

Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Having coached a lot of people with their dogs, it seems that dogs kind of go into one of three categories. Either, they absolutely hate being trained, second just behind getting their nails trimmed "I don't like being trained." Or they're so crazy about training, they're frantic and can barely think. Or they are driven and focused and absolutely loved being trained. What about your dog? One of those three categories. Think about it - more of one or more of the other? That's the topic of today's conversation.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And you could say, "Oh, it's the breed of dog. Like some breeds they're just not made to be trained. They kind of like more freedom. They're a little bit more feral of a dog." Or you know other people say, "Oh these dogs, they're so crazy for work. They get really, really high and you really can't get through to them because they're just not thinking."

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Well, today I'm gonna share with you it isn't necessarily the breed of dog. It isn't the trainer. It isn't "This dog just doesn't listen." There is one key thing that you may not be considering and I'm going to help you with it today. It doesn't matter if you're a brand-new trainer. It doesn't matter if you're an experienced world class trainer.

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This thing is going help everybody. And here it is. When you train a behavior, I don't care if it's a sit, I don't care if it's something like high level search and rescue, I don't care if it's an agility behavior, whatever that behavior is you are never just training the behavior. You are never just training from the very first time you teach a puppy anything, you are never just training a behavior. You are also training an [emotion](#).

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And I use the word "training" with quotes around it because it's not like you are saying "This dog needs to select being happy right now." But my mentor Bob Bailey, he used to always come around and say, "Pavlov is always on your shoulder as a trainer." Which means as you are selecting from one of your [four quadrants of operant conditioning](#), you also are - need to consider - the classical conditioning that is happening with the dog.

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Classical conditioning is just that. It's conditioning. So, it's the pairing, the Pavlov, remember we spoke about it in many episodes. The bell comes first and then the food. So, you are conditioning an emotional state every time you train a dog.

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And if when you're training your dog, your dog wants to leave work and you kind of bring him back or your dog goes off sniffing or they get distracted and they alarm bark "What was that?" All of that can become part of the training. The dogs emotion during the training of behavior X can be conditioned to be part of the training.



Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training

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And today I want to help you make sure that you are training a great positive conditioned emotional response each and every time you train your dogs. Now, what is a positive conditioned emotional response? I spoke about that in detail in podcast [episode number 106](#) in preparation for podcast [episode 107](#), where I talked about how I go about cutting my dog's nails and how my dog has consent and has a vote. And they can say, "I'm not enjoying this."

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So, we think about positive conditioned emotional response - really just about something the dog doesn't like and us helping them to like it more, like [visits to the Vet](#) and giving them a position, maybe a chin rest so that the Veterinarian can examine them and all the things that may or may not be unpleasant. Husbandry behaviors, grooming, we need to [consider the CER](#) for that.

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But how many of you when you're training your dog consider the dog's emotional state just for training? And I just want to preface this right now because I've heard via several compulsion trainers and this one's from one of the biggest names in television dog training who uses a lot of compulsion and fear-based training. He would actually, heard him say "The dog can't choose to be frightened today."

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How many of you say 'I'm gonna go near this edge of this cliff and I'm gonna choose not to be frightened even though I have a history of being fearful of heights.' "Today I'm gonna choose not to be frightened." How well will that go for you?

How well does it go for me even though I'm an adult saying "I'm gonna choose not to be frightened when I hear the dentist drill."? I still. I had my first root canal when I was 10 years old. I absolutely do not like going to the dentist. Because I've had a long history of negative conditioned emotional responses when I've been in that dentist chair.

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And so, emotions aren't something that a dog chooses. So, if your trainer suggests "That dog's choosing not to be thoughtful." No, no. That's the emotion that the dog is showing you in the midst of this training and likely it's there because nobody considered it when they were training.

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So, I'd like you to think about now. What is your dog's emotional state when you are training? Are they happy? Are they focused? Are they driven? You know, I've heard people criticize sport dog trainers saying "We don't have to have our dogs be fast. These sport dog people they need to have their dogs to be fast because they want to win. So, when we're just training pet dogs we don't care if they're fast." But let's dig into this a little bit.

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What does fast mean? Well, my dog comes fast on a recall. My dog goes fast on a retrieve. My dog when I ask them to sit, they go fast into a sit or a down or a stand boom, boom, boom. They're sharp. They're focused. They're driven. And what do you think if you asked my dogs "How much are you enjoying training right now?" "You with this? Oh, that's alright." No, they would say "Holy crap yeah! We're doing more!"



Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training

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So, speed actually is a representation of your dog's mental state. Not always because sometimes speed can be artificially created through a lot of pain. I'm not talking about that. You're listening to this podcast chances are that you're singing from the same hymnal as I am. And we want to create these conditioned emotional states with love and good dog training.

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And so, I want to consider when you ask your dog "we're gonna do training", if you never got any food out first, because guess what, the sight of food will create an emotional all of its own. "Hello, vegan chocolate chip cookies." I digress.

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What is your dog's emotional state if you asked them to do things and you had no cookies or no food or no toys on them? Would they be like "yeah"? Because that is what tells you what emotion has been built into your training.

If after the five or six behaviors that you asked the dog, they start going "Well I'm not – I'm really over this." then that tells me that you haven't really conditioned an emotional state into the dog training that says, "Let's do more!"

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Today, I'm gonna share with you how you can do that. Okay. I've got seven items. I tried to make it five guys. Five's a snappier number, you know, but I've got seven for you. Seven things that you can do that will influence your training.

Now I'm gonna preface this by saying, look we know if a dog is in physical pain, they're not feeling well, upset stomach, yada, yada, yada, it's gonna be very difficult to create a positive conditioned emotional response.

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And really, we shouldn't be trying because if you listened to podcast [episode 174](#) you know that dopamine is suppressed when a dog is unwell. So, you can't really condition a positive emotional response when that dog is in pain. So, we're gonna keep that out.

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Now you're gonna say, "Well what about training mechanics?" Yeah, that's got a lot to do with it. So, I want you— and I don't know why this isn't my number one viewed podcast because it's just so critically important. And that is podcast [episode number 167](#) where I taught how you can decrease the stress of your dog by becoming more effective with your training mechanics. So, check that podcast out if you haven't already done so.

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Because we're just gonna level the training field and say yes, it's not about how experienced you are as a trainer. It's not about what kind of physical condition your dog's in. We're gonna take all of that out of there.

This is just everybody right now with the dog you have and the experience you have, and the training chops you have, these are seven things that you can do right now to make sure that when you train your dog, you're training in always the emotion that you want to.



Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training

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Number one and I mentioned this in my last podcast, that was podcast [episode number 175](#). Do you shape your dog's behavior or are you luring it? Because we know luring does not create the dopamine response because the dopamine response happens when the reinforcement for the dog is higher than expected.

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And when you're shaping the reinforcement is never expected because the dog doesn't quite know when it's coming out. It's not in front of them while they're doing something. And so, every reinforcement is higher than expected because expectation is nothing. And so, are you shaping—immediately when we're shaping, we know that our training is creating a dopamine spike, which means there's a very good likelihood that you are creating a positive conditioned emotional response.

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Number two, a lot of people I see with dogs that leave work or get distracted easily are trying to train massive, big lumps of behavior. So, you get your wee puppy home at 9 or 10 weeks old, and you try to teach them to [walk on leash](#). “We're gonna go outside now. We're gonna walk on leash.” There's so many layers that come in before you strap on that leash and head out the door down to the city to visit. Walking on a loose leash requires a lot of slices. And I certainly wouldn't be doing that the first day I have that puppy home.

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Alright. So, break the behavior into small slices. You have a much better chance at creating a positive conditioned emotional response. Why? Because with a small slice of behavior, the chance of your puppy or your dog getting things right dramatically increases. I see this with people who try in the sport of dog agility who use lures to get see-saws or dog walks or contacts and you're trying to get the whole thing. Chances for stress, fear, mistakes, astronomically higher when you haven't broke the behavior down into small bite size pieces. Bite size pieces of success.

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Number three, what are the competing reinforcement in that dog's environment when you're training? Because if there's like, you know you're training at the bunny farm and they're like, “Oh, but that's over there. Oh, oh, oh, I don't—.”, you're gonna create some anxiety in your training. That anxiety is gonna be put into the behavior that you are trying to create.

Also, the dog's focus going somewhere else and you having to bring them back. That's the point I'm gonna bring up a little bit later. What do you do when your dog loses focus in your training? That's such an important point. So important that I leave it to the very end of today's podcast.

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Alright. So, minimize the distraction. I talked about that in podcast [number 167](#), minimize the distraction in the environment, maximize the success. What happens with success? Dopamine spikes and positive conditioned emotional responses.

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Number four, another biggie. When you have a dog who seems to be like enjoying what you're doing, or if you yourself are enjoying what you're doing you tend to keep doing it. So, I see people who are training an agility and the dog is kind of going at like half speed.



Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training

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But they're like, "Oh, we're doing it! We're doing obstacles! I don't care if my dog's going half speed. I'm just gonna keep doing it." That half speed is an emotion, guys. Half speed in agility, half speed in any dog sport is an emotion you are building into the behavior. And you think "Oh, my dog will get faster when he learns to like this." Oh, nay nay.

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Slice the behavior in short, short sessions. I have this book it's called the Streaker Journal. And when you become a Recaller you will receive a Streaker Journal. Do you see what I did there? I assume everyone listening to this podcast at some point will join our [Recallers program](#). Now Streaker Journal, I wrote this in 1998 and what it is, there was a rescue dog. I named him Streaker and he was a little Jack Russel Terrier.

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I think he was about 14 months old. It's all in this journal. And he was turfed out of his first two homes and marking all over in the house, had no interest in food, no interest in tugging, no interest in balls. Originally was bought for a sport prospect but the people said there's no hope, he has no desire to be a sport prospect. He wants to be a coach potato. And I'm like, I think dogs can be both.

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And so, I took this dog on, I think it was right around Christmas and I trained him in short sessions. How short do you say? Well, sometimes the session was like 16 seconds long. And I documented everything in this little journal, and I wrote it all down. So, here's one, 30 second session, 45 second session, two-minute session, woo – woo – woo – woo! Eight minutes, we worked up.

So, as he progressed I had longer and longer sessions. But within those two to three minutes to five-minute sessions there was also moments in between which we call Balance Breaks. That is point number five.

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I talked about balance breaks in podcast [episode number 57](#). I feel super important where you are training something you have some success; you break the dog away and you change their physiology. You're getting their breathing, their heart rate up. You're doing some chase games. And if your dog doesn't like to tug, you can use chase food and then chase you.

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We're changing the dog's physiology and then we go back to training. And we do this for two reasons. One for the dog and one for you. Because it's impossible for you as a trainer to maintain the kind of focus that you require to be the best you can be for your without taking a break every I don't know, 45 seconds. You know, a minute is probably the maximum that I would ever train a dog. I probably do it in 30 seconds to 45 second breaks, a little balance break and then we go right back to our work.

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Alright. So, point number four is short sessions. Point number five, balance breaks and balance breaks. Number six, I'm kind of reverse engineering this. Number six is your dog's buy-in. That is what I call the game on position. So, for my dogs it's super easy. If I'm starting with a puppy, it usually the training starts from a crate. So, I'll play some [Crate Games](#) and then I open the door. Their buy-in saying, "Yes, I want to do this."



Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training

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If you're watching this on YouTube, my dog Feature who just love to work and always had opinions about it. It doesn't have to look like they're crazy. It just has to look like they're focused. They're sharp. Their ears are on the top of the head. They're on their paws and you know, "Yeah, let's do this! Let's-" and I release them from the crate.

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Instantly when you get buy-in guys, what you get is the distractions start to melt away. If you always get buy-in before you train - if you're just taking your dog off the couch and say, "Yeah, let's do some shaping here." It's kind of like "Uh, sleeping. Uh, oh yeah. We're gonna do some shaping now? Uh, okay. Are you gonna gimme a cookie? Okay. That is good. Yeah, that's good."

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Buy-in is you're establishing that emotion of "Don't you just love this?!" right from the very first moment you say to the dog, "Let's go, game on." And if I was dealing with a dog like Streaker, that's all I worked on for my first few sessions is getting him to say, "I love this."

And I trained him in the lower level of our house, and I would get him out of his kennel. It was in the kitchen. We would go downstairs. And at first, he was like, "Oh gosh, can I mark on this? Can I mark on that?" And I would rush him through the house on leash. He wouldn't even think about marking. We get into the lower level to my what I call the training den and then I would just do hold you back and chase a cookie.

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And you got that, I might do two of those. And then I hold you back, put on the leash and go, "Let's go!" And I'd run back upstairs and put him back in his crate. And after doing two or three of those, guess what, he was getting super excited about getting to go to work. It didn't take me much more than a couple weeks before Streaker was living in my house just like one of my family pets.

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And shortly after that I had a waiting list of people wanting to adopt him. He was such a cool driven dog. Yes, he tugged. Yes, he loved tennis balls. Yes, he'd worked for food. All of the things that people said he wasn't it took me just less than a month to create all of that in that dog. Just by following the things that I'm talking about right now.

