

Dog Training With Layered Shaping: Why Classical Conditioning Must Come First

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG In the last podcast [episode number 170](#) where I dug into the five different ways that you could use reinforcement in training, I mentioned that we did something called layered shaping and I found it difficult to even put a name to what we do.

And I realized that by saying what I do with all my dogs and what we teach all our students is layered shaping kind of created this image that when our students come to us in our online classrooms we say, "Yeah, grab a clicker. Here's your roadmap to shape behavior. Let's go." That is not at all what we do. And that led me to this podcast episode.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Let me first establish that the vast majority of people who join our online classes come to us because they want to stop behavior in their dog. Maybe they want to stop chasing, car chasing, cat chasing. We've had somebody who wanted to stop shadow chasing.

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Maybe they want to stop their puppy who has grown to be nine months old and still nipping or they want to stop barking or [leash reactivity](#) or attacking power tools like the vacuum or the leaf blower or— it grows from there.

A lot of these behaviors could be potentially fatal but at the very least a nuisance like I want to stop my dog from ignoring me. I want to stop my dog from running off with items. I want to stop my dog from escaping from the backyard.

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So, 70% or more of the students who join our online classes are just like anybody else's students. They want it to stop. Now, people might have this idea that because I excel at dog sports that people join our programs because they want to do dog sports. And that just isn't the way it is.

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So, in the last podcast I said that we don't teach luring, we don't use food luring to get behavior. I'm hoping it created or stimulated some thinking. I am going to share what I do, and this is the first of many episodes that's going to eventually lead you to the place that where we are at and why we don't use luring in the shaping.

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But first I think it's really important that you understand what our goals are for our students when they come into our online program. And this is exactly the same as the goals I have for my puppies or my dogs when they come into my home as youngsters or as rescue dogs, whatever the case may be.

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So, there's four elements that we aim to achieve with anybody that comes into our online programs. I'm gonna briefly go over, name them and then I'm gonna do a little bit more of a deep dive.



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Number one, we want to grow confidence both in the dog and in their human.

Number two, we want to minimize conflicts between the dog and their owner. Ideally eliminate them but recognizing that we're all human, that might not be possible.

Number three, we want to maximize the reinforcement that that dog gets from their human or other humans in their household.

And number four, we want to minimize or ideally eliminate non contingent reinforcement that the dog might get from their environment.

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Okay. So, grow confidence, minimize conflicts, grow reinforcement received from their owner, and minimize any non-contingent reinforcement earned from the environment. All right. So, what does all of that mean? If you're a listener of this podcast you have heard me speak about our 5C pyramid and it isn't just a really cool little thing that I put together because everything starts with C.

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It really highlights the best way to train a dog and it comes together with those four elements. So, the 5C pyramid, number one at the bottom layer we're growing connection with the dog and that connection comes through growing confidence. We grow trust from the dog, we grow connection, and we develop a deeper relationship.

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So, the 5Cs: connection, then clarity, then confidence, next is challenge, and the top of the pyramid is complexity, adding complexity of behavior to the dog in your training. And so, with that pyramid in mind we want to grow that dog's confidence and we do it first by [creating positive CERs](#) (positive conditioned emotional response) in everything that we do, that we want to do with that dog.

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I'm gonna share with you two great quotes. They both are related to confidence. And the first one comes from BJ Fogg who is the author of I think my favorite book of 2022 by the name of [Tiny Habits](#). In that book he says, "We change best when we feel good not when we feel bad." Now he was talking about us humans, but I think that's true for dogs as well.

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So, the first things our students do in our programs is we are helping to create conditioned emotional responses, helping to grow that confidence, helping to grow that connection, helping to grow the trust in the relationship by conditioning things in that dog's environment. So, before we ever get to shaping anything— and by the way when our students are shaping, they don't even realize that they're shaping unless of course they're listeners to this podcast and now the jigs up Susan.

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And so, we want to have that dog be in a "Yeah! What are we gonna do? This is fun! I like this!" And that might start as in our [Home School the Dog program](#), the very first game we teach is something called Treat Diving where we give them a cue. We're conditioning a word, a positive emotional response to this word. This word happens and then magically food falls in front of you.



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We are conditioning everything from a collar, from your touch, from the words that we're going to use. We're creating this environment where the dog's going "Well, this is good. I kind of feel good about it."

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It allows us to do more with that dog. Because my second quote that I want to share with you is from actually a horse person. She wrote the book [Connection Training](#). It's a reinforcement-based horse training program.

Rachel Bedingfield said this quote and it is "Behavior doesn't happen in an unemotional vacuum."

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And so, let's be very intentional about the emotions we create for our dogs before we ever dive into that thing called reinforcement-based dog training. Okay.

