

Transitioning Your Dog Training: From All That is Wrong to That Which is Right

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG There's an old saying, 'what you learn first, you learn best.' Now that's not to say you can't relearn something to replace what you've learned first, just that sometimes it takes more effort. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog, and today's podcast is at a request from one of our YouTube Watchers.

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Sarah Anderson asks, "It would be really helpful if you could do a podcast about going from being a punishment-based/balanced trainer to a choice-based and positive reinforcement one like you. I'm really struggling with that mindset." You know what, you're not alone. That's something that is a struggle for everybody because there's very, very few people in this world who start off training their dog in our programs.

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Now there's more and more every year. But for a lot of people who have owned dogs in the past, it's a choice. And just like anything in life, to make a choice, it has to be a conscious effort. And to go from a place of punishment to a place of reinforcement, I think there's really three things that are involved, and that is *the why*, *the plan*, and *the grace*.

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I'll get to those three things in a second, but first, let's examine why punishment-based dog training is so popular. You know, obviously, it's more traditional. It goes back many generations of dog trainers who've been taught this is the best way to train a dog. I think culturally it may also be human nature.

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Now I say culturally because I don't like to believe this is the way we are naturally programmed. I believe it's a way that we evolve through our culture, in that we learn to ignore what's good and punish that which is bad, or different. If you don't believe me, just take a look at social media. And there's so many people that are pointing out what's wrong with the world.

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And those are the posts that are getting all kinds of comments. "Yeah, that's right." "That's true." "My life sucks too." "Your life sucks. My life sucks." "Here's what's wrong. It's the government. You know, there's a villain in everything. But if you see the posts that go, "Wow, life is a gift, and it's just such an amazing day." You might get a couple of thumbs up but not nearly the kind of attraction that the drama gets.

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So partially, it might be how society has wired us to ignore the good and react to the bad. But if you think about the ABCs of behavior, and I've talked about this on my podcast before, ['the thing before the thing.'](#) So, the antecedent is something that comes before the behavior, and the behavior leads to the C, which is a consequence. Now, if the consequence is something that is reinforcing, it will happen again. If the consequence is something that isn't reinforcing, it will likely be suppressed.



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Take, for example, the antecedent of your dog getting their paws up on the counter, and maybe they're going for your lunch, and you scream at them, "Hey!". Maybe you grabbed the closest something, and you throw it at them. "Get off of there!" A - *the antecedent* = the dog doing something you don't like causes the B - *your behavior* = you punish them, which creates the C - *the consequence* = dog got off the counter, the lunch was saved. So that consequence actually reinforces your behavior.

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Dogs are amazing creatures, and they're just a gift from God. And they do things in spite of what we do. And so, people get reinforced for the punishment because the thing the dog is doing stops. And that is a big reason why positive punishment, in particular, is just so rampant in dog training. So, let's say you've decided, "Okay, Susan, I want to stop this. How do I go about going from thinking punishment first to going to reinforcement?"

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It has to start number one; the first element I mentioned is the why. And in [Simon Sinek's great book 'Start with Why'](#) he suggests that any lasting change has to start with why this is important to you. And saying, "You know, I'd like to be on a Canadian Olympic team. Yeah. I think that's what I'd like to do; I'd like to be on the Canadian Olympic team."

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That is a wish, a pipe dream. But if you said, "I'd like to dedicate myself to be on a Canadian Olympic team." well, that's assuming you're Canadian. That's going to follow up with how are you going to plan your day to do eight hours of intense training? Provided you actually have some talent in that area, to begin with.

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So, there's a difference between saying, "Yeah, that would be kind of nice." and "I'm going to dedicate myself to making this happen." Do you see the difference? So, what is the difference? So, would you like to change from being a balanced trainer to being a game-based reinforcement-based trainer because your friends are doing it?

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Because it looks interesting? Because it looks fun? Or is there something deeper? I personally think those are soft reasons. They aren't going to make you stick. So, you might play along with a game or two, but when things don't go at the speed you expect it, then what you learn first, you learn best. You're going to go back to the punishment that you came from because "This isn't working! This stuff isn't working!"

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But if you're going to dedicate yourself to the change, then if things don't go at the speed that you think they should, you might get curious and ask your coach. "Am I doing something wrong?" "Is there something that I could be doing differently?" And because you're dedicated to making that change, you're going to keep moving on. So, let's dig into that why. For me, I think [the biggest why](#) is we know that how you train a dog has an effect on you. Because as the dog's behavior is getting changed, so are yours.



