Speaker Key

SG   Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG   Today's podcast might rub some people the wrong way because today, I'm going to be speaking in defense of what I believe to be the most misunderstood group of dogs on the planet. Today we talk about the high drive dog. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And I can say high drive dogs are the most misunderstood group of dogs on the planet because I, too, at one point 25 years ago, really misunderstood these dogs.

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I've been in the fortunate position to have owned and trained more than one high drive dog. And sadly, for those dogs, I did misunderstand them. Here's what happens, today so many dogs are being labeled as over-aroused when I believe in a lot of these cases; these dogs are just over-faced by the expectations of their trainer.

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And because of how these dogs express the stress of their frustration, they're labeled red lining, or they're over the top, or they're blowing off their trainers, or they're on their own agenda. And it makes me sad because if they were a dog who's stressed low, who's shut down, who got you to know looked at their owners worried, who tucked her tail and walked away from training, there'd be a heck of a lot more empathy for those dogs.

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People would be, "Oh buddy, you look afraid. Oh, I'm so sorry." No one would be calling names. They would be helping these dogs to be more confident. High drive dogs, on the other hand, people put a ton of effort into, "We've got to calm these dogs down. Let's swaddle them or let's give them essential oils or give them some medication or let's get them to lower their respiration or lower their heartbeat." So many things.

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And I'm not saying that there aren't over-aroused dogs who could benefit from one or all of those suggestions. But what I'm saying is there's a lot of dogs who are just high-energy, high drive dogs. Genetically they might've been bred for things like hunting or herding or protection work, and they're high drive.

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To say these dogs need to be calmed down is like taking an extrovert and saying, "You need to be slowing yourself down and be by yourself more and be calm and be relaxed." Or like taking an introvert and saying, "You need to put yourself out there more. You need to be out on stage. You need to be talking in front of a thousand people."

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Why can't we all just be who we are? Why can't we? If I'm the kind of person who gets energized by being around people, why is that wrong? And if you're the kind of person who needs time away once you've been around people, why is that wrong? It's not. And the same is true for dogs.

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So today, what I'm going to do is I'm going to share why I think a lot of over-aroused or high drive dogs are created. I'm going to also share the results of a little home study I did with my own moderate drive dog and how I made her appear like a high drive dog. And I'm also going to share the top 10 ways I think anybody with a high drive dog could do better by that dog. So, let's jump into it now.

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Let's just take any dog that's happy-go-lucky and really engaged and wants to play your game. And maybe they have a poor diet for their needs. Maybe they are on a diet with a lot of corn, AKA sugar. And let's say you get home from work, and you don't give them any exercise. You take them out, and you're gonna train them. Now you don't give them a warmup or a lead-in into that exercise, and you just start giving them things that you want to do.

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But here's the problem. These high drive dogs are loaded with high twitch muscles, meaning their feet can move, their head can move so much faster than the trainers are able to process that information and make decisions for what's best for the next part of their training. And so, what happens is we have this jacked-up dog with very little exercise and very little warmup who now has a trainer who's giving them poor training information through poor training mechanics. Or maybe they're trying to lump criteria, or they've got them in an environment that is over-facing them based on the level of understanding of the skill that you're trying to teach right now. And what results is, that dog fails.

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And because they feel like a cartoon character going, "What's next?! What's next?!" we think they're idiots, and we make them get back there. And then we get a little bit angry with them. Because of our frustration at not being able to do what we want to do, "It can't be us. It's got to be that dog." and so we might give them a time-out.

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And here's the thing a lot of the time, these dogs get inadvertent time-outs because you don't know what to do, and so you turn to your training bag to get something out. So now the dog's getting ignored, and so they get higher like, "Oh, I got to be better! I can do better! I can do better! Let me have another chance I can do better! I can do better! Getting better!"

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And what happens is that dog's gonna fail again and again and again. And because they keep trying and they're willing to come back to you every single time they get labeled as being over-aroused, they're red lining. Take a three-year-old kid because that's what the cognitive function of a dog is two and a half to three years old. You take a three-year-old kid, you jack them up on some sugar, and you have something that they really want, maybe some M&Ms.

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And you say, "Okay, you make that bed for me, and I'm going to give you an M&M's." And they make the bed, but you can't bounce a quarter off of it, and you say, "No, try it again." So, they are frustrated they do it again. And "No, I got to be able to bounce a quarter off it. No, do it again." At some point, really quickly, that child goes from happy and fun and let's go to throwing books off the bookshelf, having a tantrum, kicking and flailing on the ground, and maybe running out of the door crying.

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Now our dogs can do some of that. The throwing things would be biting us and jumping up and nipping at us. And the screaming is the barking, but yet they're labeled. And it isn't their fault. They've been set up for failure because of training plan design. Let me share with you an example of that. This is a series of video clips that I just shot last night to prove my point on this podcast.