So that's what the first part of growing confidence is all about. And it's ongoing. It isn't like, "Yeah, we done that, we're gonna go on for more training." No, this is all part of the training, these four elements.

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So, we're growing confidence. We've established how we do that initially through conditioning. Now we want to minimize conflicts. What do I mean by that?

Now conflicts happen every day between dogs and owners, and they're highlighted by phrases like "What did you do?" "No, ah-ah!" "Get off!" "You! Stop that!" "Bring that! What do you got? You come back here with that!" All of those are ways that you'll know you're having a conflict with your dog.

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And so, our goal in our training is to design your environment with your dog in a way that minimizes - ideally eliminates - any kind of conflict that may happen between you and your dog while we're growing that confidence and growing that relationship.

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Okay. And so how does that happen? That the reinforcement that we're gonna give your dog comes through you. Now, what does that mean?

So right now, you know that there's things that your dog just loves, food, toys, activities. What our program does is make sure that all of the food, toys, and activities get funneled through you.

This will become more clear to you a little later in the podcast when I'm sharing the absolute structure of how I train my dogs and how I train our students' dogs.

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So, we want to maximize all of the reinforcement that comes through you. And we want to minimize non-contingent reinforcement that the dog's getting in the environment.

Now, what does that mean Susan?

Well, non-contingent means they just grab it.

"Oh yeah. There's cookies on the floor. Woohoo. I'm getting that." "Oh, look at there's a squirrel on the backyard. I'm getting that too." "Oh yeah. Look at, I think I want to, there's a ball there. Let's play that ball. I want to play with the ball."



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Now it could be the dog is barking through a window. It could be it's all the places that the dog is getting reinforcement that isn't associated with you. Some of it may be great. Some of it may be not so great.

Now does this mean that my dogs have no reinforcement in their life unless it's about me? That kind of sounds like some sort of sick twisted psychopath, right? No. Right now while I'm recording this podcast my puppy I can hear downstairs, squeaking a squeaker over and over and over again.

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She has an ex-pen that's filled with all kinds of things that she can do without me. All right.

So, I'm not saying that they can have no pleasure in their life unless it's about me.

I'm saying you are aware. You are intentional about that reinforcement and ideally the most important reinforcement in your dog's life comes to them in the form of permission from you.

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Now I've talked a lot about permission on this podcast. I would strongly recommend you go to [podcast number 11](#), where I talked about the power of permission and how it could be making such a massive difference in you and in your relationship with your dog.

So, when we have those four elements in place, our goal of the training program is to turn any sort of distractions that you are wanting to stop right now into white noise for your dog.

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Your dog likes to chase wildlife, that's white noise. It eventually it becomes white noise and here is how we do it. First thing that we focus on is establishing value.

And remember I said food, toys, activities. Well, we're gonna get down to the nitty gritty. And what toys, what food, name them. On a scale of one to 10, how do they rank? "Oh, my dog likes all food." I bet you, if I gave them a dried kibble and a piece of steak, they'd go for that steak.

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You've got to know the value when you get down to activities and there's an entire podcast about this. It's podcast [episode number 90](#), where you can go through this whole process.

Now food, toys, activities. Activities, there's two categories of activities. Those that are great for our dog, and we'd love to have to be able to build those into our training. And those that are not healthy for our dog.

So, let's say your dog, you say "Susan, my dog loves chasing cars." Yeah. We're not going to use that as a reinforcement to get better behavior.

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All right. But if he loves chasing cars, I bet he'd love other things like maybe chasing a flirt pole. We can use that as a form of reinforcement in the training.

So, we want to identify that's the first layer is establishing the value and start growing that value through you, which leads us to the second thing I'm doing with my dogs and our students, and that is earn the value where our dogs can do simple things to earn rewards.



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I told you about Treat Diving. They basically have to do nothing. In [episode number 44](#) I shared with you a training progression chart. That is probably one of the most important documents that I could ever share with you. It helps you to see when you should be adding complexity.

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Remember in the 5C pyramid, I said complexity is added long after we get connection, clarity, and confidence.

Well, you go into some programs and they're adding complexity right away. Let's get your dog to sit and then stay.

You're working on stays before the dog has any connection to you emotionally or to this building or any reason to want to stay.

They're putting complexity or challenge long before they should. And that's a recipe for failure at best.

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And so, we've established what's of value and now we're gonna help your dog to understand how they earn the value. And for here for our students, we give them what I refer to in podcast [episode number 151](#). I'm giving you a lot of podcasts episodes, aren't I? Location specific markers.

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So, our students learn things like tug, means you can have the toy or cookie or good or yes, means I'm going to deliver a piece of food to you. The dog learns that toys or I could take a bowl of food and put it on the floor while I'm training, because they've never been taught to chase food with a lure. They've been taught that food is something you earn.

