahead, and you can steer away from them. Dog training challenges are exactly like that. So, let's think of a sun shower challenge for your dog. A lot of times, it's age-related, so if it's a puppy, it's something that kind of would make you laugh.

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So, it may be a puppy just chasing their tail or digging like mad in their bed. Or an older dog, like a geriatric dog, that maybe has the odd poop on the floor like that. Maybe that's not going to make you smile, but you're going to be more tolerant of it because it's your 17-year-old dog that's doing it, right?

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So, a sun shower might be your dog getting on the furniture. Now for some people, a dog getting on the furniture could be white noise. That isn't a dog training challenge at all. I don't care if my dog gets on the furniture. For my mother, a dog on the furniture was an instant hurricane. It was a five-alarm, "OMG, dogs should never be on the furniture."

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It's up to you. You decide where these dog training challenges belong. Now I'm going to help guide your decisions because sometimes what you might think is a sun shower is actually an iceberg.



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It looks like just a small problem that you could sidestep, but there's a deep lurking problem below. For example, a lot of terriers, if they're puppies and they start chasing their tail, and that becomes an OCD behavior, it becomes a real problem as they get to be an adult. So, what looks like a meaningless little sun shower, actually is an iceberg starting.

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Sometimes you have to be aware, "Is this really a sun shower?". Now, the icebergs are things that you sometimes won't even notice, like when you ask your dog to do something, and it might take the second or the third time before they do it; you might not even notice that. But the dog is learning, "when she says something to me, I don't always have to like follow through right away."

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And those are behaviors that, down the road, create dogs that just don't listen. Or a dog that when you say, ask them to sit and they're super excited and their butt almost goes to the ground, but then it starts coming back up, and you don't notice it, and then you release them. You're starting an iceberg down the road, especially anybody that plays or wants to play any kind of performance sport; that is the beginning of an iceberg. It's starting to happen.

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When dogs or puppies are playing with you, and then they leave work, and people think, "oh, this is a sun shower. He's like 18 weeks old. He's probably just starting to teethe". So, he stopped tugging on his own, and so that's okay. You think it's a sun shower, but actually, that dog got distracted. It was like, "Yeah, this is fun tugging with you. Oh, look, there's a new dog, and that would be more fun." And they get into the habit of deciding when work is done with you. That is the potential to grow into an iceberg.

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So, you want to really be on top of what those problems are. Now the hurricanes are obvious. Those are often related to fear, frustration, and anxiety. Sometimes it's panic. You can see it. It's like a neon light that your dog suddenly started growling at children. That your dog, when you put down their food bowl, starts snarling and snapping at any other dogs around them or other people nearby.

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Now you may think that's a hurricane, but a lot of times, there was a little iceberg that showed itself. Maybe your dog got their favorite toy, and they just lifted their lip a little bit, and you didn't notice it, or you noticed it, but you thought, "Oh, that's just a sun shower. That's just a little eight-week-old puppy being cute. Look at her. Look at her little grrr". Sun showers can turn into icebergs, and you might not even notice the sun shower, iceberg until it all five-alarm hurricane.

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And then it's crazy. Biting, that's a hurricane, right? Now there's puppy nipping; that could be an iceberg. Puppy nipping is something that we all have to deal with, but if you ignore it thinking it's a sun shower, it could be an iceberg that suddenly it's a hurricane. So, biting is a problem. A lot of times, these are based on fear. So, it's super important that you are very conscientious of how you're moving forward with this.



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And if you aren't sure, then I always tell people to never be afraid to invest in a really good Veterinary Behaviorist who understands dog training because they can help dissolve a problem for you or diffuse a situation super quick. So, separation anxiety, anything like this, is a hurricane because you think, "Oh my gosh, my precious little angel, we're going to have to rehome him. We might have to euthanize him".

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You have to be aware that what may seem to be a hurricane to you could be easily diffused with the help of the correct trainer. For example, I have brought in many rescue dogs over my lifetime. And one of them was a Golden Retriever. I think Sesame, when we got her was three years old.

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At that time, I used to call on veterinary clinics. I was a pharmaceutical representative, and I was at a clinic, and this dog was being brought in to be put down. And I was just making conversation with people in the waiting room. And I found out they're bringing this dog in for euthanasia, and long story short, it was because she was biting people.

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As it turns out, a lot of Golden Retrievers like to put things in their mouth. I knew that. So, I said, "Do you mind if I take the dog home and evaluate it, and I will pay for the euthanasia if I feel that she needs to be put down." She lived to be, I think 15 or 16 years old, with a long and healthy life with my niece.

