

Dog Training: The Most Important Lesson I Can Share

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG After 30 years as a professional dog trainer I've learned a lot of things, but today I'm going to share with you the most important thing that I've learned. And this one thing actually is a domino that makes dog training far less frustrating and far easier for the dog to be successful.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to the 100th episode of Shaped by Dog. And first I'd like to acknowledge the phenomenal team that I have that helps me put out these episodes each and every week. They're just amazing. They make my life crazy easy, and they support every kind of goofy idea I have to bring dog training to everybody in the world.

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So, a big round for everybody on the Shaped by Dog team. My [first episode](#) of Shaped by Dog, I really wasn't a hundred percent sure of the direction of the podcast, but I did know I wanted to share life lessons that made dog training easy that helped people to see how dog training was related to things like parenting and teaching or coaching or being the leader of a team.

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And I know we got a little bit of pushback because people were saying, "well, are you saying we should be training our children like dogs?" And I want to make it clear. Children and members of a team that you're coaching or people in a class that you're teaching or people who work for you that you might be leading, they are all learners and that's how we're united.

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And that's how there's a commonality from one to the other, to the other. And for me, having the congruency and seeking to constantly be congruent in all areas of my life, it makes life a lot easier for me. I've mentioned many times in the podcast that I look at dog training as a conversation between friends. That our dogs give us feedback by the actions that they take by what I talked about number, [episode number 4](#) the TEMP, their body language.

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They respond and they give us feedback on what we have given them. So how good are we as educators? Our dog's behavior gives us all the information we need. We just have to be open to their input. Recently I quoted Dr. Alexander Horwitz and I said, she had this brilliant line that said, "When you get dog training right it literally changes you."

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And over the past week, I've been thinking about that. And I said, "You know what even if you get dog training wrong, it literally changes you." And that's why we have to decide how do we want to be changed? Do we want to be changed for the better, or do we want to be changed for the worse? That's what I want to talk about in today's podcast. Because I believe who we become when we train a dog is just as important as who that dog becomes. I'm going to share with you what I mean by that.



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Many, many years ago, I was instructing a workshop and there was one person in the workshop who was argumentative, and she gave me a lot of push back and as the days went on, I was getting irritated. And the workshop ended and lo and behold she came back to another and another, but the same thing happened. And my now late husband John said to me after about the third workshop, "You shouldn't let her in your workshops anymore."

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And I said, "Why? Well, she keeps coming back. She obviously likes what we're doing." And he said, "I don't like who you become when you teach her." So, I became a different person. I grit my teeth. I was more adversarial, and it was a great observation on his part. I don't want to be that person. So, I either have to learn how to adjust my teaching to help her not feel like she needs to push back, or I have to not teach her.

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Who you become when you train a dog is as important as who that dog becomes. In [episode number 8](#) of Shaped by Dog I talked about the belief loop, something I learned from educator Tony Robbins. And the five elements are beliefs, how our beliefs impact every outcome in our life. And the belief loop looks something like this. You have a belief and then there's something that called confirmation bias that kicks in.

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So, let's say my belief is, I believe life is a miracle. And so, my confirmation bias is I'm going to go and look through life "Wow. Look at that. Look at the flowers, what a miracle. How amazing is that. Life is so good." And so, your belief impacts your thoughts. So, if I believe life is a miracle, I'm going to be looking for how great life is.

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Your thoughts then will affect your actions, 'I'm going to be taking action in doing things in a more positive way'. Your action affects your outcomes, 'I may not always get perfect outcomes, but I believe those outcomes were perfect for what I needed at that moment'. And that fills the next loop in the belief loop. Now let's talk about parenting.

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I'm going to give you two examples of parenting knowing that I am not a parent but let's look at— this isn't a generality. Let's just look at a singular example of parenting in the fifties where children were expected to be seen and not heard, that they were expected to obey their parents, that they're expected to not talk back and do as they were told. And if that was your belief loop as a parent then when you saw something that the child did that wasn't following along those beliefs, then you would immediately say they're bad. They're wrong.