Every session starts with buy-in. You do a little bit, you take a balance break, you re-engage, you take a balance break, and on a balance break you can end up putting them back in a crate or up on a Hot Zone, a dog bed, to create that reengagement.

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Okay. And my final point number seven, this is a biggie. Believe the dog. Always believe the dog. You are teaching your dog; your dog is teaching you. Your dog's responses is giving you feedback on the effectiveness of what you've done. Is the session short enough? Is the slice that you're trying to train small enough? Did you get buy-in to begin with? Have you done balance breaks at the most appropriate time?

So, when your dog in the midst of working stops and scratches, or more obviously goes off and has a big poop or goes and visits somebody, or just starts sniffing, all of this is telling you 'Somewhere you missed.'



Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training

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And so, you have one of two things that you can do. You can put the dog up either in their bed with a handful of cookies or in their crate with a handful of cookies, take down your video and evaluate. Were there things that you missed up to this point?

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Or you can re-engage but if the dog has gone off and left you, there would be no re-engagement for me. That dog has given me a neon sign 'Your training was flawed.' I would put that dog up and evaluate. Was it how I manipulated my environment? Was it the slice of the behavior? Was it the length of the session? Was it my mechanics as a trainer? What happened?

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Now I'm not saying every time a dog gets stressed, we stop the session. What I'm saying is that dog getting stressed is giving you feedback on your training session, on how you set it up and how you've been executing on that session. And so, I either put the dog up and go and look at my video. Or if it's just that the dog kind of looked away or just started sniffing, I might stand still until that dog re-engages with me and I go, "Okay, let's try that again."

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And I might try it again. If I get half speed, if I get disengagement, if I get anything that says the dog is in this game, then I put them up and I say, "Let's go back to the drawing board because something was flawed in either how I planned this or how I executed it."

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Guys it's just so important that you believe the dog. When you believe the dog, you will make good training choices that is always in the best interest of the dog. And that's when every session builds on the last. It builds in momentum. It builds in success. It builds in buy-in from the dog and when the dog's loving it, you are gonna love it.

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Set a timer if you need to, because sometimes when it gets so good you train for too long. And the worst thing that can happen is you're always ending your training because your dog disengages. Absolutely the worst thing that can happen. Alright. I hope this makes sense. I would love to hear your feedback on this.

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Do you have a dog right now - be honest with me - do you have a dog who is crazy over the top, not thinking, crazy about dog training? Well, then you need to evaluate the reinforcement that you're using. Are you biting off too much of a slice for them? Are your training environments not manipulated enough? Or is your dog just right loving this? "This is great."

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They're focus every time you bring them out, they love to train and they're giving you the right—remember in the zone? We talked about the arousal zone in podcast [episode number 86](#). Is your dog right in that zone? Or does your dog look for ways to get out of training with you? "Uh, yeah, it's a little hot outside." "Mm. I think it's raining out." "Oh, I think I hurt my paw." "I don't think I want to really train." If that's your dog, I'm hoping the seven things I went over today are gonna help you change that.





Episode: #176

Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training

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Let me know. Come on over to YouTube, leave me a comment. And while you're over here, please hit the subscribe button if you're not a subscriber. And if what I'm saying to you today and in any of my podcasts is of value to you and you think it would be of value to another dog owner, I would love for you to share this information because there's so much less than perfect and let's just call it flawed dog training advice getting floated around right now.

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Let's get really good science-based training that's going to bring out the best in dogs in a process based in love. Let's get that shared by sharing this podcast with your other dog loving friends. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[YouTube Playlist: The Emotional State of Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 146: Balanced Dog Training: Does It Really Exist?](#)

[Podcast Episode 106: Consent In Dog Training: The Misuse, Misunderstanding And Misapplication](#)

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

[YouTube Video: Vet Visits For Dogs: How To Create A Positive Experience For Everyone](#)

[Podcast Episode 132: All The Things Your Dog Hates And How To Fix Them](#)

[Podcast Episode 174: Dopamine In Dog Training: Anticipation, Rewards, And The Transfer Of Value](#)

[Podcast Episode 167: Reduce Your Dog's Stress And Anxiety In Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 175: Food Luring VS Shaping In Dog Training: How Science Changed How I Teach Dogs](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Loose Leash Walking with Susan Garrett](#)

[Recallers](#)

[Podcast Episode 57: Why Balance Breaks Fast Track Your Dog Training](#)

[Crate Games](#)

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



Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of 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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