

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Earlier this week, I put a post on social media asking anybody who is involved with dog sports if they had a question they would like me to address on my podcast. And guess what? I got 84 different questions that came up just in over 24 hours posted on [Instagram](#). And I'm going to try to answer as many as I can in the next 20 minutes.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett, and welcome to Shaped by Dog. If you have no interest in dog sports or are really not familiar with what dog sports are, well, stick with me because there's a lot of questions here that relate to general dog training, to begin with. And if my voice seems a little bit raspy, it's because, over the last four days, I trained, the first-ever for us, and possibly the first in the world, a global Agility camp chat, entirely through zoom.

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It was crazy. We had tons of people on there. We really didn't know what it was going to be like, but by all accounts, it was a massive success. So that's what prompted me to say, "Hey, let's talk about dog sports in a podcast." And so, I'm going to jump right in, and I got to tell you, I have two online programs to do with dog agility.

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There's [Handling360](#), which is all about the layers of learning. Taking a dog right from the beginning all the way up to being able to run courses. Learning how to handle that means listening to their handler's cues, following directions, following the body, and getting the course correct.

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And our other online program for dog agility is called [Agility Nation](#). Now that's all about everything except for handling. Things like teaching a dog how to weave or teaching a dog fitness exercises or human fitness exercises. So, there are two separate programs. One is a membership. Agility Nation is a membership.

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Why am I telling you all of this? Because at the very end of this podcast, as I was answering these questions, I thought, 'I got to tell people that some of these answers you could get in much greater detail in possibly Handling360 or a quick answer in something like Agility Nation'. But I'll get into that later. For now, let's jump into these questions.

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I'm already down three minutes. Okay, first one. "How do you connect with your dog better while running an entire agility course?". So, connection means you run your course, and your dog's got to do all those obstacles, but if you don't [connect with your dog](#), your dog may misread what you're telling them and go off and run a course of their own which of course in the sport of dog agility we have to do the course as the judge numbered.



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Some judges are just funny that way. Actually, the truth is you have to follow the rules. So how do you connect? Now I think it comes down to just a few things. Number one is having a consistent handling program. Obviously, Handling360 does that for us. But that means that you do the same thing every time you set up a sequence that looks like 'X'. You handle it exactly the same way every time, and your dog learns that.

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Now the other part of that is you put in the [layers of learning](#) so that your dog has clarity of understanding with every single cue you will ever use in dog agility. So, if I give my dog a cue to jump long over a jump, there is no way that that dog will ever turn tight when I give that cue to jump long, regardless of what my body is doing.

So, clarity of handling. My execution as a handler, ability to give the dog cues, my dog's understanding of those cues through the layers of learning that I've put in. And the third one and this might be the most difficult for some people, and that is the ability to handle your ring nerves and do what you want in a timely fashion. To be able to execute regardless of how excited you are in the moment.

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So those are the big three things that help you to connect with your dog best. Next question, "*How to give motivation a boost during a course or a training?*". Now motivation comes from the way that we train our dogs. So, think about this. Think about if you are watching, and I've used this example before, say you're watching a basketball game, and it's super exciting, and you are totally into it.

Your team steals the ball, and you scream, "Whoa!" you're so motivated by this game it's just, so passionate, you're just riveted. There's no way you're going to take your eyes off the course. Much like when I flew out to San Francisco to watch my beloved Raptors win the NBA championship in 2019. Woo! Woo! Woo! But I digress. Now, what if your team is losing? Like they're stinking the place out.

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Kind of like when Kobe Bryant dropped 81 points on my beloved Raptors, but that's another story. What if your team just is not playing well and the cheerleaders come over and go, "Hey, let's inject some joy? How about you, you know, give me an R?" And you're like, "Okay, Yeah. Rightever. R." Like, you might play along, or you might not, you know. That's what it's like when you're trying to inject motivation into a dog who isn't motivated by what they have in front of them.

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If you do your job right as a dog trainer and you've transferred the value that goes from whatever the dog loves into what you would like that dog to love, much like what I talked about in episode 90 here on Shaped by Dog. Where I talked about [Premack and the transfer value](#). If you've done your job right, your dog is like me watching the Raptors in a really good game. They are just riveted, "Yeah!". They don't need anybody going, "Hey, give me an R!"

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They're like, "Get out of my way. We're doing something I love, and it's awesome, and I'm doing it with mom, and I just love it. We're having so much fun." So, if you don't have that, it isn't an injection of motivation you want. You want to go all the way back and say, 'What layer am I missing in my dog's fundamental dog training?'