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And so then, that thought of 'my daughter or son is bad or wrong' is going to trigger an emotion, which is maybe frustration or possibly anger. And that emotion is going to control the action you take next. It could be a scolding. It could be a physical spanking or get a switch and get a weapon depending on who your parents were.



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So that physical action now is going to have an outcome on who that child becomes. Do they become somebody who is withdrawn or maybe they become somebody who rebels? Either way there could be emotional trauma that's carried on through their life. Now let's look an example of a parent today, and I have great examples of my brothers and sisters and my nieces and nephews who are phenomenal parents.

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And so, if they believe that their kids are full of curiosity and is there a role in life to inspire their love of learning and their love of adventure and encourage their children to be kind to other kids and to people, they meet and to every living being, and that to enjoy the out of doors.

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And if that's the kind of parent they're focusing on raising that kind of child, then if something goes wrong and their child does something, they don't immediately think, "Oh, they're being defiant." They think, "Wow, look at them being curious. It didn't work out this time, but how can I help them to see how they could have done something differently?"

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And so that's their thought, their emotion is one, you know, you might still be frustrated as a parent, but that frustration will quickly go to how can this be a learning opportunity for my child? And then you spring into action to share that learning opportunity. And what you're doing is developing a child who's confident and willing to take chances and to grow and to learn. Do you see a parallel here?

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I think for a lot of dog training, we're stuck in the 1950s. Now I've repeated my belief many, many times here on this podcast that I believe that our dogs are doing the absolute best they can with the education we've given them in the environment that we've asked them to perform.

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But I also believe that dogs do what's [reinforcing](#). So, it's up to us to [control their access](#) to that reinforcement in order for them to give us the outcomes we're looking for. Now, something has really fascinated me over the years is when people come to visit me in my home. If they are not dog trainers, they'll see my dogs and they'll go "They're so well-trained! I can't believe how—" like just my dogs not going out an open door blows their mind.

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Right. Now, if they are dog trainers that visit me in my home, this is a commonality that I've heard for 20 or 30 years. And it is this. "Susan, I can't believe what personalities each of your dogs have. They have such big personalities." And those of you who have seen my dogs on video, you've seen Swagger carrying his toy and chomping on his toy. You've seen Tater Salad rolling over on his back. You've seen each individual, Feature barking her opinions at us.

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You're seeing that personality because the training that I have allows the dog to be uniquely them. They still, we still come together in training. I still get amazing behavior, amazing outcome, but I get that behavior allowing them to be who they are.



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I let their light shine, or I let their freak flag fly however you want to put it. That's what I love about training this way. Would you rather have a child who makes a bold decision but gets it wrong occasionally or a child who is so afraid to make a choice that could be wrong that they choose nothing.

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That maybe they're a child of the fifties who when they made an incorrect choice, they had a serious consequence from their parents. What I want is a dog who will confidently make a choice. But the key is we need to start early with those dogs. And maybe some of you who are listening to this haven't started early and don't be discouraged. I will circle back to you.

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But I start early with my puppies, and I help them to make correct choices that form good habits. That their reinforcement is coming from things that I like. And as they grow, I allow them to have more freedom because they're making more and more good choices. And all I have is good habits.

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If they make a poor choice, then I address it from "Hmm, I wonder why you chose that?" "How can I alter your education to help you understand I need a different choice in this environment?" That's what creates empowered dogs. And dogs who aren't afraid. If you look at a lot of dogs, let's just take Riko from [episode number 99](#) who— what I love about Riko is that he's got this great joy of life.

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He's bouncing off the furniture and he's bouncing off their guests and he's taking things— potentially that environment gave him too many opportunities to make incorrect choices. And he learned to steal reinforcement from inappropriate places. But a lot of dog trainers would look at Riko and go, "He's blowing you off. He's being a jerk and he's trying to dominate you."

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And if that is the belief you adopt as a dog trainer then you are going to have confirmation bias that's going to want you to look for opportunities to support that belief. So, when your dog steals a sock and runs off, he's being a jerk. And you tell him to come back, and he doesn't, he's blowing you off.

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And so, your belief now controls your thoughts, 'that dog is in trouble'. Your thoughts control your emotions. You are frustrated to begin with. Now you're angry and your teeth are grit "and you know what?!" And now that emotion controls your outcome, "If I get a hold of you, you little turd! Like I am going to rip you a new one."

