

Conditioned Responses: The Magic Every New Puppy (And Dog) Owner Must Know About

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Have you ever picked up your dog's bowl and walked across the room and there could be nothing in it, yet your dog gets excited? Or maybe picked up a set of car keys and walked to the door or have your dog go cray cray when the doorbell rang? If you answered yes to any of that then you my friend have experienced the magic of conditioning.

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And today I'm going to share with you why it's so important you understand what's going on and how you can use it to your advantage. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Conditioning is something we've spoke about on this podcast many times. On [episode number 39](#) I talked about deciding if a dog is being stubborn or is it really conditioning that's gone on?

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Now if you look at things like your dog food bowl. If you have a dog who loves food, then they're going to go crazy when they see the bowl because they've been conditioned to expect food is about to be delivered when you see the bowl.

Think back to the Russian scientist Pavlov and he did the experiment where he took an unconditioned response (ringing a bell) paired it with an unconditioned stimulus (a piece of meat) and very quickly the unconditioned response became a conditioned response because it predicted to something that the animal loved, or wanted to have happened, and that was a piece of meat appeared.

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All right. And so that's exactly what happens when a dog sees a dog food bowl. I'm going to go through a few things. Now, what happens is when animals are being conditioned? One of three things can happen. They can go, "Oh my gosh, that's good." "Oh, my gosh, that's bad." or "That's meaningless. Pfft. I've learned to ignore that." All right. Now as dog owners we don't want the "Oh my gosh. That's bad" response. Believe me.

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You may say, "Oh, no, no, no Susan, I want my dog to know that it's bad to piddle on the floor." No. No you don't. You want your dog to know it's [good to piddle outside](#). Because if our dog learns that it's bad to piddle on the kitchen floor, they may potentially learn you don't like it when they piddle on the kitchen floor but going behind the couch where you can't see them is okay. You're just one of those weird people who don't like to see them piddle. Okay. They'll just hide it.

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And so, we really don't want a dog to be conditioned to something is bad because a lot of times that could lead to fears, phobias, and things that really interferes with their joy of life, their joy of living. So today I'm going to share with you how you can use that great magical power of conditioning and use it to create habits that makes life with your dog or puppy. And I'm hoping people with new puppies are listening to this, because this my friend is going to make all the difference in the world. I'm going to go through a list of things.



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And I want you to think in your own dogs, is this good, bad, or it's just you know meaningless. That's meaningless. Good, bad, or meaningless is what we're looking for. So, you put your hand in your pocket. If you're a person who keeps treats in their pocket and there's been a lot of repetitions with a hand in the pocket means something good is going to happen, then you may have your dog's attention all around you when you put your hand in your pocket. That would be ding-ding good. For some of you, it might be meaningless. I don't actually ever carry treats in my pocket. I pick up the dog food bowl. Just walking across the room. There might be nothing in it, but there's been a history because that's what learning is.

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Learning is a [behavior change based on experience](#). That's all. And so, the experience of getting food in the bowl, I've learned that that bowl signals something good's about to happen. Right. What about the doorbell rings? If your dog loves people, then they may get excited start bouncing up and down, maybe barking, circling - because the doorbell is a signal that something exciting is about to happen in their world.

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What about your dog's name? Something good? Something meaningless? Oh, I hope it doesn't mean something bad. It should be no matter what tone you say your dog's name in, [it should always be something good](#). But unfortunately, especially with new puppy owners you say the dog's names so much, the puppy learns that it is meaningless. We're going to fix that at the end of this podcast.

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Okay. What about you lunging trying to catch your dog? I bet you for most dogs it's, well it's like a good bad. It's good because this is fun, but it's bad because don't get caught. Now you've grabbed those kids' socks and you're racing around the house. Do not let them catch you now. Woohoo. So, there are things that get conditioned in a way that we don't want them to, but this is the magic of conditioning. We can change it. We can intentionally condition something different. If you have a cue: sit, down, come, that you have to repeat more than once like your dog is saying that it isn't a conditioned response.

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It isn't a— now I'm not saying you learned it through conditioning. The dog hopefully has learned that when I hear this word it means - boom. You may have shaped the behavior with rewarding with cookies, but the word itself means I do something out if it's been trained correctly. If it's been trained incorrectly the conditioning might mean to your dog when I hear that word, I check out my environment, see if there's anything else going around and then maybe check in with the person talking to me, wah-wah-wah (Charlie Brown's teacher) and see if maybe they have something better than what I can find in the environment.