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Before I begin, you need to know that all of my dogs have the criteria that when we go to the door, if I put my hand or anybody puts her hand on the handle, that means they need to go into a sit. And as the door gets open, they need to maintain that seat. When I give them a release cue, they can leave one dog at a time.

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Now, if they come across the door that door is open, they still can't break the barrier of that door. That is the criteria that I have for them. And I would say 99% of the dogs, every single dog in this household, will follow that criteria. But last night, I set up what I would call my moderately driven dog, Momentum.

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I set her up to fail and to be frustrated, and to show that anxiety in a way that she wouldn't normally show anxiety. Why is this abnormal? Because normally, I wouldn't set my dogs up to fail this way. So, in this first clip, I take Momentum by herself, no other dog around. I walked down the stairs, put my hand on the door. She knows exactly what to do. Flies into a sit.

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You can tell her body's relaxed because of the angle of the shoulder. She's a little bit more upright. She eagerly takes my treat when I offer it to her, everybody is happy. Example number two. Here, Momentum was all by herself again, but this time when I released her off the step, the door was open. She drives into position. Very happy again. Now I believe her body is slightly more tense. You can tell that the angle of her shoulder is a little lower. She's getting a little lower to the ground. Now I don't know why, but my hallucination is she's more excited because the opportunity to go outside is more obvious that she is anticipating I'm going to release her to go outside.

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So, let's go-to example number three. Very similar to example number one, the door's closed except all the other dogs are nearby. And so, the thought that we might be going outside is more possible in Momentum's mind. And so, we'd get a little more tenseness of the body, but again I asked her to go into a down, to go into a sit. She happily complies with everything I say and has no problem.

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Example four is a little tougher because this time, I've got my back to the door, not something that we usually do. I asked Momentum to come into my side, and then to show that she's very compliant, I asked her to go into a down, a stand. You can see she's happy. She's relaxed. She takes the food. Everybody's happy and now let's let the fun begin. I now call off all of the dogs around, and I leave Momentum up on the step. As the dogs come near, I open the door, and I wait for their choice. They all choose to sit. And once they're sitting, I call Momentum. She no longer can stop at the threshold.

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She stops half in half out, hoping that's good enough. Sometimes is anytime to a dog, guys. You be tight with your criteria and be consistent. So, I called Momentum back, and now I released the other dogs, and she's getting more and more excited. She goes into a sit. You can see the angle of her shoulder is getting really low, and look how resistant she is to taking my food reward.

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She does take it, but it takes a lot more effort. Now, these are six examples that I'm about to share with you; if you're watching this on YouTube, you'll be able to see it. But if you're listening to this podcast, I'm going to describe exactly what I see, so you won't be left behind. You will get to see exactly what's happening to my dog as I work through this at-home experiment with my dog.

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Example number six, I call all the dogs to an open door. They happily go into a sit. I released them all, and then I called Momentum, and she didn't even hesitate. My beautiful criteria. I could say, "Hey, she's blowing me off. She knows what to do! Come on, man! You! Get your back here!" And I could get angry at my high drive dog. "She's over-aroused! What that heck!" And now she goes into a sit, but I try to get her to sit with her back to the open door. Absolutely no freaking way.

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Now I could say, "She knows this; she's blowing me off. She's just red lining. Like she's intentionally doing something to me, guys." No, this is a dog who I've suddenly changed the criteria for. Yeah, she knows how to do all those things, but I've changed the environment. The environment presents everything to the dog. It's like the skill is not learned. Now some environmental changes aren't a big deal. Like me asking her to do these behaviors with the door closed.

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She can't even do a simple sit. You can hear that she's starting to vocalize. She's getting frustrated. If I kept this up, she might've even nipped at me. I don't know. I absolutely couldn't get compliance from her, but it wasn't her fault. It was human error. It was an experimental design. It was trainer mechanics. It was the trainer's plan. It was all on me.

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And 90%, I don't know what the percentage is, guys, but I like to give the dogs that benefit of the doubt. I believe that most of the dogs I see online that people are blaming them and saying they're over-aroused and need to check into 77 different other programs before they'll ever have success. Most of these dogs are over-faced by the challenge you're presenting in your training.

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Here's what I'd like you to do. I would like you to go to my YouTube video that's entitled 'Perch Work (Pivots and Spins).' And even if your dog knows perch work, I want you to take your high drive dog, and I want you to do this. And I would like you to recognize your dog's breathing is probably a lot lower. The vocalization is a lot less. The dog's focus is a lot greater. Why? Because that experimental design is dead easy for any dog to have success with. So, what can you do? If you somehow identify with some of the scenarios that I've painted here in this podcast, maybe you've got a dog, maybe a working Cocker or a Malinois or a Border Collie or a high drive Poodle, you know, it's not unique to any one breed.

