

Stop Your Dog's Unwanted Behaviors With This Positive Interrupter

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG If you like me, took an obedience class back in the 80s, you would've learned to say things like, "Ah!", "No!", "Hey!" to your dog. And wait a minute, you just learned that recently? Well, you are gonna want to hear today's podcast, that's for sure.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And those noises that we were taught or that you might still be learning or that somebody still might be teaching you, are words that stop behavior. They're meant to startle a dog, stop them from what they're doing. And I've got to tell you, back in the 80s I was the queen of the "Ah!". I mean, I could get that guttural sound out better than anybody.

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And my little Jack Russell Terrier would flip her ears behind her head, much like I talked about on [podcast episode number 157](#). All the signs of a dog showing stress. Ears pin, licking her lips, she would avert her eyes from me. Body would get a little bit low. Sometimes she'd do a fake scratch. They're not itchy. I forgot to mention that in podcast episode 157. The fake scratch that dogs will do is another sign of stress.

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So, when you use those loud sounds to startle your dog and get them to stop what they're doing, you will see the effect on the dog by them doing, maybe subtle, it might be just eye shifting. It might be just a little flick of the tongue. But you will see signs of them showing you some emotional stress. So, what we wanted to do back then, is we wanted to stop the dogs. But the way I was taught, you know, you're saying "no" or you're clapping really loud, you're getting in there. But in your mind, there's a judgment being made.

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"I don't like what you're doing." "You are wrong" or "you might even be bad" or "you might even be a jerk for doing what you're doing". So, "you're chewing my sofa", or "you're barking incessantly at nothing", or "you're jumping on my guests". "I need you to stop." "You're wrong." "At the very least you're wrong." But possibly in my mind it's escalating. "You're bad. You're a jerk."

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Those are judgements and they're unfair. And the "Ah-ah! No! Hey!", what they don't do is tell our dogs what we want them to do. Some people coin the phrase 'negative interrupter' with those sounds, which I think is flawed science because negative means you're taking something away and really, you're adding.

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So, I would just call those *positive punishers*. Positive punishers in the form of your voice. And a punisher is meant to suppress behavior. "Okay Susan, but what do we do? Because guess what? Dogs are imperfect. Sometimes they make bad choices, and I can't get to them, they're at a distance, what could I do?" I'm really glad you asked, because that is the topic of today's podcast.



Stop Your Dog's Unwanted Behaviors With This Positive Interrupter

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Now we get asked this question a lot in our online courses. "How can I teach leave it?" Well of course if you've been raised with [ItsYerChoice](#) you ideally would never need a leave it cue. Guess what your positive interrupter, you could use the word "leave it". "Leave it" means don't roll in whatever you're about to roll in. "Leave it" means don't bark at whoever's at the door. "Leave it" could mean don't eat what you're about to eat. So, "leave it" could be your positive interrupter.

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But let's just agree right now if you're driving, I want you to pull over. I want you to put one hand in the air and you're gonna swear. "If I use the word leave it, I'm never going to say it in an angry tone." If you can't say that, then go with something that is nonsensical like "wit-wit-wit-wit-wit-wit" or "pup-pup-pup-pup", something that's melodic and different.

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And just the sound like you might want to just experiment with sounds because there are some sounds without any conditioning at all you're gonna get your dogs coming over and going like "What is that? That sounded really fun." So, a positive interrupter, first thing you have to do is pick the sound or the word.

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If you do sports, you could borrow one with the cue "ready". Now a lot of people when they do sports, they say "ready". And that will get the dogs— my dogs are running. I can hear them coming now. That will get the dogs excited and come in focused on you. That could be your positive interrupter. I wouldn't advise you to do it if you are also using it to get your dog jacked up for different sports. Because what if, and this is a great place where I use my positive interrupter.

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If my dog, I see them locking on a distraction in the distance, maybe we're out walking, and they see a deer. And I just say "enough", or I'll say "wit-wit-wit" and they'll just come off of it. But if I use a cue that means 'get jacked up, get engaged and get ready to chase' then there might be a conflict for the dog.

