

## Remove Confusion And Build Your Dog's Confidence With One Simple Dog Training Habit

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG If I told you I have a simple dog-training rule that I use with all of my dogs and I teach it to all my students and this simple rule will actually exponentially improve your dog training. It will help you overcome challenges with your dog much faster. Think of a scale that you're working on right now. It will help your dog grow confidence so much faster.

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Best of all, it doesn't cost you anything. You don't have to buy any special treats. You don't have to have any special tools. All you need to know you have within you right now, and you will be able to implement it right after this podcast. Are you ready? Let's go. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog.

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And if you are watching this podcast on YouTube, I would love for you to be part of our community. And all you have to do is hit the subscribe button. And if you would like to know when our next podcast is coming out, hit the notification bell as well as long as you're here. And as long as you're here trust me, with that opening you can't help but like this video. Please go ahead and hit the like button. Let's go.

This is a rule that I observed in people when I was teaching seminars back in the late 90s. I actually started data collecting because I saw the same habit, the same rehearsal of a habit in people with their dogs over and over again. And here's what makes dog training success happen is you have to acquire habits of success. That is, you rehearse success with your dog. And the more that you are not rehearsing success the more you're working against your dog's opportunity to be successful.

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And here's what happens. When you are doing things that is confusing to your dog, you're going to see your dog's focus is going to go down. Obviously, their success in dog training is going to go down. Their motivation to work with, especially soft dog, they may just lose motivation. They're going to get more frustrated. You'll see more anxiety behavior, like the dog is leaving work and getting the zoomies or sniffing. And the stress, and anxiety is going to get up.

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All of this can be eliminated. And here's what I observed that there was a ratio for every 30 people I taught, two people were able to implement this as a way of a habit. And I'm hoping after this podcast, you are going to increase that ratio to three people, 3 of 30.

So, 2 of 30. And it's kind of like mindfulness. It's about being present to what's happening to your dog. And it goes like this. If you interrupt your dog when he's working to let him know, that won't earn reinforcement. So it may be that you stop them, and you call them back to start again. Or you know, you give them a non-reward marker which you know ideally if you're listening to this podcast, you're going to eventually learn that non-reward markers are really blaming the dog for somewhere where you messed up. I'm not saying I never use them, but it is rare. And I never use them when a dog can be thinking for themselves.



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But I digress. I think I have a podcast on [how I use non-reward markers](#) or if I use non-reward markers. We'll leave a link in the show notes to that. So, if you interrupt a dog to let him know that won't earn you reinforcement then you gosh darn it better get as good at interrupting him when he gets it right. Because dog training, I've said this many times, [is a conversation](#). So as a dog trainer and if you own a dog, you're a dog trainer. So as a dog owner, you ask the dog a question and the dog gives you an answer.

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In this environment, this is what I think the answer is. So, if you say "can you sit?", "can you fetch me up that stick?", "can you walk nicely beside me on a leash?", "can you do this agility sequence?", "can you greet my guests nicely?", and when the dog gives you their response in the form of a behavior and it's not one you like, you've got to accept it's his behavior.

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He's telling you in this environment with these distractions and this level of excitement, this is all the answer I can give you. And we've got to believe him. So where does a 2 of 30 come in? I've talked about in podcast [episode number 126](#). I talked about starting with the end in mind when we're teaching something that could be a behavior chain.

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So, let's take a simple retrieve. It is a behavior chain of six behaviors. So first now you could do a retrieve without some of these, but let's just say a simple retrieve. We ask our dog to sit, we throw a toy, and then we check that our dog is still sitting. They haven't paddled their feet. They haven't moved halfway forward. They haven't stood up. They haven't laid down. They haven't gone into a crouch to get ready to leave. Because sit means hold this position and don't alter it.

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There's criteria for a behavior. We asked our dog to sit, that's one part of the behavior chain of the retrieve. Now, after we've thrown the retrieve toy, let's say it's a tennis ball. And we then release the dog. So, number one is the dog sits when we asked, number two they hold the sit and don't alter it once we throw the toy, number three is they leave when we give them the release and they drive out to grab that toy. Number four is they go directly to the toy. They don't meander around "Oh, look! There's a butterfly", directly to the toy.

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Number five, they pick up the toy and they spin back to us. Number six they run back to us, and they put the toy directly in our hand. Right in our hand. Look at that, look at the toy right in my hand. That is a retrieve. Now you could say we could break up number six and two, they drive back as fast as they can. Number seven would be they put the toy in my hand, but you get the idea. That is a behavior chain. Now here's where the 2 of 30 comes in. Let's say you get partway through this. You throw the toy, and the dog goes to leave, and you go "Ah-ah! Nope. Nope. Nope. Ah-ah."

