



## Episode: #151

# How Location Specific Reinforcement Markers Will Improve Your Dog Training!

### Speaker Key

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### Transcript

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SG I remember in the early 1990s when I first learned about [clicker training](#), I was practicing out of sight stays in an obedience hall with other competitors. We were in a closet to tell you the truth. I clicked my clicker to mark for my dog she was correct. Because I had a mirror, I could see she was, and then she came running in because I clicked my clicker the behavior's over, right? I reinforced her. And as I'm walking back to position, I'm thinking something doesn't feel right.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. That was my earliest experiences with using a clicker and I wasn't necessarily wrong, however, training a behavior that stationary is going to take a lot longer to grow that dog's understanding. It wasn't until probably 10 years later when I really started working with Bob and Marian Bailey that I heard the phrase that you want to mark for position and reward for behavior.

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And that's led me to the topic of today's podcast. Now I'm going to be completely honest with you. I was intending on doing part three of our distance series today and I realized there was a big gap that I had to fill in. And that is a topic of today's podcast which is *Location Specific Reinforcer Markers*.

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It's a big, long title and honestly, I was using it long before I had ever heard that phrase. And honestly, something that I'd been using quite a while until somebody said, "Hey, the protection world has started doing what you're doing and they're calling it Location Specific Reinforcer Markers." I'm like, "Well that sounds like a really cool title, whoever came up with that one."

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What they are? They are words that tell my dog "You are right, but—" or qualifying what's going to happen after. So, it's not a "but as much as AND - stick with me on this one. So going back to that dog that I was reinforcing with the mark from the closet, she was getting information that what she was doing was correct.

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But the reinforcement I gave her actually was rewarding her for leaving position. And so, the idea would be a way to mark her position but reinforce her in position. Because it doubles the value which when you're doubling the value, you're growing the understanding much more efficiently which means it doesn't take as long for the dog to understand exactly what you want.

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So, I started what is now known as a Location Specific Reinforcer Marker back in the mid-nineties with my dog Buzz when I was wanting to reinforce start lines. And what I would do is I would plant a toy behind him and sometimes I would release him for the jump in agility. And other times I would tell him "Look Back" and his toy was there on the ground, and I would tell him "Get it". You know, he couldn't just spin around and say, "No, you said break. I'm not going to take the jump. I'm going to take the toy."



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That word “Look Back” it told him what you're doing right now - holding position without paddling your feet - is correct. Behavior is correct. It also told him you are now going to get reinforced. It also told him where to look for the reinforcement. So, I could have said - now I didn't do it back then but today if I wanted to release him forward, I would just say the word of the obstacle.

And that would have still been a Location Specific Reinforcer Marker. Because I would not give the name of the obstacle if what he was doing wasn't correct.

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So, when I say “jump” or “tunnel” whatever the first obstacle on a course is I'm telling my dog what you're doing and how you're doing it is correct. I'm thrilled with it, which is why I caution people to be really, really present when they're releasing dogs at a start line because you're giving them a massive reinforcement.

So, I'm telling them “What you're doing is correct.” I'm telling them what the name of the reinforcement is and obviously they're staring right at it, so where it is.

Now by giving markers like this, what you're doing is you're creating clarity with your dog, but the marker word creates this unbelievable [transfer of value](#). We all know that our dogs have preferences to reinforcement, correct? Like there'll be dogs that you have that they love their food. And if you said “tug” they would go, “Yeah, I really, really don't want to do that.”

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But you can— now this is providing that the dogs will tug, you can ask your dog to tug and when they get really, really good tugging you could then say “cookie” and reward the tugging with a cookie. Because it's telling the dog what you're doing right now “You can stop, it is good. And this is the reward you will get for it.” Okay. It's far, far more information than continuing to say what typically people say “Okay.” Okay means this and okay means that.

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‘It's a break from what you're doing.’ ‘Okay, let's go do something else.’ ‘Okay, cookies coming.’ ‘Okay. I'm going to throw the toy.’ It's far more specific. So, I started with Swagger, I actually introduced even more specificity to this, in that I started using the word “search” which meant you will look for reinforcement on the floor. And what I found for that, especially a dog like Swagger, he would then know immediately that to leave the position. And often I was doing something I wanted him to reload like a perch skill.