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So, what you think is a hurricane might just be a sun shower, or it might've been an iceberg that you allowed to develop, and we could fix that problem. So, you've got your list of problems, and you've set them into categories. What do you do now? I know what they are, I've decided, I think these are sun showers, sun showers you're just going to let them go for a bit.

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And you're really going to focus on the hurricanes and the icebergs. And here's the formula that's going to help you. First and foremost, our approach we call is "*do land*." We don't want to set the dog up to don't. Don't lunge. Don't growl. Don't bite. I love this quote from Jean Donaldson, "when there's obvious emotion, you have to deal with the emotion first."

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You can't correct the dog or tell them they're wrong because it's emotion. You cannot correct emotion. You need to help guide emotion to get to a joyful place. And that's why we call our training, being here and do land. And here's your first step. With this list of behaviors that I started this podcast with, you may or may not have guessed.

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The dog I was describing is none other than our own Tater Salad. Our Bulldog Boston Terrier Pug cross, who we adopted as a 15-month-old dog who came with all of these problems. Some of them, somebody might've thought they were a sun shower, and they turned into an iceberg, and then they were all out hurricanes when we got him.



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And actually, when we got into the car after we picked him up, Kim who works here, who we co-share Tater Salad's ownership, she looked at me, and she said, "What have I done?" Because he was that much of a hot mess. The number one thing we did is we need to prevent rehearsals of these bad behaviors.

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We can't correct him when he's wrong. We just need to prevent rehearsals of the things we don't like, which means we're not going to give him access to chasing small animals. We're not going to give him access to run away. We're going to set him up by giving him plenty of exercise and immediately teaching him games that allow him to take back the power. To not be told he's wrong, to not be told "give that to me," giving him over the power.

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And it starts by playing simple little games. And those simple little games all create layers of learning for your dog that help him make really good choices. And there are three critical games we call part of our critical core we teach in all of our programs, Home School the Dog or Recallers, or our Agility training programs because even for a performance dog, these games are so important.

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And I've spoken about one of these games so many times here in the podcast, ItsYerChoice. It's like the dog takes this big, big sigh. "Ugh. I get how I can control earning my rewards." And that's what we want. And so, what I've got for you as I am going to give you this eBook and this eBook maps out a lot of the things that I talked about, it maps out what leads to some of these behavior problems.

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And when you know that, you could prevent those things. And I'm also going to give you access to those three games that I spoke about. So, you'll see in the show notes, wherever you're listening to this podcast, just come on over, download the show notes, click on the link, go to recallers.com. And there, you'll be able to have access to the eBook and access to those three games that are going to start turning over the power to your dog.

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And that sounds weird because so many people will say, "He's got all the power. He's trying to dominate you". No, he needs to be in control of things so he can make good choices, and he can grow into the dog who can show you how brilliant he can be because every dog has that in them, has that possibility.

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So many people come to visit us now, and they think Tater Salad is their idea of a dream dog. And if they had seen him that night when we got him in the car and Kim thought, "What a hot mess this dog is." All dogs can become that great dream dogs. Yes. Even your dog. It doesn't matter how old they are. It doesn't matter what the history is. You may say, "Oh Susan, this is a rescue dog." You've got to leave the past behind. Now, there may be 1% of the dogs out there that have a chemical imbalance in their brain, and they are attacking other dogs or attacking people. And possibly those dogs, there is no solution, and they might have to be euthanized, but those cases are so rare.



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Most of those dogs that are lashing out are just misunderstood, and they can be rehabilitated. So go into the show notes, get this download and let's start now by doing something. A lot of times, people have just been avoiding these issues. Avoiding the sun showers, allowing them to turn into icebergs and then all-out hurricanes.

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Managing the behavior is part of getting to a better place. And I always say there are three things we can do. We can ignore the behavior or under that would be redirecting. So, if a dog wants to resource guard, you might want to get their attention onto something else while you deal with fixing the resource guarding problem. And if that's you, I've got a podcast that you can go deep dive on to [how I fixed that problem with my own puppy](#).

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Three things we can do. We can ignore it and hope it gets better. And while we're doing that, [redirect the dog onto something else](#). We can manage their behavior. So, we never see it again. That might mean we never take the dog for a walk because they're being reactive to other dogs. Or you could just fix it, and fixing means we're helping that dog to learn how to make good choices even when you're not around.

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That's it for today. Please check out the show notes; please download these resources that I have for you. And let's start dealing with those sun showers and icebergs before they ever turn into hurricanes. I'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Get your FREE "Challenges in Dog Training" eBook](#)

[Download the PDF to take your Challenges Inventory](#)

[Podcast Episode 66: Resource Guarding: Dog vs Dog Aggression](#)

[Podcast Episode 6: The Art of Manipulation](#)



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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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