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And then the outcome has you potentially harshly correcting the dog, yelling at the dog saying "no, you're bad." You're maybe giving them a prolonged time out because they are such a bad dog or worse. There's a lot worse above that. And what does that create in the dog? It creates that 1950 child who— you see these dogs. You just look at any YouTube channel from a trainer who promotes using punishment. The dog's ears are back, the whites of their eyes, they're panting because they're afraid to make the wrong choice.



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Now let's look at how that affects you or your children who are mimicking you. You are going through life looking for opportunities to say you are wrong. And maybe you're just looking for opportunities to say your dog is wrong. But that will change you. How you train your dog will change you.

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Because if you are running a business and you have somebody who isn't creating the kind of outcomes you want on your team. Then you go, "Well, why aren't you working harder? Obviously, you're doing something wrong. What are you doing?" instead of saying "Hmm, maybe I didn't give clear enough instruction." "Maybe they need more training." "Maybe I haven't inspired them enough of why we're doing this."

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We always look at blaming someone else rather than turning it on ourselves and saying, "How can I better encourage my child, my student, my teammate, person that is working for me?" "How can I better inspire them?" Create psychological safety so they're not afraid to make a choice. Create an environment where I don't have to be in control of them. "Did you do your homework?" "Uh, did you turn in your time clock?" "Did you leave early? I wasn't here on Friday." "Did you have a long lunch?"

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You're inspiring this amazing performance because you give them the options, but you've created clarity in how you structured their educational program to begin with.

So, I ask you now, what are your beliefs and how did they get there? If there's a belief in your head that saying, "You are crap, you can't train a dog." or "You're not good enough.", trust me when I say that belief was put there by someone else.

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Don't allow anyone to rent space in your head, especially if they're not paying for it, because you're the one who's paying for it. The voices in your head should be ones that give you the opportunity to look for confirmation bias that brings out the best in who you are.

And by bringing out the best in who you are, you're bringing out the best in your dog, in your child, in the people you're coaching, in the people you're teaching.

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Do you see how that works? What are the beliefs you have? Are they intentional or are they just things you've done, and you've gone along, and you've never really taken a good hard look at them? When you're intentional you're embracing beliefs that bring out the best in you. And I believe that is what dogs do. Is when you train a dog in a way that brings out the best in the dog it helps you to rise to the best version of you.

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It helps you to show up to the world as the person that you were meant to be. And that's the beauty of training dogs in a way where its reinforcement based.

If it's game-based you're both having fun, but it needs to be structured in a way that minimizes or eliminates any rehearsals of things that are going to create reinforcement in an inappropriate way.



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Positive is not permissive. It is possible to have the dog of your dreams. I know because I have five of them and I've had 10 of them throughout my lifetime. Become the person you're meant to be by training the dog with the intention that they are a reflection of everything you know about dog training.

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And if things aren't working out the way you want, then that just means you need to find a mentor who can help raise your level of understanding so that you can in turn raise your dog's level.

Surround yourself with people who inspire you to want to be that person, who help you to believe it's possible.

For me, that's our online dog community. And that's why I continue to do this year after year because that community reflects the kindness back to me that I am trying to reflect in my dogs and in my dog training.

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It's all one big belief loop. It all brings you back to the same place. Our dogs are helping us to be the best versions of ourselves. But they could also be taking you down another road. All roads of success in dog training go through your beliefs. And I think it's so important that you examine how intentional they are.

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If you're a listener of the podcast that has been here since the beginning, I thank you. If you're brand new to this podcast, I hope I've inspired you to go back to watch or listen to the first 99. Regardless of where you're from or why you're here I welcome you into our community and I thank you. And I look forward to sharing many more episodes here on Shaped by Dog. We'll see you next time.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 1: Done Is Better than Perfect](#)

[Podcast Episode 4: T.E.M.P. \(Tail, Eyes/Ears, Mouth, Posture\)](#)

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

[Confirmation Bias \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 2: Reinforcement](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 99: When Reinforcement Based Dog Training Doesn't Work](#)



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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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