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It's the same for every single sport, and it's the same for every single dog. Next question. *"How often do you do fitness?"* Now I'm assuming you mean with my dog. Now I try to do fitness at least four times a week with myself; it doesn't always work. However, with my dogs, anytime I train any agility training, I start every session with at least one fitness exercise, and then two times a week, they get 40 min sessions.

Now, when I say "they," I mean my dogs like my puppy This! and Momentum, my dogs where I'm training for agility, they get 40 minutes twice a week of just fitness. Swagger gets, you know, 10-minute sessions two or three times a week.

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And of course, they get things like aerobic. They get walking and swimming and things like that. I don't include that in their fitness, but of course, that is fitness training. But what I'm talking about is really focused body awareness, much like I do when I'm in the gym. So that's what my dog's fitness program looks like.

Next question. *"How to prevent arthritis in sport dogs?"* Well, much like us athletes. Once they get older, sometimes you just can't prevent it, but you can delay it, and you can do your best to make sure that your dog isn't riddled with arthritis. You can do things like prioritizing nutrition, warm-up and cool-down, and fitness.

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Don't let your sport be what keeps your dog in shape. Be intentional about the exercises you do with your dog in a way that develops their front end or their back end or their flexibility, their mobility, their balance, proprioception, things like that. So, nutrition, fitness, warm-up, cool-down. Those are the big things that are going to help delay or maybe prevent arthritis in some cases.

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Okay, next question. *"How do you build jump value for puppies with the uprights?"* Now just getting a puppy to have value for an upright. I talked about it in episode 90, the transfer of value. But it's how do I build value for anything? Whether it's crate games or value for, you know, not going outside before I give you your release word or whatever it is I'm training, it's all through [shaping](#), and it's all through taking what the dog really, really loves and transferring that into what I really, really want.

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In this case is I want my puppy to focus on an upright, if it wasn't upright, and have them want that upright like, "Oh, I really want to do something. I really want to engage with that upright." So, it's just shaping, transfer value. Next question. *"When working with directions in a tunnel and on your running contact, do you use the same cues or different cues?"* I use two completely different sets of cues for each of those different obstacles.

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"How do you personally work your way up to championship level?" This is a great question. Because what a lot of people do is they say like for example, here in North America, I know in Europe you have different levels of competition. So, there might be what we call the novice level and then the open or intermediate level, and then the master level. And there might be something above that. There might be three to four levels. And in England, for example, they have seven different levels of agility.



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And what people do, not most people, but people new to the sport they might say “Okay, I’m going to train what I need to get to level one. And then I’m going to go back and train level two.” It’s not how it works. I train my dogs to get to level seven and half of level seven type skills because then when I go to level one, it gets dead easy for my puppy, right?

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When I say puppy, I mean by then my dog is two years old. And so don’t think about training in levels. Think about training in joy and complete understanding because then you won’t have to retrain anything. You won’t be building in mistakes because level one would be pretty easy. I could probably get, you know, a fairly untrained dog around level one, but then you’ve got a lot of mistakes with the dog looking at you, and you’re doing agility and them, you know, turning the wrong way. All of that’s built into playing agility in the ring with you. That holds true for all sports.

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This is a good question. “*How do you decide when it’s time to retire a dog from competition?*” Now I retire my dogs a long time before they ever need to be retired. And I do that because I can do agility here at home with them. But how did I decide early on? It was the dog’s soundness. I, of course, would never give them any kind of any anti-inflammatory or anything and go out and run agility with them. So, if they can’t stay sound, then I won’t run agility with them. That’s number one.

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I would say there are two number ones. Because the big number one is, ‘does, my dog still love it?’ But the way I train my dogs, they always love it, and they would never stop doing agility. They could be limping their way and go, “Yeah, no, I still want to do it. I want to do it.”

So, it’s the dog’s joy of the sport. And as I said earlier, if your dog doesn’t love the sport, just take a step back, take a month or two off and go back and build that joy to the foundational layers and then re-add those layers with tons of joy.

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Every dog can be trained to love the sport. Trust me on that one. And then, of course, the dog soundness, if there’s any chance that the dog might not be a hundred percent sound, then I’m not going to compete in sports with them. “*How do you inject joy in training?*”

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And I talked about transfer of value, but for me, it all starts with, you know, tugging, my dog’s tugging, and crate games and playing games that dog. You know, [Recallers](#) games is the start of everything I do in any sport.

And it’s about the transfer of value. Having fun together as a team teamwork starts with just the dog chasing you. Anytime I go “Woo!” and run, my dogs will all chase me. If you don’t have that, there’s your foundation layer.

