

Dog Training Outside The Box: Transfer Of Value Case Study

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Over the last few weeks I have been rolling out a series that kind of grew organically from your questions, all about the [methodology of how I train](#) my dogs, how I come up with the lesson plans for my students and often it's "How do you train this without a lure, Susan?"

It could be something as simple like, "How do you teach heeling without a food lure?", or "How do you teach your dog to point his back leg with or without a food lure?", "How could you shape your dog to retrieve?" And my answer to that really requires some out of the box thinking. And tonight, I'm going to do a deep dive and give you a glimpse of what that looks like.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. In [a podcast last week](#), I mentioned a German Shepherd that I was teaching in Atlanta, and this was at least or more than 20 years ago. I was giving a seminar. This woman showed up right at the beginning of the day. She said, "This is my dog." Let's call her Bella. Honestly, my memory is not that good that I can't remember either the woman's name or the dog's name.

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She said, "I need to teach Bella how to retrieve the dumbbell for obedience. And my instructor said that they would like to do a force fetch." Which means they were going to ear pinch the dog until the dog opened its mouth. Then they would put the dumbbell in and that's called negative reinforcement. They remove the pain when the dog does what they want. You guys don't really need to know that if you are listening to this podcast, you probably don't ever want to cause your dog pain.

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But this was what was going to be Bella's fate if I couldn't help this woman somehow do that behavior. Let's just take a step back and talk about when we are training in a reinforcement-based program, meaning you've decided you want to train your dog without the use of physical corrections or verbal intimidation. You don't want to say, "Hey! No! Ah!" You don't want to give them a collar pop. You certainly don't want to give them an ear pinch in order to get them to open their mouth for a dumbbell.

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When you decide to train that way then your number one tool is reinforcement. And so, you've got to become brilliant at the use of and the understanding of reinforcement. So, let's just do a deep dive into that. And I break it up into what we need the dog to understand and what the human really needs to understand all about reinforcement.

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So, let's talk about the dog since it's pretty simple for them. Number one, the dog needs to understand when reinforcement is available. Meaning 'now you're going to earn your reinforcement' because otherwise they're gonna be constantly trying to get the reinforcement especially if they've been lured. So, the first thing that we teach our students in our online classrooms is how to teach the dog to know when the reinforcement is coming.



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You can just chillax until it's coming. And you guys know all about markers. So, a marker is what tells the dog that choice was correct. The choice was correct. And you know from podcast [episode number 174](#) that now they're gonna get a dopamine spike. That they've made the correct choice. They can expect a reinforcement is on the way.

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And so, a marker is what teaches our dogs that. It could be a marker like a clicker. So, every single time my dog hears a clicker, they will get a reinforcement. Even if I click by mistake, I will always reinforce because that's the bond that I've made with my dog. There are other things like words that I'll use.

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And if you refer to podcast [episode number 151](#), I talked about location specific markers which tells my dog that they're going to get a reinforcement delivered here or they can go here and expect this reinforcement. If I want my dog to hold a position or a location I will say "cookie" which means I'm going to deliver the cookie to their mouth.

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So stationary positions, that's an easy one that tells them you no need to move. I will deliver the cookie into your mouth. In heel position, I will say "cookie", touch my hip and deliver the cookie. And the hip becomes a targeted area for the dog to stay in that general location. Okay. So, I've spoken about them. You can [go to 151](#) and look at all the words that I used that mean 'your reinforcement is coming, expect it here'.

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I do also have a couple words that mean 'you possibly might earn reinforcement but keep doing what you're doing' and things like "good" or "super" or "excellent". Like these words that mean 'keep going, you're on the right track'. The dog needs to understand don't go after whatever reinforcement is out in your environment unless you hear a marker word that says, "game on now it's coming" or "now you can go get it".

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The second thing that the dog needs to know is how to earn that reinforcement, meaning when they are being shaped, they need to know how to offer a behavior. And for dogs who've been food lured their whole life, they have been reinforced for doing nothing until the lure comes out. So, a lot of dogs won't start offering "Look, I can wave. I can back up. I can roll my eyes. I can knit you a sweater." So, people will assume, "Oh, this dog. Yeah, clicker training, that method won't work for my dog."

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Yeah, you know what, clicker training isn't a method, it's just applying science. So, it works for every species on the planet. It will work for your dog. Your dog will abide by the laws of learning. I promise. However, you may need to make that very simple for them to offer their first behavior.

Alright. So, it's possible. That's all our dogs have to do is understand and through our educating them, they will understand their marker words which means 'your reinforcement's available'. And they have to understand how to offer something. Now it's your work. What do you need to know? First of all, you have to know, what are your dog's best reinforcements.



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That is number one, what is like off the charts, crazy, outrageous, 'oh my gosh I'm losing my mind because this reinforcement is coming out'. You also need to know, what is a really good reinforcement. And then you've got to know, what is an acceptable reinforcement. Now, those things are gonna change based on the age, of the dog's experience in training, and the location where you are training.