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There are dogs within every breed that have various levels of drive, and it doesn't mean they all have to be calm in order to have success. So, what I'm going to give you are the ten ways that you can improve your training with your high drive dog. And trust me, I know because I've made a lot of these mistakes.

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I wrote a book about one of my first high drive dogs, Buzzy, in the book *Shaping Success*. Now all of the lessons that Buzzy taught me that I wrote about in this book were benefited by Swagger because Swagger was a really high drive dog. But he was the dog of anyone's dreams to train because I knew what to do, and I knew what not to do. I knew how to keep frustration down, and I knew how to keep success up. And as a result, he was one of the most decorated agility dogs of his day. So here we go, ten things that we can do for our high drive dogs.

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Number one, be empathetic. Remember the three-year-old child who's showing frustration by throwing things and screaming, and having a tantrum. You need to keep your dog focused and successful. So be empathetic, and above all, please do not label or blame your dog. I promise no matter what you're feeling right now, and this may sting a little bit.

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I promise it is not the dog's fault. It is your lack of understanding or your execution or your planning of the training that's flawed. It is not, repeat after me; it is not the dog's fault. Be empathetic. ***Number two.*** Let me just say I don't know what your definition of free shaping is, but for me, in most cases, especially with a high drive, dog-***free shaping is just another way of describing a complete frustration shaping.***

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So, I took two Border Collies very closely related to each other, and I shaped identical behavior. With my skills, how my skills had improved over the ten years, with how my skills had improved over the 20 years, and the experience that I'd gained through the dogs that I trained during that time, I was able to train my dog Encore to get the exact same behavior 100 times faster than I was able to train my dog Stoni.

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Now, it would be easy to say, "Well, Stoni must've just been stupid, right?" Stoni was probably one of the smartest dogs I have ever owned. She was brilliant. She was a gift. And I just can't say anything but amazing things about her. It wasn't Stoni's fault. It was my interpretation. It was my execution. It was my flawed training. It was me as a trainer, and nothing shows it better than that blog post.

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So please go and look up that blog post. We'll put a link in the show notes so you can see what I mean by how you create anxiety and frustration in a dog and how it gets expressed by the dog. So free shaping should not be a session where you offer the dog, you're standing there with something the dog really wants, and you're waiting for them to like whittle you a whistle out of a piece of wood. The environment needs to be manipulated.

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All the good things I've talked about here on Shaped by Dog about how to create a successful shaping session. All of that needs to be in play in order to do a really successful shaping session that isn't one of frustration. ***Number three, those high drive dogs need a massively high rate of reinforcement.*** That's why I suggested you all go check out that YouTube video 'perch work, pivots, and spins' where you can see there's such a high rate of reinforcement.

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It's almost impossible for the dog to fail because of the way I am constantly manipulating the environment. A high rate of reinforcement will lower frustration. And if you do this successfully every time you train, you're going to find that your dog's vocalization comes down, that tenseness of their body comes down. The softness of their eye happens. The focus for their work starts to increase.

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Number four, consider not using a clicker with a high drive dog. Now you might want to do a little experimenting, a home experiment of your own. But my experience with high drive dogs is that if I use a clicker, the dog's level of energy goes up. They get higher, which I use to my benefit when I'm training a dog that appears to have not a lot of drive. I will use a clicker a lot for those dogs.

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Buzzy taught me this first, and then I was training a student's dog, another really high drive red Border Collie coincidentally. And it was something that this dog got so that it was an electronic nose touch that after she made it beep, we would give her food, and the dog got so obsessed by the sound of the beep she stopped taking the treats. She just wanted to make the click happen. Similarly, I found that with Buzz, he got more and more frantic, and the longer it went between his clicks.

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He wanted the click, and oftentimes he wouldn't care if he got his reward or not. Of course, I would always make him take his reward, but high drive dogs would go to possibly using a word, but if it was possible, just-food chuck. And I mean, if that makes a dog look at you, then I have to go to a marker word. Maybe use a remote feeder, but eliminate the beep. Eliminate the click anytime you can.

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Number five, use big chunks of food. Food that takes a bit of time for the dog to chew up. Now I know some dogs will just swallow it but use those big chunks anyway. And I know for those of you with little dogs, it means that you're going to have shorter training sessions. But again, my observation and over the 30 years of training a lot of high drive dogs is that the more satiated the dog gets, the bigger the chunks of food, the more they eat, the calmer they get.