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So, I've seen people use the cue "ready" as a way to get their dogs to come off of things. But that's a slippery slope. So, pick a word. "Wit-wit", let's all go with "wit-wit". I'll know you listen to this podcast or you're a member of one of my online classes if I hear you say the word "wit-wit". Is it a word? It's a hyphenated word, is it? It's a phrase. "Wit-wit-wit-wit-wit-wit-wit-wit-wit-wit". My dogs are going crazy right now.

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So, let's teach our positive interrupter. First thing you're gonna do, super easy. You're gonna get high, high value rewards. Put them in like ideally if you've got a kangaroo pouch or somewhere where the dog, you know, a bait pouch is just so obvious.

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So, if you want to use a bait pouch, sure. But do some sessions without it. You're going to have your dog on a leash. So, they're gonna be nice and close.



Stop Your Dog's Unwanted Behaviors With This Positive Interrupter

00:19:12

And you're gonna say the word and immediately drop a cookie in front of the dog. They're gonna eat it. You're gonna keep moving. So, as they're eating it, they're gonna be on a leash. You're not gonna jerk them or anything. Wait till they eat it and then they're gonna come with. I don't want them snarfling and sniffing because "wit-wit-wit" doesn't mean start sniffing the ground, it means 'turn and find me fast'.

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You're gonna repeat this until the dog is ready for you to say the "wit-wit-wit-wit" cue. And then what you're gonna do is you're gonna add some motion. So, it's going to be, give the cue and then turn and run, the dog catches up and then you drop the cookie on the floor. Now here we can hand the dog the cookie as well, but I want you to alternate, sometimes drop it on the floor sometimes you're going to hand it to the dog.

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Eventually, if you're doing this like in your living room or your kitchen you can throw it into the corner so you can run across in the opposite direction. Why do I want movement? Because it adds to the reinforcement value. You can stand still, but our dogs love to chase. They love to chase. So eventually, we want to be able to say the "wit-wit-wit" cue without moving at all.

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But initially I would say we're gonna move 80% of the time. 10% of the time practicing it just standing still, 80% of the time you are at least— now if you can't move that great, you can turn and like walk fast or walk at whatever speed is your fast. Just turn away from the dog, keep in contact with them with one eye over your shoulder, but we want them to see you turning and leaving because the "wit-wit" means 'engage with me'.

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Engage with me. So, we say the cue that they come. Now three weeks, let's put up our hand again, "Susan, I solemnly swear I will not try to use this cue to interrupt an undesired behavior before three weeks." Now that's an arbitrary number. It might take you four or five weeks, depending on how often that you can practice this game.

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We want to move from just saying the word, dropping cookies. That's your first session. Like that's gonna be over real quick. And then saying the word, moving away and then handing the dog a cookie or dropping the cookie. And then, for those of you whose dogs tug, we're playing another game. Now, if your dog doesn't tug, don't switch off, don't cross your arms and get a potty face on me because I got something for you. Just be patient okay.

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So, what I want you to do is I want you to start tugging with your dog. You're going to have your high value treat somewhere where you can grab it really quick. In the midst of tugging, you're gonna give your cue "wit-wit-wit-wit-wit-wit-wit". The dog should disengage from the tug toy. If by chance they don't, you are going to just become limp and stop saying anything. Just wait until the dog disengages. If they don't disengage, then you can just do a collar grab because that should help them go "Oh yeah, collar grab means I'm gonna get a cookie."



Stop Your Dog's Unwanted Behaviors With This Positive Interrupter

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And then they're gonna spit out the toy, you're gonna drop the cookie, go back and do more "wit-wit-wit" without a tug. But what the next stage of learning is the dog is doing an activity, maybe an activity they like. You give the positive interrupter, and they learn 'stop what I'm doing and chase'. 'Stop what I'm doing and find mama'. 'Stop what I'm doing and look'.

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So, the tug game is just an easy one to get them involved. Now, if you have higher value rewards or tugs that your dog loves, don't go to the highest one at first, go to the lowest one and work your way up so that they're crazy involved with tug. And you give your "wit-wit-wit", and they drop that tug. They're learning 'no matter what I'm doing I hear "wit-wit-wit" and I turn, and I come'.