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So, what's outrageous, what's good, what's acceptable in this environment at this stage of your training. Alright. And what about under these distractions? Because if there's a lot of environmental distractions, you're gonna have to go and even higher. So, what was previously acceptable won't be acceptable when there's a lot of distractions around.

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Every time you train your dog you have to consider where you're training and what is outrageous, what is good, what is acceptable, because those are going to keep changing. You also have to know, what are you limited by the environment you're training. So, for example if you're training in a class, you can't use a squeaky toy because you're going to be just distracting all of the other dogs.

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Likewise, if your dog's outrageous number one reinforcement is swimming and there's no body of water nearby, that can't be your dog's number one outrageous outstanding reinforcement when you're training in this environment. So, the environment, it's not just the distractions, it's the structure of the environment, what problems or what assets does it present that you can use as a reinforcement.

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For example, when I am training my Border Collie This! in the building, her number one most outrageous reinforcement is me or somebody else taking off running with a toy that she can catch and play tug with. When we are outside, her number one outrageous reinforcement is the chance to chase her mother.

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So, it changes knowing that you want to go to that when you need it. Now, the other thing you need to consider, what is the most outrageous good and acceptable reinforcement for the behavior that you are training. So, if you were going to be training, let's say precision heel position, you may choose to use something that can be delivered to the mouth of the dog in that precision heel position.

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So, you could use like go for a swim to reinforce that, but it would be more limiting because it could only happen once every once in a while, where delivering high value food could happen more quickly. So, what is the behavior and is it reasonable to consider using what the dog loves most of all in the normal situation. Alright. Does it work for the behavior that you are training?

The next consideration is the delivery of that reinforcement. And that is really dependent upon your goal. What is your goal of training? So, if I was wanting to shape my dog to accept their nails being trimmed, there's a lot of things that come up to this, but the position would be they're lying on their side. And I would either give them a marker word which meant you could get out of that position. Or more likely what I would do is bring the reinforcement to them.



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So, the placement of the reinforcement actually reinforces them lying down. [Reinforcement is a process](#). If you use a marker, you still need to be considerate of the placement of the reinforcement. So, if you wanted to teach a dog to run far away from you and you marked 'that's good' and then they came back and sat in front of you while you dug a cookie out of your pocket, yeah you would be reinforcing them leaving you, but you would also be reinforcing them for coming back and sitting in front of you. Which would be in opposition to them running away from you.

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So, the behavior of running away from you would take a lot longer for you to train. Super important. The placement of reinforcement is critical because you've got that gap. Next is the delivery of reinforcement. "Well, what's the difference, Susan? The delivery and the placement?" The placement is what the dog is doing. The delivery is how swift and deliberate you are when you are bringing that reinforcement to them.

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Okay. Reinforcement process. It's a process. So, the humans got to be concerned with the value, the delivery, and the placement. The dog they got it kind of easy. Now let's get back to our friendly German Shepherd and take all these considerations in. The first thing I said to this lady is "What is of value?" And she opened this amazing buffet.

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She had all these little Tupperware containers, chopped up roast beef in this one, chopped up chicken in this one, a chopped up hardboiled egg in this one, chopped up cheese and some little freeze-dried minnows. I remember it like, it was like, "Wow, this is one lucky dog." These seem like all pretty outrageously high value awards.

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And I said, "Okay. And what about a clicker? Does he know a clicker?" "Yep. He knows a clicker means he's gonna get a reward." Alright. Number two she said, "I want to teach him to retrieve."

But remember in the last podcast episode I talked about the [emotion of training](#) before I go to what's important, any part of the shaping process for the retrieve, I need to know what kind of emotion this dog is going to be bringing into the training.

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And so, I take my training away from what's important. Super important for you to know you don't just start training what you want to train, take it away from what's important. So, if I was teaching in agility a dog to stop at the end of a dog walk, I would take that away from training and teach them to stop at the end of a set of stairs until I get a high level of 'oh my gosh, this is so good' then I would take it into what's important.

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So, we're gonna take the training away from what's important and that [involved a target stick](#). So, I want the dog to just touch his nose to the target stick. We're gonna click and reward that. Okay. So, we're doing this in a group. She presented the target; the dog touched it.

And if ever there was a dog personifying Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh, he did it.



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She gave him a piece of roast beef and he chewed it up so slowly, then she presented it. And then the dog kind of was looking at her, looked away very slowly and deliberately touched the target, she clicked, he looked back at her, she gave him chicken.

Same response no matter what kind of outrageous high value reward she gave. So, at the end of the session we put the dogs away and I said, "I'm very confident, if this is your outrageous high value reward, your dog will be getting an ear pinch from your instructor tomorrow. Because there is no way we are going to shape a retrieve when he really doesn't care about the reinforcement."

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Because shaping is about the transfer of value. The value the dog has for the reinforcement you're using goes into the behavior you're training. So, I said, "Does he like tug toys?" "No." "Does he like tennis balls?" "Not really." "Okay. Is there anything that your dog has ever seen or done or eaten or smelled that makes his ears come up and he's on the balls of his feet and the tail just starts going, 'oh yeah!'"