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Remember we're in level number two, earn the reinforcement. And it starts so simple, Treat Diving followed by [ItsYerChoice](#). I've shared that game with as many people in a far corners of this planet. ItsYerChoice is a game changer for your training.

It helps the dog to identify, when is food just white noise and when is the chance for me to earn it.

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And that takes us to level number three where we want to grow the value. So, remember back at the beginning we establish what food and toys and activities your dog loves.

Well for a lot of our students coming into our programs, that's a very, very short list. And so, with a short list it's very difficult to grow the value to things that we want to use in training like I want you down the road to understand this spot on my hip is of great value, we call it [Reinforcement Zone](#).

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But if we haven't transferred the value to other pieces of food or to toys or to games, we got to do that right now. So, what we teach our students first off and what I teach my puppies first off are games that change their physiology.

Because in everything we do with our students, we understand the importance of that [arousal curve](#) that I spoke about in many podcast episodes.



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The arousal curve that gets our dogs into their zone of genius, where they can learn and grow and connect with us at their best.

We want to teach our dogs games that help grow that arousal, but it's growing the connection at the same time. So that is where we're growing the value.

And guess what, by doing that we are continuing to add more positive conditioned emotional states to our dogs when they're interacting with us and yet it's training.

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"This is training? This doesn't seem like training Susan. Like, when do they go sit and down?" This is training.

This is training that helps create the change of not chasing wildlife and not chasing cats and not biting you and not chasing dogs while the dog is feeling good. Because change happens best when it feels good. Right.

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Now, we've grown that value, more food, more toys, more activities. Now we're going to transfer the value. And this is the stage where our students are actually doing some shaping, but they may not quite realize it. So, transferring the value to things like I said, positions.

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A position of lying on your side and being completely at ease while we're going to [trim your nails](#). Positions like I mentioned, walking beside me on a loose leash. Positions, like targeting different parts of your body that help transfer value in a way that makes you want to do that. Transferring value to locations like a crate or a dog bed that the dog wants to stay there.

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Remember we want to minimize conflict. We want the dog to be empowered by choice in every step of the training. And it may not sound like, like this kind of sounds like pie in the sky. But I've been doing it this way for more than 20 years. And I've been teaching it this way online for more than 12 years. It isn't pie in the sky. It's effective and it works for dog training problems you wouldn't imagine, games and conditioning a dog feeling good could ever work for.

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Now we've transferred the value. And guess what we're adding now, testing the value.

This is where we add challenge. Remember when you went to your third class in obedient school where they said, "Now we're gonna teach stay or come." pop. No, we don't add challenge until we have all of those other layers ahead.

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And then we can add challenge in a way that's a game, that's playful. That even if the dog fails, they're feeling good about themselves because they're anticipating getting things right the next time. So, our program is about reinforcement-based dog training, but we don't dig into any part of the quadrants of offering conditioning until we've really established through classical conditioning, a way for our dog and human bond to grow.



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And through that growth and that trust, anything is possible my friend. I hope this all makes sense to you. I know if you're one of my students listening to this, this will all make sense to you. But maybe you've not heard it laid out in this way. I'd love to get your feedback. Either jump over to shapedbydog.com/171 and leave us a comment or come on over to YouTube and watch the episode. Leave me a comment there.

What does all of this mean to you? And let me know, are you a very beginning novice trainer or are you an established professional? Because if you are an established professional trust me, if you would adopt some of this into your programming, it will make the world of difference to your students.

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And if you're still thinking this is a little bit not tangible, stick with me, I've got more coming up to talk about my own protocols in my own dog training and how I take those elements and make them work for anybody. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 170: 5 Popular Ways To Train Your Dog With Food](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Reactive or Aggressive Dogs: Key Insights with Susan Garret](#)

[Podcast Episode 130: Conditioned Responses: The Magic Every New Puppy \(And Dog\) Owner Must Know About](#)

[Book: Tiny Habits: The Small Changes That Change Everything by BJ Fogg](#)

[Home School the Dog Online Program](#)

[Book: Connection Training: The Heart and Science of Positive Horse Training by Hannah Weston and Rachel Bedingfield](#)

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

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

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

[Podcast Episode 151: How Location Specific Reinforcement Markers Will Improve Your Dog Training!](#)

[Learn the ItsYerChoice Game \(IYC\)](#)

[YouTube Video: Understanding Your Dog's Reinforcement Zone \(RZ\) with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 86: How to Train Unmotivated or Overexcited Dogs \(Arousal Curve\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 107: Pedicure Please: 3 Steps To Dog Nail Trimming Or Grooming Success At Home!](#)



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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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- TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@dogsthat>
- LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat>
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