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My dogs might be giving an accompanying serenade to tonight's podcast because I'm talking dirty. I'm saying all their favorite words. So, for those of you whose dogs don't tug, here's what I want you to do. I want you to take a low value food aka something that they will not eat. A rock. Now if there's a chance your dog is one of those dogs like Tater Salad, if you throw anything he's gonna eat first and ask questions later, don't do this with a rock.

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I want you to throw a block of wood bigger than your dog's head. Okay, so you're gonna throw it to get their attention. You're gonna say "wit-wit-wit" and go in the opposite direction. Eventually I want you to get to a place where you can roll a piece of kibble on the floor. Your dog goes to get it. You're gonna say "wit-wit-wit", go in the opposite direction and give them a high value reward.

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Now you will need somebody to help you with this because I want the dog not to be able to get to that kibble. If they do, no big deal, I don't want you to have them on a leash and like give them a (inaudible sound) at the end of the leash. If they do, no big deal, we just know that "wit-wit-wit" is just not strong enough, high enough value for them at this moment.

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You could do this a couple of times and start throwing it further and further away. You could actually roll it under a door or an area where it's almost impossible for the dog to get that low value cookie. If they still start like scratching and "Oh my gosh, I really have to get this dried up old piece of kibble." then that tells me you haven't done the two to three weeks or longer of the fun "wit-wit", turn, run away fun, like high, high value rewards so that your dog just hears that noise and "Wow! Something amazing's gonna happen." That's what we want.

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Now you're three or five or whatever week, introductory probation period is over. And now you're going to use your "wit-wit" cue just to interrupt low value activities. So, something like, here's when I use mine. Post swimming licking drives me crazy when I'm trying to focus on something. So, I will use that cue. My dogs will come over. I'm just interrupting them. Now, "Can you go do something else? Go lie down somewhere else." So, then they're not right under my feet licking.



Stop Your Dog's Unwanted Behaviors With This Positive Interrupter

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Now, you're not going to wait till the UPS guy comes and every all anarchies are going crazy because it's less likely to work. Use your positive interrupters only when you're willing to bet me a thousand dollars that your dog is going to give you that head whip and drive towards you.

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Now, "Susan, I've been listening to your podcast quite a bit. And I know about [podcast number 16 the thing before the thing](#). Am I not just rewarding my dog in a [behavior chain](#) you've got to be bad to be good?" I am so glad you asked that question because as a matter of fact, you potentially could be.

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So, the positive interrupters are things I use a ton when I have puppies. I see a puppy about to squat to go to the bathroom "oh, wit-wit-wit-wit-wit let's get outside". I see my puppy is [chewing on something inappropriate](#), but as soon as that happens the wheels start turning in my head, "what am I gonna do to make sure that doesn't happen again?"

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Because if your puppy like loves chewing on one corner of your sofa and you find four or five times a day you're saying "wit-wit-wit" guess what, you are creating a lovely behavior chain for yourself. So, every time you do it, it's actually like you are breaking out into song to remind yourself of a training plan, right?

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It's like you're saying "Wit-wit-wit-wit-wit, oh my puppy is chewing on the sofa, and I've got to learn how not to teach that so I'm gonna go and look at Susan Garrett's podcast, and then I'm gonna figure out a plan" So yes, the answer is yes. If you rely on this as a regular form of management, you could be in fact, rewarding the thing before the thing.

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And so, I use it for puppies. If you've been using it and your dog is no longer a puppy and you're doing it for the same thing, that's just highlighting for you you've got a flaw in your training plan. So please [adjust that training plan](#).

Leave me a comment. Let me know what your positive interrupter word is and let me know how the conditioning goes. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 157: Dog Body Language: Understanding Canine Communication Signals And Emotions](#)

[Kikopup on YouTube](#)

[Blog with Video: Teaching Puppies: It's Just Arranging Coincidences](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 16: The Thing Before Your Dog's Thing](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Behavior Chains in Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 131: How Would Susan Garrett Plan 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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