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Okay. That is how cues start to become meaningless. We're going to fix that. Yeah. We're going to fix that. Okay. Let's fix these things. It's so simple. Number one, I want you to make a list of all the things in your dog's world that are good, that their response is good. And it could be person, place, thing, time of day, something you're wearing. I know every time I put on my boots my dogs know she's going outside, and we want to go to and [so they get excited](#).



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The sight of me putting on my shoes or boots means very good chance they're going to be going to do something with me. Maybe we're going to the building to train, or maybe we're going for a big walk. And so that is a conditioned response. Picking up a leash for some of you maybe a conditioned response.

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Now, some of you who go for a walk may have a dog that when you turn around to go home, the turnaround to go home is a conditioned response and they put on the brakes. "Oh, nay nay, I'm not done." Likewise. You might have a dog that you might go to a dog park, not something I'm a big fan of. There's an asterisk to that. Some of them may be but generally not.

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But you go to the dog park, you let your dog off leash they're having a great old time and then you want to go home. They see you pick up the leash that conditioned presence of the leash at home meant "Woohoo! We're going to the dog park." the conditioned presence of the leash at the dog park means, "Uh, no, we're not done playing with Jimmy. Yeah. We got a game on over here and scores tied and oh nay nay not going home."

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All right. We don't want those responses. Let's talk about how we're going to fix this. Let's start by just using something that the dog's already conditioned to think is wonderful and use it to our advantage. So go grab your dog dish. You're gonna take your dog dish. You're going to put a treat in it and put it on the ground in front of your dog. What's your dog gonna do? "Well Susan of course they're going to dive their face in and they're going to eat it." Now maybe your dog knows [ItsYerChoice](#) and they're going to wait. That's fine too. Tell them they can get that cookie, and all is good.

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Now what you're going to do is you're going to do that two or three times until they anticipate that the cookie is going to be in the bowl. The fourth time, you're going to put an empty bowl down. The dog is going to - now if your dog really knows [ItsYerChoice](#) and they're not moving then don't put the bowl right on the ground - just put a bowl in front of them. So, you know, you can be telling them to get it. So, they're not in a control position. I don't want them to wait. I want them to just stick their head in the bowl.

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The fourth time, you put the bowl on the ground or if you've been holding it, hold it out. The dog's going to put their face in there's going to be nothing there. And you're going to say good and immediately drop a cookie in the bowl. Like the cookie should come in before their face even gets out if you can be that fast but the word 'good' has to happen first. Then you're going to go back to a cookie in the bowl and then you're going to go back to no cookie, "good."

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What I want the dog to do is start putting their head in the bowl when there's nothing in there. Why would they do that? Because we are shaping them. We're taking a conditioned response "I see this bowl and it's good." And we're now [shaping a behavior](#) associated with that. It's easy to shape now because we've already got a conditioned response to start with. Now you've got a dog who will stick their face in the bowl. "Okay Susan, that's really fun. What else?"



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Now if you have a new puppy, you can do something like take their collar, put it in the bowl, put it on the ground. They're going to be putting their face in the bowl. You're going to say "good" and drop the cookie in the collar in the bowl. So, the collar's round in the bowl and then the cookie goes in the collar. After a few times of that take the collar out of the bowl and put it on the ground. And the dog goes to put their head in and put a cookie in the collar. Now they're targeting the collar on the ground. You could hold it up in your hand and have them put their nose in.

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What we're doing is teaching them that this collar is good. This collar is fun. Now you can undo the collar, go to put it around their neck, take it off, give them a cookie. You can do the same thing with your leash. Put the leash in the bowl, have them target the clip on the leash. Now we've built in power to things we're going to use on our walk: our leash, our collar.

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So, when you go to put a collar on your dog you might go to just about clip it on and then take it off and give them a cookie walk away. Do that a couple of times and then clip it on and maybe clip the leash on, walk them a couple of steps, give a cookie, take it off. So, for new puppies this is a great way to get them used to wearing a collar and a leash. And the association that "Hey, good, bad, indifferent. Oh, this is good. This is good."

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You know I as a child had my first root canal at the dentist office when I was 10 years old. Guess what my conditioning to a dentist office was? Not good and definitely not meaningless. It definitely was 'This is a bad place.' The sound of a dentist drill very, very, very bad place for me. All right. So, we want our dog to say this is good. All right. Let's now talk about we're going for a walk. If you have a dog who when they're heading back home puts on the brakes this is what you're going to do.