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You could leave the position, grab the cookie, come back to work. All right. What you're doing right now is correct. You are going to get reinforced and here's where you look for your reinforcement. So, when I raise my dogs, I make sure I build in massive value for swimming. Now, some dogs it's easy. Other dogs, it takes a little bit more work. But all of my dogs end up being possessed by the water. They just vibrate at the thought of swimming.

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Now this is a massive reinforcement. And so, here's another big bonus win within this podcast. Don't just let your dog steal that. It's huge. It could be the biggest reinforcement for many dogs.



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So, when you're using that as a location specific reinforcement, it brings amazing [value to the behavior](#) that you're reinforcing. Right. So, I will use it for building drive for my agility behaviors. If I'm working obedience outside, I may use it as a you've done really great heel work.

So instead of saying "good boy", I will then I will mark with "swimming". Boom. They're off. There's nothing, there's nothing [more powerful](#) than that. Now my young dog This! she loves to chase her mother and so I started by if you give me great positional work by my side and I've built it so maybe I'll ask for a spin at my side.

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Maybe I'll ask for a sit or a down. Then I will do \*click-click sound\*, I'm going to make that a little bit louder because she can hear me. You might be, not be able to \*click sound\*. That means you can now chase dogs. \*Click sound\* means chase dogs. So, if I wanted her to tug for example, you come in, you've walked by my side I would then go "get it", here's my toy, get it. And she would have to tug and in the midst of tugging I could then go \*click- click sound\*. So, what I've done now is I've transferred that amazing value to run into the toy.

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So here are some of the location specific reinforcements that I used. I've told you "Search" means you can leave position and look for a food on the ground. Now it could be more than one food, but it will be a piece of food that I have thrown. Most of the time my dogs have seen that. The exception would be if I throw in a handful of food in the grass and in that case, I may continue to say the word search to get them continuing to look.

So, it's something that they've seen me throw. If it is a piece of food I'm bringing into them, and [ItsYerChoice](#) is always in play for my dogs. So, as I'm bringing a cookie and they can't leave position to get that cookie. I'll bring it in and as I bring it close to their face I'll say, "get it" and they can eat the cookie. Now I will also put cookies in a bowl. Cookies in a bowl you could just use the word "bowl".

I don't use cookies in the bowl that often so I too will use the word "get it". Now I could put, throw cookies on the ground and cookie in the bowl. If I say "get it" you can't get the cookie on the ground. You have to go for the cookie in the bowl. If I have a cookie coming to your face and I say, "get it" you don't get this one and then grab the one on the floor because I didn't say "search". Super, super important.

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Things I'm delivering right to my dog I tend to say, "get it". So, if I'm bringing the toy right into their face, I tend to say get it. Couple of exceptions to that one and I will share those with you. If I want my dog to retrieve a dead retrieve, I will say "bring me", that means fly out, grab it, fly back, bring me. Here's a location specific marker that can save your dog's life. Normally at a door I'll say "break". Break means go out and find your own reinforcement. Now, if I'm saying break from a crate and I'm standing still, that reinforcement should be with me. But if I'm saying break and you can go outside in the backyard and do your business and do whatever you want, you find your own reinforcement on the word break.

If I'm releasing my dogs in the building and there's a chance that there's cars in the parking lot, I won't say break. I will say "wit-wit" and that means come into my side. So yes, you are correct for holding position. Yes, you can earn reinforcement and here's where you're going to get your reinforcement "wit-wit" come into my side.



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Often while they're there I will give them a cookie for walking with me at my side. I don't want them to just take off and run. All right. So, here's in agility where I've grown this and I've heard that Shade Whitesel in protection work has really taken off with this. And I think she's got like 20 different location specific markers.

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In agility with my youngest dog what I've done is my cues that mean turn to the right are cues that are lower in a tone. So, it would be like "rye-rye" or "rrrr", those or "check-check". Those are three cues that mean turn to the right. And so, what I did is when I reinforced her for turning right, I always use her frizzer, so she loves her frizzer.

And so, I put the word "frizzer". Which sounds it's low, low tempo, "frizzer", it means you're always going to get reinforcement to the right is always with a frizzer. Reinforcement to the left, another favorite toy is "cow tug". Now I have recently started to go "ceetee". So, "ceetee" cow tug because my cues to the left are "chi-chi" and "lili-lili". So those are two of my cues that mean turn to the left.

