

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG In the big picture of dog training, how important is it to be consistent really? I mean, if you don't want to have behaviors like on the scale that my dogs are, do you really need to be that consistent? That is the topic of today's podcast. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I'm Susan Garrett. And today's podcast was inspired by a letter that we received, and it goes like this.

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“Susan will positive reinforcement training work when there isn't much consistency between my husband and myself? He says that I'm a control freak.” This is similar to the letter that was the topic of podcast [episode number 49](#), but I am going to bring up some new points. But you might want to check out that one as well. Back to the letter.

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“He says that I'm a control freak because I want the dogs to sit at the door before I let them go out. He opens the door and just lets them bolt. I basically stopped trying to do any training because it seems everything I do he undoes. I have three dogs. Any suggestions would be helpful. Thank you.” So, let's take a look at this thing called consistency and why do we even care if our dog sits at the door. And are we being kind of control freaks?

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We've got a lot of questions to unpack here. Let's start by reminding you the two big ways, you know, there's all kinds of ways, but two big ways of training dogs. And there's training a dog to move away from something that is punishment, there's training dogs to move towards something that would be something they like, as in reinforcement.

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And there's people who use a mixture of those things and today's podcast is not to debate which is right or wrong. Anyway, it's what's right or wrong for you and where you are on your journey with dogs but that's for another discussion. Those of us who are choosing to train our dogs with reinforcement, wanting them to move towards something. There's really two different divisions here.

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So, there's the world of luring, where of course the dogs are going to move towards it, but it's kind of like putting a carrot in front of a mule, you know, they'll go so far and then they're like, “Okay, I'm done”. Or the dog might say, “I'm over that”. Or they'll go “Hmm. That meatball's good. But man, oh man, that deer looks like a lot more fun. So, I'm going to chase it.” So, there's some limitations with when your training is lure based, but it doesn't evolve into what we do, we actually don't use lures here much or at all. And that is, we're shaping behavior.



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And I told you all of that to get to this one line. When you're shaping behavior, you're creating a [transfer of value](#). So, the reinforcement value of the food, the toy, chasing somebody or something, that reinforcement value gets transferred into you. And that's why we're doing all these things.

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So, let's unpack now the scenario of, well, what if your husband's doing one thing and you're doing something else? I'm going to give you two examples. First of all, a friend of mine who she trains her dog very much the way we subscribe, and she has her dog sit at the door and her dog isn't you know, allowed to beg at the table, etc. Her husband has completely different rules. The sit at the door is a sometimes thing. If he feels like it or if the dog bolts out the door he might say, "Hey, Hey, come on back here."

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Most of the time it's just "let's go outside". And they all go out together. They retrieve in the backyard, but if a dog doesn't bring it back that's okay. He was out doing yard work anyway. And while he eats his meal, the dog always gets some from the plate. So, guess what? The dog always begs from him.

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And so, there are two different sets of rules. Does that mean that because he isn't creating any rules or following up on the rules you'd like to see enforce, that means that my friend's, let's call her Kim. My friend Kim has no hope of training her dog. Oh, nay nay. Think about this, if you have a dog in a fenced-in backyard and on the outside of the fence, is this massive, like Shangri-La for dogs, right? There's people handing out treats all over, there's dogs playing fetch, there's dogs chasing dogs, there's agility. There's everything you want outside that fence.

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Now the dogs inside this wooden fence and they just were kind of like, you know, trying to look through the cracks of the fence and notice, "Hey, this board's open. Hey, I just pushed through it and I'm free." Well guess what? The next day they're going to go out in the backyard and how long will it take for them to go over and start pushing the boards beside the one that got them out until they figure out which one got them out. And then "I'm free! Back to Shangri-La!"

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Now after days and days and days of this, do you think your dog will ever go over to the boards over here that never ever let them out and start pushing on them? They won't, will they? Because dogs understand how to earn reinforcement. And so, if your husband is a gaping hole in the fence, your dog knows to expect that. But that doesn't mean your dog's going to expect the same with you. Because you have never been that gaping hole in the fence. You have always held firm to 'in order to get this, you have to do that. And so, it is never a waste of your time.

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Now let's talk about the consistency within what you do. What if "Ah Susan, some days I'm in a hurry. Like I'm dressed for work and my dog doesn't sit. I got to let him out. Is it, like just once in a while, that's alright, right?" My mentor, the iconic Bob Bailey, he has this rule of thumb that if 10% of the time you make an error in your training, it's not going to affect the overhaul behavior if 90% of the time it's really good. But here's where people make a mistake.



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They say, "Well 90% of the time my dog is doing the sit and I'm opening the door and they're going out. But you know what I was really in a hurry, and I let them out because I was ready, I had to go to work. And then I was late for work, and I just had to get them out. And then I came home from work, but I had to go out to a meeting, so I just had to let them out."