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The example being, if you are somebody who looks to punish, then every time your dog does something wrong, you will be judging their behavior and looking to “Hey! Hey!” get on them. Now, how does that affect who you are as a human being?

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Well, I can't tell you for sure, but I know from my personal experience when I changed to become a person who looked for ways to set my dog up for success so that I could reinforce them, I became a person who looked for ways to tell people they were awesome. I looked for ways to lead my team in the way that I trained my dogs. I became a different person.

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I know if you were a parent, I have seen parents try to teach children how to correct the dog into a down. How to alpha role the dog and tell them, “You know, you have to tell this dog that you're the boss or they're not going to listen to them.” And it breaks my heart. What lessons are you teaching that child? Who will that child grow to be when they are in a position where they think they are a leader of somebody and that somebody on their team disappoints them? Or a classmate does something that they feel shouldn't be?

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I personally believe there's a potential that we're raising kids to believe we should be in control of others. And the bottom line, none of us can control anybody. We can only control ourselves. None of us can control our dogs. We can only inspire them to do what we want them to do by setting them up with really good choices.

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I don't care; all the electric collars and pinch collars and anything you want to throw at a dog cannot control the dog. You can change one moment in time, but you can't control who that dog is. They still have that choice. Now you cause enough pain. You can shut down who that dog is and have them become a mere shadow of who they are.

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But I'm hoping that your big why is “I want my dog to help me to become the person I'm meant to be.” My big why is I want to be shaped by dog. My big why is I want to bring out the absolute best in my dog. I want my dog to show their true personality and character. At the same time, living life in a way that's [following guidelines](#) I set up for them so we can live in harmony and do things together.

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If that's your big why then that's going to lead you to be dedicated to make the change. And you're not going to be on any timetable looking at ‘why isn't this happening right now. So, establish what your why is and then come up with a plan.

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Now, if you're listening to this podcast, you have [more than a hundred other podcasts](#) that you can start and download the show notes and really do a deep dive into how we train, how we approach any kind of dog training challenge.



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If you stay present for the words I say in every one of the [past 100 podcasts](#), you will have a massive leg up on becoming the trainer that looks for the good and helps set the dog up for reinforcement. In order to train this way, you've got to be brilliant at the use of reinforcement. And there's really kind of two sections during the day that this happens. Number one is training.

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So that might be, I don't know, 20 minutes a day, maybe an hour, but I don't get an hour a day. And I do bouts of five to 10 minutes of training at the most. And during those times, most often using food or toys. So, if you're using food or toys in your training, my guess is that's only five or 10 minutes of the day. The other section of your training has got to be [the other 16 hours](#) that you're awake or potentially interacting with your dog.

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And during that time, the reinforcement is the [permission](#) of the behaviors that you allow your dog to engage with. Do you allow your dog to bark at the front window or fence fight with the neighbors' dog or chase after wildlife or cats? And then once it's done, be mad at the dog? That's reinforcement that you need to start to manage so that the dog's behavior goes through you, and you make the choice of how they earn that [reinforcement](#).

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That's how this works. Also, in that plan, you need an awareness. An awareness of what's going on during the day and awareness of where your dog gets the reinforcement. It's not just about playing a couple of games. It's like saying, "I ate a salad at lunch, therefore I can have a triple-decker ice cream sundae and chocolate bars for breakfast, and I'm going to lose weight."

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If you're dedicated to something, you've got to look at the entire day. You've got to look at having an awareness of where your dog is getting their reinforcement and how you can adjust that reinforcement. So, it's something that brings you to a more productive place. You also have to have awareness of your own self-talk. You have to have awareness of how you're talking about your dog.

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Now here on Shaped by Dog I talked about [the 'belief loop.'](#) Who do you believe that dog is? If you find yourself saying he's a bad dog or he's stupid, or he's aggressive, or he's whatever your list of adjectives are, you need to reign that in and trigger your brain. So that when you say, "Oh Susan, how could you be so...?" Whatever it is, the word is you're going to say about yourself. Make the change.

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I've never talked about myself in a bad way. Even if I went downstairs to get my cell phone and I got distracted and got a drink of water and came back upstairs and didn't have my cell phone, I don't say, "Oh Susan, how could you be so stupid or forgetful?" even if it starts, "Oh Susan, look at how much extra exercise you've just given yourself. Let's celebrate that!" I never allow myself to talk badly about myself. I never allow myself to talk badly about my dogs. So that awareness of where your dog is getting reinforcement and that awareness about how you talk about yourself and about your dog.