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“*How do you track the cue words?*” I compete in multiple venues and use some words differently. And so, for me, I have a fitness journal because I use a ton of different words. I have a lot of cues in agility, and I just recently changed some of them for my youngest puppy. This!



Your Dog Agility And Dog Sports Questions Covered

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And so, what I did is I wrote all our cues in the back of her fitness journal. That way, Kim would know them, and I know them. So, my advice to you is spreadsheet or journal, write them on a whiteboard somewhere where you'll see them, and every day try to rehearse them in your head so that they just become second nature.

You don't want to think out there. "Okay, I'm going to get my dog to turn right. What is my dog's right turn cue?". So for me, my dog, I want her to turn tight right on a jump. I would say "rye, rye." If I wanted a turn tight right of coming out of a tunnel, I would say "check, check." If I wanted to turn tight right off of a dog walk, I would go "Rrr."

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So different cues. You don't ever want to have to think about them. You just want them to be there. But it starts by keeping track of them in a journal or on a whiteboard or somewhere you'll see them every day and then [rehearsing them in your brain and out loud](#) every day. "How do you focus an overexcited dog at the start line?"

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So why is a dog over-excited? Remember, I've talked about [your dog's emotions](#) many times here in Shaped by dog and leave some links in the show notes to some episodes I really recommend you go and listen to. And emotions need to be dealt with first. So, some dogs are coming into a start line [very anxious](#), maybe because they've had a history of you and your dog having mistakes out there. And you may be [getting frustrated](#) with your dog or disappointed with your dog and or maybe giving the dog a timeout and punishing them for something they did.

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So that may be causing a lot of [anxiety](#) at the start line. And remember, the dogs are always doing the best they can with the education we've given them in the environment that we're asking them to perform. So, it is never the dog's issue. So, if you have problems out there, please go back, peel back the layers, build a better foundation. And never let your dog know that they haven't done anything but an amazing job for you anytime you leave the ring in agility.

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Now [some dogs are just joyful and excited](#), and they love the sport, and they're excited at the start line. That doesn't mean they can't give you a hundred percent [focus and control](#). So, where does that come from? Focus forward is one of the first things that I teach my agility puppies and that it gets built into absolutely everything I do. How do I get that? Exactly like I said with how do we get our dog interested in agility wing upright just by a transfer of value. Right, focus forward. That might be the skill that you're shaping today is 'I want you just to focus.' "Could you tell me about your warm-up or cool-down routine?" I have a 20-minute warm-up routine. I can do it in as small as eight, but the most important part of that warm-up routine is that my dog has really, really warmed up.

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I personally would like to get my body really, really warmed up, but there's a number of different things that I do during that 20 minutes, but it starts, and it ends with the cool-down is walking. So not trotting. I want my dog walking, and my cool-down is I want my dog's breathing to get back to normal. And both my warm-up and my cool-down, I do some exercises with my dogs, no matter what venue I'm at, I don't need special equipment for this.



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I'll just do a few little exercises, and really those are the big, big things. Get your dogs out there walking. Don't cheat them, even when you're practicing at home; rehearse your warm-up and cool-down because success in the ring comes from having a routine that your dog can predict. "Oh yeah. Now we're going to go do agility."

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"How should I get my energetic nine-month-old pup started without risking his bone growth?" First of all, any dog sport with a puppy starts the same way every good family dog training program should start.

And that is with the basics. With a recall, with a retrieve, with basic manners around the house, with great focus for you and any member of the family, with consistency, with exercise, with loose leash walking.

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All of those things create an amazing family pet. And guess what? That's the foundation that creates an amazing sports performance dog. My puppy is now one year old, and she has just recently gone over jumps. And when I say jumps, guess how high she's been going over.

She's gone over about her knee height. So, she's really not going over huge jumps. So, I am not a person that gets all wrapped up in 'are my dog's bone plates close?' because I know I'm more focused on 'what's the soft tissue fiber doing?', 'how well are the muscles developed and the things that support the bones?'

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I am not going to put my dog in jeopardy by doing really ballistic exercises or concussive exercises when they're under a year old, or if I had a big dog, it would probably go out to 18 months old. *"Have you seen many Australian Shepherds win at agility? I'm asking for a friend."* Quite honestly. Yeah. There's been some amazing Aussies in agility.

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Most recently, I must admit most of the dogs doing winning in that height class are Border Collies along with the odd Malinois. But you know, at the highest level of agility, it's mostly Border Collies. But there's a lot of talented Australian Shepherds, especially the ones with the tails left on. Next question.

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"Which approach works best to train focus forward in agility?" As I mentioned, transfer value and shaping. It doesn't matter what you're training. You can get that through transfer value and shaping.