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And so, what's going to happen is your dog, they're going to recognize the gaping hole in the fence. They're going to recognize, "Well, when she's all dressed like this and a little bit agitated with different energy, it's pretty close to 100% of that time we don't have to sit. "That fence is broken babe, we're going!" So do you see that? That 10% is 10% of that situation. So, people in dog agility they say, "Oh, my dog never breaks a start line at home, but in the ring yeah, he doesn't hold it but that's, like less than 10% of the total. We do a lot of stays at home."

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Again, it's a hundred percent of the time in the ring. So even if it was like 50% of the time in the ring, your dog's still going to be pushing that fence board to see if, "Hey, we're trial time. Probably don't have to stay at this one. Let's give it a go." And so that's how criteria works. And I want to share with you how you can possibly get your husband on board because we have to consider what is your husband's perception is his reality.

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He is seeing a control freak. You are making the dog do something because you want to show that you have more power over that dog. But what if we could show him a different picture in that it isn't about the sit, it's actually about the release. We need the dog to understand 'you do this, then you get that'. I want to share how important transfer value is because my late husband who loved the dogs dearly, he was much like my friend that I called Kim.

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My late husband really didn't have many rules that he upheld. And here's the interesting thought, he fed the dogs almost exclusively. I almost never fed the dogs. So, they got manna from heaven twice a day, no rules. I mean, all they knew was to be in their crates because I established that rule. But you know, he didn't have to enforce it they just did that. He delivered, you know, your breakfast. You don't have to do anything. He didn't care if your feet were in, were out, you were nearby, you're in somebody else's crate, you were standing kind of close, you got twice a day, you got these amazing meals.

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So, all this reinforcement cookies for nothing. The other thing that I would share with you about John is he also gave them bedtime cookies. And when they wanted to go outside, they never had to sit. Rarely, rarely did they have to sit. And if they sat kind of crouched, if they kind of near the ground, that's fine. "Just— okay, go on. Break. You can go. You can get out there." And so, from the outside you go, okay Susan control freak you make sure that you don't feed the dogs unless they're in their crate. You have these rules to live by. And if you remember from [episode 117](#), which was my last episode, I spoke about how all of these lifetime guidelines of transferring value with my release word helped create value for me.



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And so, my dogs on an annual basis had about 6,400 times they heard the word “break” from me that helped build value. Because what happens after the word “break”? You get to do something you love. Go outside, leave the crate, and play tug with me. Every time you hear the word break, you're getting reinforced by what happens after.

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So, those are two different scenarios. With my late husband John, no rules. Really the only rules ‘don't go on his coach’, that annoyed him, but basically no rules. And the vast majority of the food rewards ever given to those dogs were given by John for no reason. Now, if John was out in the yard and a car should happen to come up and my dogs would go, “Oh, company!” and they go running over and he'd call them, they rarely would come back.

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If he was in the kitchen and asked them to sit, they were likely to sit because there's a possibility that he might feed them. My dogs really didn't listen to John that well, because there was never the transfer of value. Because all of the reinforcement had zero contingencies to it. I get what I want when I want.

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Imagine if you had somebody who worked for you that you paid them from working from nine to five and they showed up at 11 sometimes and they left at two and they sometimes just had a little nap in their office instead of actually working but they still got the same paycheck every time. Eventually you would find they do less and less and less because they still have the same paycheck every time.

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And so that's what happens when your [rules are sloppy or non-existent](#). So, what we can share with your husband is not about you being a control freak. It's about you really wanting to be that person that trains the dog in a way that they're moving towards. Because if we don't get that transfer of value, if we don't get our dogs seeing value in us, then the only thing that my late husband John could have done if he needed to stop my dogs from doing something would be to yell at them. To apply punishment which he wouldn't do. He just didn't care.

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And so, you've got those two choices. Do you want a dog who moves away because you've punished him? “Don't do that. You get off! No! Ah-ah! Stop it.” So, then you have a dog who is a little more cautious of you who learns ‘she doesn't like me on the couch when she knows I'm on the couch so I just have to learn what the times when she might know I'm on the couch, all those other times I'm not on the couch’ versus teaching a dog to not want to get on the coach. Right? One is the dog does something, we're living in do-land, the other they're moving away.



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And so, have that conversation with your husband. And then you can say, "Hey, I'm okay if you don't want that transfer of value. If you just want to hang out with the dogs without rules. But I'd like to give it a go. I'd like to try what this Susan Garrett person is talking about and try to see if I can start building a contingency of 'when you sit at the door, you get to go outside for a car ride'."

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"If you sit before I take your leash off you then get permission to go for a swim in the pond'. I like to start to get some of those 6,400 repetitions in a year that Susan gets that is a transfer of value. Even if that doesn't make a difference in my overall dog training. Would you be supportive of me doing that?"

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"You don't have to do it yourself because Susan's shared with me you can be the gaping hole in the fence, but I'd like to be that strong board that my dog can rely on. That's going to be there consistently applying the same contingencies." See what your husband says and let us know how it goes for you.

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I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 49: How Your Questions Instantly Improve or Sabotage Your Dog Training](#)

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

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

[Podcast Episode 117: What's More Important Than Your Dog Training Sessions?](#)



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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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