

Giving and Receiving Constructive Feedback About Your Dog Training

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG The only way we can make the world a better place for all the dogs in it is if we can inspire the people who own those dogs to want to train the dogs. But that's not going to happen if the people they're taking lessons from are treating them in a way that makes them feel less than. And let me tell you, this is probably one of the most raw and real podcasts that I've done, because it hits home for me, for my entire career as a dog trainer.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And I'm almost shaking to think about talking about this topic. It's about how do we give feedback to people training their dogs and as a student how do we receive that critical feedback? Because it's so important. It's the only way we're going to [help our dogs be better](#).

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This is a topic that's very dear to my heart because I've been teaching dog training for more than 30 years. I've taught in just about every continent on this earth. I've taught thousands and thousands of people and their dogs. And I've had to evolve because I used to teach in a way that really didn't inspire people to want to carry on learning from me. I'll tell you more about that later.

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But let's talk about most people listening to this, you have a dog, you want to take it to dog training class. So, what are the considerations that go through your brain? If you're like most people like I was when I was going to take my first dog to a dog training class, it was what's local, what's handy to me. I don't want to go too far. What's, you know, financially affordable. I don't want to spend a lot of money, so let's call around and see who's the cheapest.

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What ones do my friends and my Veterinarian recommend? Those have got to be great sources, right? Or which ones are well known for something, like they've achieved something amazing. Maybe they're on the local news a lot. That's probably how I should pick, right? I would say no to all of them. You know maybe some of them will give you some consideration especially you know if your friend is really knowledgeable with dog training or your Veterinarian, but really picking the wrong dog training school will do two things.

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Number one, it will make you feel less than. It will make you feel like "I just don't have the talent for this. It's too bad because I really love dogs, but I guess I'm a cat person. I just don't have what it takes to be able to train dogs because my poor dog failed at a grade one and I just suck at this, I guess." Or number two. "Oh, geez. It's too bad this dog is such a loser. Yeah. Yeah. They told me that I probably will never overcome his problems. Um, he's just not the kind of dog who really gets into this stuff, so yeah, it's too bad. So, I guess we'll just never go back to any classes, and I'll just keep him in my backyard, and he'll never get to go anywhere."



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So, the wrong dog training school is just such a huge mistake for you. And no, nobody should be failing out of any class because here's what I believe. And if you've been listening to me or if you've read any of my books, this is a mantra I've been saying over and over and over again for probably 25 years. Dogs are a reflection of our ability to train.

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So, if there is a problem we have with our dog, then it's a limitation we have and we need to seek out better education for ourselves. Now take this to the next level. Students are a reflection of how capable their dog training instructor is. How good a teacher they are or how good a coach they are. Now, a lot of people are going, "Oh, no, no, no. Susan, it's the people. They don't put in the work. They don't, I give them the homework, they don't do it. So, it's not my bad, it's their bad."

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Keep listening because I'm going to share with you how I think maybe I am right on all pages. So, I've told you what considerations most people think about and why I think maybe they're not the best. Let me tell you what I think should be the considerations when you're deciding where you should take your dog or the who you should invest your time and your money with when you want to train your dog.

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So, number one, they've got to have an obvious love of dogs and everybody in their facility should have an obvious love of dogs. And you can tell it in the way they talk to dogs, in the way they talk about dogs with their own dogs, with their coaches, with their students' dogs, or when they talk about former students. How do they talk about dogs? And I'm going to put number one B, they're going to have a love of people.

Because guess what? As much as it's romantic to think "[I'm going to be a dog trainer](#), a dog trainer is somebody who teaches people how to train their dogs". So, you've got to have an empathy and a love of people that goes as deep as your love of dogs.

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Number two, your important core values need to align with theirs. So, if you believe like I do, that dogs should be trained with kindness, and science-based, reinforcement based strategically layered games that bring out the best in dogs. So, if you go to somebody who says, "Well, I think I need to show your dogs who's boss and we need to alpha role them.", there's an obvious misalignment of core values. No, that's not a good place for you to be.