Find something the dog loves and shape them to look at something else using what they love as their reward. Well, this is an interesting question. I remember I had like 82 or 84 questions, so I'm not going to get through them all.

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"What are your top five body awareness exercises?" Super question. And the answer is, it depends. So, my top five puppy body awareness exercises are going to be different than my top five competition dog exercises. And within the competition dog, it really depends on what my dog's strengths and weaknesses are.



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So, for example, for a puppy, sit, down, stand, love them. I love them on a plank, you know, sit, down, stand on a plank where those paws aren't going to move, and I'm going to move around your body. And you can get off balance a little bit one way, a little bit the other. Sit, down, stand, big, big, big fan of those for puppies.

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And as my dog grows up a little bit, I love sidestepping, side passing. I start quite young with my puppies. Things like 'back up' is a great exercise where they learn how to weight shift their body back and step in a really controlled manner. Of course, I love things like cavalettis for body awareness exercises and control things like that.

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But I would say for sport, I really want my dog to have an awareness of how to use their limbs. So, it might be lifting up one limb at a time, but it's about strength, mobility, proprioception, flexibility, weight shifting. Those are really big things for me. We in Agility Nation have well over 50 different fitness exercises in there from contributors from all over the world. Veterinarians, physiotherapists, and specialists.

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I used to come up with them on my own. I don't even bother anymore because there are some people that's all they do is live and breathe fitness exercises for dogs. Why will I knock myself out when there are people out there that that's all they do. So that's what I do. I just use what other people come up with now.

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"What would you say is the most important part of your warm-up routine?" Again, the most important part, I would say, is my dog's warm-ups. So, my dog is really ready to go. I would never want to skip that, but for me, the most important part is the thing that connects me with my dog. And that is the last thing that I do before I leave my dog at the start line is I take a deep breath in.

And I slowly let it out as I connect with my dog, and then I lead out. I do the same thing every single time my dog predicts, 'game is now on.' Now I didn't cover anywhere near the number of questions that we had here, so I'm hoping maybe I'll come back and do this again because there's a lot of really good questions. But I would like to recommend you check out the show notes.

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And for those of you who have a real interest in taking a deeper dive in things like puppy training or focus forward or fitness for your dog, or how to get your dog to understand how to weave or do contacts or how to get your head right. What I do for that mental preparation, or when I talk about visualization, "what does that mean, Susan? How do I visualize?"

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All of those things are topics that are in our workshops in Agility Nation. And honestly, when I put this podcast together, I had zero intention of talking about Agility Nation, but there's so many questions that would be well-served just by taking a look at one of those workshops. So let me tell you, in this four-day workshop that I just ran to audit, one day of those workshops was \$125.



Episode: #105

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And the feedback we got, it was beyond amazing. They loved our workshops that we did, our virtual workshops. Now I'm telling you that because you could get one of my 90 workshops that are in Agility Nation for, you know, a one-month membership. But the cool thing is if you wanted to sign up for Agility Nation, which normally is closed, but because I put this together, I said to my team, "Let's not only let people who watch this podcast get into Agility Nation, but get in at a very special price."

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So, you could get one workshop for \$125, or you could get them all for, I'm not going to tell you it's a pretty special price. Go to the show notes, click on the link, and you can have access to Agility Nation for a month. Get a deep dive on all of these topics because guess what? There's over 90 workshops. There's over 50 different fitness exercises you can learn for your dog, as well as so many other things.

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So that's all I'm going to talk about Agility Nation. If you're watching this on YouTube, please leave me a comment. Let me know what you thought of this episode. And is this something you'd like me to do a follow-up episode on answering more questions about dog sports? And if you have any, leave them in the comments as well. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Join Agility Nation](#) (Use the Discount Code: **SUSANSAID**)

[Susan's Instagram](#)

[Handling360](#)

[Podcast Episode 5: What is Shaping And How Can Dogs Shape Us](#)

[Podcast Episode 90: Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value](#)

[Vlog: Toning Up On Cue Clarity \(Hearing The Sirens\)](#)

[Recallers](#)

Episodes Covering Your Dog's Emotions:

[Episode 35: Pro Dog Training Tip To Improve Your Dog's Focus](#)

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

[Episode 103: Excited Or Suspicious Dog? Dealing With Your Dog's Emotions](#)

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

[Episode 38: 3 Keys to a Confident Dog](#)

[Episode 7: You, Your Dog, Maslow and Lizard Brain](#)

[Podcast Episode 79: Reduce Anxiety and Grow Your Dog's Confidence with These Pro Dog Training Tips](#)



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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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