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We call that the cookie coma for dogs that are just moderate drive that the more cookies they get, the slower they get. The same is true with a high-drive dog. So a big chunk, I used to use big chunks of stewing beef with Buzzy when I did obedience with him because that's where I wanted him to be the calmest. I wanted zero vocalization. ***Number six is a mind shift for you. Every time we train, we aren't evaluating the dog skills; we're evaluating our skills.*** The dog is just demonstrating what we've taught. So, if you keep that mind shift that, "Hey, I'm going out to evaluate my own skills. And my dog is just going to be the mirror that shows them back to me.", you will never get mad at your dog.

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You'll never get frustrated. You will all go, "Hmmm, that's not what I thought it was training. So, let's go back to square one and see if I can figure out how to do that better." It's going to be a complete mind blow when you get that mind shift right.

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Number seven, have a very high success rate when you're training. Now you're going to say, "Well, Susan, you already said that. You said have a high rate of reinforcement." But with a high drive dog, in particular, you can have a very high rate of reinforcement and a low success rate because high drive dogs can offer so many other behaviors in between. You might be giving a lot of cookies per minute, but your success rate might be low.

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Again, that YouTube '[perch work](#), pivots, and spins' shows you how you can have a very high success rate by manipulating the environment and minimizing the opportunity for the dog to choose incorrectly. ***Number eight. Teach the dog these cues.*** "Search" means you can release from the control position and look for food. "Break" means you are free to release from a control position and look for the value, and hopefully, they're going to spin around and look at me because I'm the value, and you could use a word that means you can find the toy. I say, "Get it," but if you want to name your toys, I'm doing a little bit of that in agility.

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I want your dog to have [clarity at what ends control behavior](#). I'm going to say that one more time. Your dogs need clarity at what is the criteria that end control behaviors. Think about yourself as a little kid on a long car ride. Have any of you said this phrase? "Are we there yet?" Because in my hallucination is that's what's going through my dog's mind when I'm trying to build duration with a control behavior.

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"Is this done yet?" "Are we good? Are we done yet?" But once they have clarity of those three cues at what ends the behavior, you'll see a calmness come over that dog. And this could hold true for dogs in agility. You lead out from the start line; the ones that are breaking the start lines are the ones that have unclear, inconsistent criteria at what releases them from the start line.

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And you're going to say, "No, no, no. My dog knows it." No, they don't because I bet you there's a time or two where you wanted them to hold a sit, but their butt was off the ground before you released them. Or their butt was all the way off the ground, and then you're like, "Well, they're still haven't moved their feet, I'm going to release them."

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Or their front feet are paddling, and you release them. Or they're walking towards the first jump, and you release them, or they just blow by you, and you keep going. That's what's led to the dog getting more and more frantic at the start line because now they're completely unsure what their criteria really is. That leads us to ***point number nine, forget your outcome goals***. I don't want you to say, "I've got to get this done so I can get to this trial." "I want to win this tournament, or by the time my dog's this age, I need to have them to be on this team or this podium, or I need to have them host trained by the time they're this age, I need to get this done."

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Forget outcome goals and look at progress goals. So, look at where you are now. Look at where you were last week. It might be the same place. That's your baseline. And now look at what you can do to build confidence and knowledge, and education into your dog to move the needle, to progress your skills, and do it for every area of your training.

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And that leads me to the *10th and final point. Love your dog.* And you would be surprised the number of people with high drive dogs when I've asked that question, "Do you love your dog?" and they pause. And they say, "Well, I like him." And if you can't say you love them, high drive dogs are going to give you way too much frustration.

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Please do them a favor and pass them on to a home where somebody will love them. Because you will not be able to shift your mindset. You will not be able to put in the time and find joy in looking for progress. You are going to get frustrated in what these dogs need most of all from us. They need the freedom to not have to prove anything to us.

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Love your dog unconditionally. Don't be disappointed. Don't be frustrated. Don't be angry. I know it's easy to say, but if you go back to that mind shift, I promise you better days are ahead for you and your high drive dog. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources to Visit Now:

YouTube Video: Susan Garrett's Perch Work Dog Tricks (Pivots and Spins)

Video Blog: Positive Dog Training and the Difference in Shaping

PDF Download: Stages of Learning Progressions Chart

Resources to Review:

Podcast Episode 35: Pro Dog Training Tip To Improve Your Dog's Focus

Podcast Episode 103: Excited Or Suspicious Dog? Dealing With Your Dog's Emotions

Podcast Episode 106: Consent In Dog Training: The Misuse, Misunderstanding And Misapplication

Blog Post: Post: Got D.A.S.H. (Desire, Accuracy, Speed and Habitat)?

Book: Shaping Success by Susan Garrett

Podcast Episode 5: What is Shaping And How Can Dogs Shape Us

Podcast Episode 06: The Art of Manipulation

Podcast Episode 69: Clicker Training: Will It Work For Every Dog?

Podcast Episode 52: The Five Most Common Words in Dog Training and Which Ones I Never Use

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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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