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And so, she knows it was an easy understanding for This! to learn turns to the right, because 'frizzer' was always the reinforcement for anything to the right and 'gt' - 'ceetee' -, "cow tug, cow tug, cow tug" is always to the left or "ceetee, ceetee, ceetee" is always for your reinforcement to the left.

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So, this is the first time I've done specific toys for specific activities in agility. Most important thing about these specific markers is I strongly recommend you guys have a tone that sounds different than the other ones. So, 'break' should sound different than 'search' should sound different than \*click-click sound\* should sound different than 'wit-wit'.

So, they should have unique sounds that in a high arousal state, the dog will know immediately what you want. There's no confusion. Right. So, let's just introduce a couple of these. Here's what I'd like you to do. Let's introduce 'search'. Put a cookie in your hand and put it in front of your dog, say the word "search", drop the cookie on the ground.

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Do that a few times. And then if you haven't played ItsYerChoice, you need to start playing ItsYerChoice. We'll put a [link in the show notes](#). Pick up a cookie, start to bring it towards your dog's face. And if they try to steal it, of course they're savvy with ItsYerChoice, they shouldn't try and steal it. If they do just cover your hand around it and wait, when they stop trying to steal it, bring it back and when they hold position tell them "Get it" or whatever cues you want.

So, search and get it. Search and get it. Now, what we're going to do is we're going to put that cookie in a bowl. Bring the bowl close to your dog and say, "get it". Now get it means they can leave position now and get the cookie out of the bowl. All right. You want to then build up so that— and you can do this with a toy if you want guys. Pick your own location specific cues.

So maybe you want your dogs to come flying into position on your right or your left, and you want to use a ball, a tennis ball, or frizzer. Whatever it is you want to use, be very specific and very consistent. And I strongly encourage you to have different tones. So, in preparation for what we're going to do next, if your dog loves toys, then start to name one toy on the ground - it's going to be called 'this'.



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So, if I say “frizzer” then This! will always pick up the frizzer off the floor. I normally don't say frizzer unless I throw it. But if I say frizzer she'll look for the frizzer. All right. So, we want your dogs to understand what ‘search’ means. What get it from a bowl, let's use ‘bowl’. If I was going to grow that behavior, I would use something like ‘bucket’ means get it from the bowl. Make up your own.

So, we're going to have ‘search’, ‘bucket’, and if your dog loves toys then the name of one toy. That will help you for when we get to our next podcast episode, which is going to be talking about distance work. Okay.

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So don't be overwhelmed if you're new to dog training, location specific cues, the most important thing is you are consistent. You never release a dog from position unless you love what they're doing. And if you're going to use a word, please don't have it be a word that you use throughout your day like ‘okay, okay, okay, okay’.

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Build value, grow understanding, use different words. A cue a dog knows. So, if my dog is in a sit and I say down, that is a location specific reinforcement. What you're doing is correct right now, here's where you're going to earn reinforcement is by changing position. Does that mean I run in and reward the down right away?

No, it could mean yes. It could also mean you're in the [middle of a behavior chain](#) and we will give you reinforcement later. But that's what we want. Names that the dog knows in agility, obstacle names are releases and location specific telling the dog here's your reinforcement. You get to do a tunnel now or whatever.

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Okay. So just start adding one or two. And all I wanted everyone to hear this podcast for is to recognize the [power of harnessing what your dog finds most valuable](#) and put it into a known word. And by having it as a known release, it is permission to partake in that activity, which is bringing that unbelievable value all the way through you.

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Super, super important. Have a go, come on over to YouTube, leave me a comment. Let me know how it goes for you and your dog. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

### **ItsYerChoice Game:**

[Learn how to play ItsYerChoice \(IYC\)](#)

### **Resources:**

[Podcast Episode 69: Clicker Training: Will It Work For Every Dog?](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 94: How the Best Professional Dog Trainers Use Reinforcement](#)

[Podcast Episode 11: The Power of Permission in Dog Training](#)

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



## How Location Specific Reinforcement Markers Will Improve Your Dog Training!

### 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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