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By the dog leaving, they are giving you a opportunity to create clarity and confidence for them. By you saying "Ah-ah. Nope, don't leave.", you are telling them "I don't have time to acknowledge the struggles you are having right now. I just want to play a good old game of fetch." And so, what happens?



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And this may sound harsh and please forgive me if it comes across as being harsh. What we have when we're training our dog, is what our dogs need, and then we have what we really want to do. And there's a phenomenal quote by Zig Ziglar. I was a big fan of Zig Ziglar back in the 70s and the 80s. He's the late Zig Ziglar, iconic man. And the quote goes like this. *"The main reason people fail is their willingness to give up what they want most of all for what they want right now."*

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Now this is a great, great quote to live by. I really want to lose 10 pounds but oh man I do want that donut. Uh, I really want to learn agility and so I really should be training my dog but oh man I really got to watch this basketball game right now. So, the willingness to give up what they want most of all for what they want right now.

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And so, what we want is a dog that we can play fetch with. It's just so easy but we're willing to give up the ease of that game for what we want right now which is 'I just want to finish the retrieve game'. And for those of you who do any kind of dog sports, this is glaring. Now let me give you an example in agility.

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Let's say there's six obstacles. And you as a handler have to do these six obstacles. Now, when I set out to run a sequence with my dog, because I'm a world champion of dog agility there's a very good chance when I set out to do a sequence that at the end of seven obstacles my dog is going to get a reward. So, let's say seven obstacles.

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It might take us like two and a half seconds to get through seven obstacles. By the time I say my dog's first obstacle within three seconds they've got a reward. And so, when we do the next sequence within three seconds, maybe four seconds, maybe two seconds, maybe five seconds. If I'm doing a longer sequence or a course, it might take 30 seconds, but you can see how fast my dogs are getting reinforced.

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Now, can you see how a dog getting reinforced that often would increase their focus for me, their focus for work? Would help grow that dog's confidence, would minimize the dog's frustration, would minimize the dog's stress, would alleviate any anxiety about working with me, that kind of reinforcement. But here's what happens with the 28 of 30.

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I will remind them of my 2 of 30 rule. And then they'll get working and their dog, maybe they want them to go take obstacle number three, but the dog doesn't execute it right. And they go, "Oh darn. Okay well, let's start back at one." And then they do it again. And the dog doesn't execute number three. "Oh, come on buddy. We can do this." And they start back at one. The dog finally gets obstacle number three right and then they go on to four, five.

But lo and behold, the dog executes number five incorrectly. Now chances are the dog's making these mistakes because you're handling isn't at the level it needs to be, or it could be that the dog just isn't confident or understanding it.



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But regardless, how long has it been since you started working with this dog before he got that first reward? Sometimes it might be two or three or four minutes. My dog, three to five seconds. We set it out, boom you got it right. We set it out, boom you got it right. That's what grows the confidence. And so, I want you to have a dog that has that kind of focus, that kind of confidence.

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So, I want you to become 2 of 30 and this is what it looks like. You ask your dog to do something and he either gets it right and you reward him, or he gets it wrong and then what you need to do is number one call him back, set him up, asking him the similar question. And if he gets it wrong again, he's telling you "In this environment, under these distractions, with this level of excitement, I can't do it."

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So, as I mentioned in podcast [episode number 136](#), we need to minimize the excitement level for the dog, maybe by growing distance or in the case of the ball, when I would go to throw the ball and the dog would kind of lean forward, what I might do is just drop the ball beside me. You're going to slice a piece of that behavior so that the dog can be correct.

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And so, it looks like this. I went to throw the ball. My dog went to move. I said, "Hey buddy, come on back here. Let's try that again. Can you sit?" The dog gets into the sit position. And then I drop the ball beside me, and I observe, are you holding a great sit? And if he doesn't hold a great sit, I lowered the distraction level even more by picking up the ball, turning in a circle, asking for another sit, placing the ball on the ground.

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"You can do that. Good boy!" So, then I might give him a cookie or I might say "now you can get the ball" and I got to build that up. Once I can put the ball down am I going to throw it next time? No. But what I might do is put it right out in front of him. But I now know what I need to work on. I need to work on ItsYerChoice with balls. I need to work on distractions around tennis balls. I've seen this in Crate Games. People will ask the question.