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Number three, they have success in areas that are important to you. So, take a look at how their dogs are trained and don't believe the people who say, "Oh, you know, like the cobbler's kid, they don't have their good shoes. Yeah I'm training everybody else's dogs. And I don't have time to train my own dogs." If you live with a dog, you're training them.

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And so, if their dogs are really not well behaved, they don't understand that training is easy if you make it a part of your life 24/7. So yes, look at what kind of family pets their dogs are because that's what you're buying into. And if you want to do agility or another sport, look at the success they have. Number four is look at the success of their students.



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When you see people in the park, and this is something that I just love about our Recallers students, we've given them business cards actually, for the podcast, and they hand them out because people go, "Oh my gosh, your dog is amazing. Where did you train them?" And they hand out [our business cards](#).

Because our Recallers program is a huge megaphone for the success of our program. The students are excelling in areas where most people want success with their own dogs. So, what do their dogs look like? What do their students' dogs look like?

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Number five is how do they help their students find an answer? Do they say, "Do this because I said so." or do they kind of Ted Lasso it? So, if you're not familiar with Ted Lasso, it's a show on Netflix where this fellow who is an American football coach takes a job in Britain coaching football over there which is soccer, which has nothing to do with American football.

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But if you know how to coach people in a way that builds them up and helps them to make the best decisions for themselves, then it doesn't matter. I mean, obviously ideally at an elite level, you should have experience in that sport, but you can still have success using questions, especially if you're helping people to find answers, and you know the path they need to get onto to get those answers.

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So, are they coaches who say "do this", or are they coaches who engage you and get you to find your own way through their questions? So, number one, you've got to pick the right coach. Number two, and this is really important. There are things in life out of our control and we've got to recognize that. And you might've done a great job and pick the best dog training coach for you, but they may have coached, I don't know, 10 hours that day.

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And then you ask the same question that 15 people before you ask and guess what, that tells that coach that they didn't teach that item very well. Because if 15 people asked the same question, that's a reflection of me as an instructor. But when you ask it, they just go off. "Oh, for the love of all that is holy. Why are you asking me that same question?" And then you might get all upset. "Why are you yelling at me? I just asked a question. I don't have a right to ask a question?"

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What I want you to do is ask yourself, if I've picked this coach then I know they're going to give me what I need. So, what I need to do is when I get feedback, I can't control how it's given or what is said to me, what I can do is control how I take out the important bits and throw away the stuff that doesn't matter. So, take away the things that you really need.

Take it on board. Take action. Make the change in your dog training because your coach is going to give you some great feedback. Make the change.

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And if your feelings have been hurt, you're going to circle back around at a time when you're going to have a reasonable conversation about "Here's what happened and here's how I felt." Not about "You are mean to me! And I don't like that!" Help your coach to up-level themselves as a coach.



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Now let's talk to you guys as coaches. Anybody that is teaching dog training. There's a few things that I would like to share from my experiences. As I said off the top, I used to teach dog training from a place of where I would say to people "Well, you can have fluffy Susan and I'll candy coat what I'm going to tell you or you can have straight shooting Susan, where I'm going to give you the raw truth about what's going on with your dog?" And by saying that it was not me that had to be kinder and learn how to coach people in a way that inspired them to take action. I put it all on them.

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"Oh, if you're going to be a big wimp then I guess I can not give you the whole truth and I'll just candy coat stuff." Do you see how that's blaming them because you don't know how to deliver information in a way that they can take it on board? So as the coach think in terms of, I have [a 5C Pyramid](#). So, the first thing you need to do as a person's coach is connect, the bottom layer, connect with them. Ask them about "what are your goals with this dog?" Because your goals as their coach has nothing to do with what their goals are. And you can help inspire them to have loftier goals as you go along. But you can't do that until you have a connection, a place of trust, a place of common core values.

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That's when you can now inspire them and encourage them in a lovingly playful way to want more. Number one, is that all important connection.

And then you're going to create clarity, clarity for something that they can do with their dog. So, for us it starts as simple as ItsYerChoice game or Crate Games or Collar Grab or Call Once. Games that they can try and go, "Oh my gosh, like I got this!" Success is easy for them.

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It inspires them to want to do homework because the games are just so easy for them to take on board and put into their daily life. And they go "Look at my dog!" And they might ask their friends and neighbors "Do you want to see my dog do something? I never thought he could do that!" Create clarity by manipulating the environment so that success is inevitable.