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Now, the most obvious part of the plan is the strategic games that you're going to play with your dog. That's going to bring them to have better behavior around the house and in your interactions with the dog. Now for me, that starts with [a game called ItsYerChoice](#). And if you're in our communities, if you're in one of our online classrooms, you're well familiar with ItsYerChoice.

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It is a foundation core game in every one of my online classrooms. If you're new to me or hearing this for the first time and you would like to start somewhere, I will give you access to our ItsYerChoice Summit, a hundred percent free. I'll give you the link in the show notes. That is the place to start. That alone and with all these other podcasts will give you a massive foundation to help get that kind of relationship that you're dedicating yourself to with your dog.

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And the final element is grace. And this is the tough one. Because once we are aware of what's possible for our dogs with game-based reinforcement-based dog training, once you buy in and you say, "that's what I want," you can't help but look at the choices you've made in the past and feel bad about yourself.

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Or if you're working along at this, and then suddenly your dog runs off, and you start gritting your teeth and yelling at him, and you put him on leash and you give him a couple shots because you're so angry, and then you go back to the house, and you beat yourself up. When you know better, you do better. And if you slip up and you make a mistake, what you've got to ask yourself is, "How could I have handled this differently?" "What did I learn from this?" Write it down. Go back to the ABCs.

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And if your dog is doing something and you yell at them and you stop the behavior, and you get that reinforcement because your punishment created the outcome you were looking for, I want you to look at that outcome differently. Sure, the dog stopped getting the lunch. I want you to look at the dog's eyes as they look at you, the dog's body language. Are they a little bit more worried about you? Are they a little more fearful? Are they a little more withdrawn? Are they less likely to show you who their true personality is?

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So, is it really a good outcome when your punishment stops the dog from doing something? It depends on what that consequence is. So, I encourage you to look at this differently. Ask yourself, what did my dog just learn? You may say, "Oh, he learned to stay off the counter." Or did he learn to be afraid of you? Did he really learn to stay off the counter? Do you think that he will never get on the counter again? That you can leave a buffet of meat out there? Don't kid yourself.

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Your dog didn't learn to stay off the counter. One shot on the neck doesn't teach the dog not to pull on a leash. Screaming at them and shaking them when they don't come when called never teaches them not to run off again. All it does is make them feel worried about being around you. So, the ABCs, I would like you to look at that differently.



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Anytime you inadvertently punish your dog, look at the consequence that you were given, even if the dog does stop. Look at it differently because that will help you take a different approach next time. That will help you to sit back and go, "Okay, first of all, is my dog safe?" So, you can do anything you want. If there's a chance that your dog may be in danger. So let me preface that if your dog is running out in the street, if screaming at them will stop them, by all means, scream at them. And then take a look back at how can I make sure that never happens again?

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And what can I do right now to [add layers into my dog's foundational learning](#) that will help him understand how important it is to never go out an open gate, to never go out an open door. All of those lessons are what lead to having that dream dog. So, grace is important, but grace with education.

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Grace is living in the present. Recognizing 10 minutes ago, you might've gritted your teeth and done something that you really were a little ashamed of. And grace is going, "You know what, Susan, you are a good person. You're dedicating yourself to making life better for this dog so that that doesn't happen again." Cut yourself some slack, celebrate that you realized now that you did it. And even if you slip up again, you fall back on grace, and that's what's going to allow you to bring out the best in you because that's what our dogs are here for. To help us all to be the best versions of ourselves we can be.

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That's it for Shaped by Dog for today. And hey, if you're listening to this and in an area that you can drop down and leave me a review like iTunes, I sure would appreciate that because that is how iTunes allows others to learn about this podcast. So, if you think this is a message that other people can learn from, please leave us a review. Knock on those stars. Hopefully, they're five, but I can't tell you to leave five. So, leave something that rhymes with hive. And if you're watching this on YouTube, go ahead and hit the like button and share it with your friends. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog. Remember rhymes with hive, beehive. See you next time.

Resources:

[Learn How to Play ItsYerChoice](#)

[Podcast Episode 16: The Thing Before Your Dog's Thing](#)

[Book: Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action by Simon Sinek](#)

[Podcast Episode 100: Dog Training: The Most Important Lesson I Can Share](#)

[Podcast Episode 27: Do Dogs Need Rules?](#)

[Shaped By Dog Podcast: All Episodes](#)

[Podcast Episode 83: The Dog Training You Do When You're Not Dog Training](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 2: Reinforcement](#)

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

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



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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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