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They'll open the crate door, and "can you hold your sit while I toss a cookie?" And the dog goes, "Uh, uh, oh no, I can't. I want that cookie." And so, you pick it up and you wait until they go back in or please don't be one of those people that go, "Ah-ah no!" "Ah-ah wrong!" and put the dog back in. You might just close the crate door, but what you do next is critical. Because what the 28 of 30 do is they ask the same question, the dog gets it right.

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And then they go, "Okay, that's good." Now I'm going to throw a tennis ball out there. Now I'm going to throw a squeaky toy out there. So, they keep piling on the stress of, "do you know this?" "Do you know this?" "Do you know this?" The dog showed you 'I have a lack of confidence here.' We need to grow that confidence. We need to polish it up like a shiny penny and then we can move on. And so, when the dog makes a mistake, you're going to re-ask the question. "Can you sit when I drop a tennis ball?" and then when they say "yes, I can" you can reward them. And then you're going to rephrase the question. So, "can you sit when I roll a tennis ball?" "Yes, I can." "All right, then you can get it."



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And now you can move on. What does that look like in like a sport like agility? So, my dog makes a mistake at obstacle number three. As I'm walking back to start again, I give the dog what I call a [Screw Up Cookie](#).

And this is really important. I want the dog to know you attempted something with me. Either I trained it wrong or handled it wrong, but either way, it was my bad. So, you deserve a reward because I want you to have rewards at the high rate of reinforcement that Susan's agility dogs do. But I want to acknowledge that [reinforcement will build behavior](#). So, I don't want to just reward nothing.

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And so, what I do on the way back, I might ask the dog to sit or down or do a simple trick, and then I will toss them a reward for that. So, they attempted the sequence. They only got as far as three, but on the way back I gave them a reward. Now we go back again. Now this time let's say they get three. That is my rephrasing of the question.

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And so, when I ask them again and they get three, I pretend I'm moving on to four, but I throw a reward back and we celebrate that. So, we're growing confidence by giving them a reward even when they made a mistake. However, they're just tricks, I never reward them for the mistake. This is what I see people do.

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So, the dog, let's say they knocked a bar at three. And so, then people go, "Oh yeah. Susan says I got to give you a screw up cookie." So, they throw the dog a cookie for knocking the bar. Yeah, that's not what I said. I said, we asked for an alternate behavior, something simple that they can do easily. I wouldn't ask them to go over jump because what if they knocked the bar?

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I would do something simple, maybe come into Reinforcement Zone because that's a really good behavior for a dog. Not pulling on leash and learning how to turn tight in agility. One screw up cookie. Then I asked them that same question with a rephrase. If you get it right this time as I'm running away, I'm going to throw the reward back.

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I don't carry on. That is for the people who say, "Oh, you got it wrong at three. Okay, now you finally got it right, now we're going to go on to four." "You got four right, or you made a mistake at five. Well, we got to go again." "We're going to do 1, 2, 3, 4, 5." "Well, you got it right at five. We got to do six."

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That is putting what you want, 'I really want to finish this sequence', ahead of what your dog needs. And that's going to lead to more frustration and sometimes it might create enough anxiety that your dog just doesn't want to work with you. So, if it's a sport, your dog might "Yeah, that guy. I don't really like the kind of person that that guy becomes when we get doing this kind of stuff together."

If you are 2 of 30, you are always going to put your dog's needs ahead of your needs. And you're going to believe your dog when they ask a question, when you ask them a question and they say, "Yeah, in this environment with these distractions and this level of excitement. This is all I got for you right now."





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When you believe them, and you start polishing that penny until it's shiny in every single situation that your dog is telling you "I think I might have a question here." before you know it, you're not only going to have a confident dog that can retrieve in any environment or can not pull on leash because you've not allowed that to grow.

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You're going to have a dog that is willing to work with you anytime, anyplace. And that is worth it's weight in gold, but that's what creates this amazing relationship with you and your dog. Please moving forward be 2 of 30. Be the one that always says, "Hey, I believe you buddy. Let's go sharpen a skill that you really are telling me that you don't understand right now."

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

### Resources:

[Podcast Episode 64: Help! How Can I Tell My Dog He's Wrong?](#)

[Blog Post: Distraction Work in Dog Training: A Conversation Between Friends](#)

[Podcast Episode 126: How Dog Training Goes Better When You Begin With The End In Mind](#)

[Podcast Episode 136: Help Your Excited Dog Calm Down And Stop Barking, Lunging, Spinning, Nipping](#)

[Blog Post: Screw Up Cookies \(Your Dog's Plan B\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 2: Reinforcement](#)



## Remove Confusion And Build Your Dog's Confidence With One Simple Dog Training Habit

### 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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