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It isn't just going to happen if they do things a certain way at a certain time of day with a certain dog with a certain gift of athleticness that they have. Success is inevitable because you as their coach set up the strategies so that they were going to have success. So, we've connected, we've created clarity. Now we're growing that confidence.

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And that confidence comes from you guiding them with your questions. That confidence happens by them training their dog, by them getting success. And they're not going to keep doing that if they're made to feel less than. So back in the day, I was earnest about wanting everybody to do what I was doing as a dog trainer.

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But in the 90s very few people were doing what I was doing at the elite level of sports and so I was kind of on an island by myself. And because of that, you either grow thick skin and get a big ego so that you can carry on when other people think that you're going to fail, or you give up and do what everybody else is doing. But I kept going.



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But what I did I taught so many seminars and I know there were people at seminars that because of the feedback I gave them, ended up in the bathroom crying on the way home or occasionally they would weep openly in front of me. And that affected me. Every person that I knew that I had hurt their feelings, it built in me the need to become a better coach. And what would happen is I would see them doing something to their dog and I'd go, "Oh my gosh, no! Don't you see how what you just did to this to the dog? And blaming him for this, and it wasn't his fault. And how do you feel now?"

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And I maybe didn't say it just like that. And I honestly never meant to hurt anybody's feelings, but what I did was I triggered them.

Because they wouldn't be there if they didn't love their dog. They wouldn't be there if they didn't want to learn how to be the best they could for their dog. And here they had somebody that they used to respect who was making them feel ashamed. "What did I do to my dog? Oh my gosh, what an animal am I?" And what my words would do would trigger them to their back brain, their lizard brain.

Remember lizard brain? Fight, flight, or freeze.

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Now, obviously they couldn't fight me because who's going to take on, right? So, they might fight, most of them will just freeze. And that's when they would be locked in this emotional back brain. My words after that would never be registered. Just like me being chased by that guy when I talked about it in podcast [episode number 103](#), running down the street, nothing would register. So once I put them into their back brain and I made them feel ashamed.

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I could've said, "Hey, you know what? I think you and I are so cool. We're so much alike. Like we've got common goals and we should grow. I think we should actually like move in together because we're just so cool. Like, I think we're amazing." None of that would register because I've already made them feel bad about what they were doing.

And were they leaving my class or my workshop or my seminar feeling good about their dog, feeling good about themselves as a trainer, feeling more confident than they walked through the door?

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That's your job as a coach. Your job is to connect, create clarity so that success is inevitable. Have them repeat, inspire them to practice so that they grow confidence. And then you can challenge them. So, so often especially people teaching agility, they get people off the street, and they say, "Come on, let's get your dog up and over this equipment.", like on week two or three. And then the dogs are like, "No", some of them are really doing badly. And then, "Oh, your dog is just a duffer." "Oh, we can do better." "Oh, you had to hold your cookie right." "Oh, you didn't."

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No. When you break things down, success is inevitable. When success is inevitable, people grow more confidence. When they grow more confidence, you can throw more challenge at them. And then they have the ability to make better choices. That all happens because you're a coach who cares. So, two takeaways is dig deep to grow, to be better for the people you want to show up and be better for.





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And any time something is triggering you ask yourself 'what's within my control'. Is it within my control to get this coach to stop being so mean to me? No. What if I take the feedback, make the change, my dog will benefit by it. It's a bit on each of us. But if we each work hard to keep growing together, who's going to be the big beneficiary? Dogs.

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Because more and more people are going to want to train their dogs with kindness and more and more dogs are going to have the life of their dreams with more freedom, more ability to go out and enjoy life at the park and go swimming. And that's just going to be a better world all around for all of us, right? I'm glad you're here. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 100: Dog Training: The Most Important Lesson I Can Share](#)

[Podcast Episode 37: Dog Training as a Career](#)

[DogsThat / Shaped by Dog Business Cards PDF Download](#)

Download the 5C Pyramid PDF at [Podcast Episode 21: The 5 Critical Dog Training Layers for Confidence with Anything](#)

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



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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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