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You're going to go out, you're going to turn left or whatever direction you [go for your walk](#), walk three steps, turn around, walk two steps back, give your dog a cookie and then start going back in the direction the dog wants to go. Every so often you're going to turn around and walk two or three steps, give them a cookie, maybe walk six steps and turn around and go back. What we're doing is we're conditioning them that this is a good way and then when you're walking home don't forget to give them rewards so that there is meaning to that walk home.

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Yes, there's meaning to the walk out. It means 'I'm going to the park.' But they might want to be out there longer than you have time for so they're more likely to put on the brakes. This is a way to make sure that they're going to love walking both directions. What about that dog that you take off the leash at the park and then when you go to hook it back on it doesn't matter?

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"I love getting the leash on at home, but I'm not happening here." First of all, how is your recall? If your dog's name is bad or meaningless then should you have really taken them off leash at the dog park? Like that's kind of like jumping in the Ferrari when it has no brakes, right? You have to wait until it runs out of gas before you can do anything now.



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And if you've got that much time that's great, but don't take that chance unless you've got time to work it out. And here's what I would do. If I'm taking my dog to a dog park and I don't have a great recall here is what I would do. What is your dog's response to you sitting or kneeling on the ground at home? Chances are they're going to come running in like "What are you doing?" And they're all goofy and excited.

So, at the dog park when the dog is like not first when they get there, like when there's a lull in the action, just kneel on the ground, the dog is going to come near you, grab the collar, give them a cookie, tell them to go play.

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If you did that routinely at the dog park and eventually you wouldn't even have to kneel down. When there's a lull in the action call your dog over, grab the collar, clip on the leash, give them a cookie, take off the leash, tell them to go play.

What we're doing is we're teaching the dog that the leash at the dog park is not a terminal event. It doesn't mean all fun ends because you've got a leash on. We're building the value of putting a leash on at the dog park because we're [taking the value of having fun](#) at the dog park.

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I had to do this exact thing with almost every puppy I owned at bedtime. Because we would have fun, they played [Crate Games](#) and then I would put them in their crate at night and they would go, "No, I'm not. I'm not going to go in." and my last puppy would sit beside the crate, "Hmmm yeah, I don't think I want to go in there." "But why Susan? We do all sorts of Crate Games?" Because at night it's a terminal thing.

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So, I just get into the habit when I have a new puppy is I'll put them to bed at night. I'll go and do my teeth. I'll come back. I'll let them out. They can walk around and chase, follow me around. I don't play any games. I don't want it to be crazy fun. And then I'll call them again, put them in the crate, I always give them a few cookies when I put them in the crate at night, and then we go to bed.

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I might do that once or twice. Now I won't give them a handful of cookies every time because I don't want to fill them up because they're going to bed for the night. Right. I just want to use conditioning, the magical power of conditioning, I want to use that to my advantage. So, any time there is a terminal end to fun, a terminal end to activity that the dog loves, make sure you rehearse that end many times before it actually really is the end.

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And then what we're doing is conditioning the puppy that any time you call me something amazing is going to happen. Now that is a rudimentary approach and I promise you it will make all the difference in the world because it truly is like magic. But if you would like to learn more about how to make sure that your puppy grows up not learning that their name is meaningless, not learning that the cues sit or down or come or anything is optional. If you would like to have that kind of relationship where you play with your puppy and they're learning, because learning is just a change of behavior based on experiences and your puppy can learn to be exceptionally well-behaved while having fun playing games with you.



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If you would like that then we will [put a link in the show notes](#) so that you can join for four months into one of our online programs. Name of the program is *Home School the Dog*, and you will be able to deep dive into all of this. Sure, you can spend the next few hours googling conditioning and puppies and get some other people's ideas or you can save a lot of time and with this link save a huge investment because I'm [offering you Home School the Dog at 80% off](#) just because you listened to this podcast.

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I hope you take me up on my offer. I'd love to see you in our classroom because I want all the puppies and all the rescue dogs and all the dogs starting midlife that are learning to be conditioned to have an amazing relationship with their dog. I'd like you all to be part of our community. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Home School the Dog:

[Join Home School the Dog on Susan's special opportunity](#)

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 39: Is a Resistant Dog a Stubborn Dog?](#)

[Podcast Episode 48: Potty Train Your Puppy in a Week \(Easy 3 Step Process\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 44: Using Coincidences and Positive Associations in Dog Training](#)

[Blog Post: A GAME to Preserve Your Dog's Recall Cue](#)

[Blog Post: Identifying And Using Positive Triggers For Your Dog](#)

[ItsYerChoice Game](#)

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

[Crate Games Online](#)

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

[YouTube Playlist for Loose Leash Walking](#)



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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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