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"Oh yeah." she said. "When the kids play with the bubbles in the backyard. You know those soap bubbles? You blow and the bubbles come out." I said, "Alright, go get me some dollar store bubbles." We got the bubbles. Now here's the key. We've got our best reinforcement. We've got a split. We've got our marker and now we've got to manipulate the environment.

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So, I put the bubbles on a chair, and I said, "We are going to go and shape behavior over here." And I said I just want to see what this dog's like with bubbles. So, we presented the target and when he touched it, I said we're gonna create a reinforcement process. So, when he touches it, I want you to say the word "bubbles" which is meaningless to this dog. He didn't know they were bubbles.

He turned to her, she started running the 25 feet to the chair, picked up the bubbles and doing some streams. This dog turned into something the likes I've never seen before. He was jumping over the woman's head, snapping like an alligator grabbing those bubbles. And in between when she was loading, his tail was going like a helicopter "Oh my gosh! There's bubbles!"

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So, two streams of bubbles that's it. Put it back. Come on back over here. Now what most people would say, "Oh my gosh, we found something that the dog loves. We're just gonna train with bubbles for the rest of his life." There's two problems, actually probably three problems with that.

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Number one, you get that icky soap scum all over your house. Who wants that? Number two, eventually the dog's getting tired. Like that was a pretty exhausting exhibition. And number three, how inconvenient is it to always be packing bubbles? So, what we have to do is take the value of the high outrageous reinforcer and put it into our other reinforcers, AKA the transfer of value.

And so, this is the process. She presented the target. The dog touched it, click, give a piece of roast beef. He did his slow chew. Presented the target the second time, we say "bubbles", run across the floor, another stream of bubbles. It only took two before this dog said, "Yeah, I'll touch that ball."



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So, she started going like hit the ball and then she was turning to sprint to the bubbles on her own. But no one said “bubbles”. Without a marker there's no reinforcement. That's why it's just super important that we're not letting a dog just grab reinforcement on their own. “Come on back here, Bella.” She hit it again and she was kind of moved but click means you're getting food.

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Then we did a click and food again and then another touch and “bubbles”, off we go running and more bubbles. So that was the end of the session. The rest of the sessions is we started going five nose touches with food and one bubbles. And then maybe we do one nose touch and bubbles. And then we went to 10 nose touches before we got the bubbles. And then we might have done three and then one again but with bubbles.

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And then we might go to 20 and guess what, by the end of the day I think Bella would've whittled us something out of wood if we wanted. She was so excited about the click and getting food because the more she got of that, the closer she got to bubbles.

Very soon the bubbles would only have to come out I don't know, once a session or once very week and eventually it would be just a special reinforcement that you wouldn't have to use because food had gone from barely tolerable to really good. Because they meant the chance to get closer to bubbles.

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So, outside the box thinking means there isn't a linear path for all dogs.

You look at the reinforcement process.

You look at what is outrageous to the dog. And you look at how can you grow excitement by putting the bubbles 25 feet away, we got the dog to run, changing the physiology, building in a game within a game that working with me is exciting. Moving with me is exciting.

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Shaping that dog to retrieve an object or point his back leg, anything would've been possible now all that would be required is a great training plan and knowing what's your environment, what are the distractions, what is the behavior you want to create, and what's the most appropriate reinforcement because you have so many at this point.

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Okay. This has been a long series and I thank you guys for your questions that has led me to put together really defining my origin in dog training. Defining how I train all of my students. And I want to take this opportunity to share with you this October I'm gonna be rolling out something very special.

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You're familiar with video streaming like your favorite movies and every month there's a membership that you can join and just watch series or movies, some documentaries. Well, my team and I are rolling out one for people who have an interest in training their dogs and it's called DoggyFlix.

So [DoggyFlix](#) is going to be available in October 100% free. Because if you've been following my podcast, you know I love to share what I know. I love to create a better life for dogs and their humans.



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And so, I'm making a commitment that a minimum of once a year, all the members of DoggyFlix will receive an educational video series. And the first one will be coming out in October. You can go to doggyflix.com right now. That's doggyflix.com.

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And there's a waiting list. Everybody who joins that waiting list will get a notification when DoggyFlix is available. You will create a membership. Remember right now this is a hundred percent free for anybody who wants to continue to learn. Everything that I've talked about here in the podcast, how do we apply this to actual dog training? So that's going to be the topic of the first series in DoggyFlix.

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So go ahead, [click the link](#) that's in the show notes right now, take you over to the waiting list. I'm just super excited for what my team and I are putting together to create this brand-new venue of DoggyFlix to bring amazing education to dog lovers everywhere.

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I'd love to know what gems, aha moments, and nuggets you received from today's podcast. Please jump on over to YouTube and leave a comment for me because I love getting your feedback. You guys are amazing. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

DoggyFlix Waiting List:

[Click here to get on our DoggyFlix Waiting List](#)

Resources:

[YouTube Playlist: Susan Garrett's Dog Training Philosophy and Training Processes](#)

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

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

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

[Podcast Episode 31: 5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster \(Reinforcement Process\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 176: Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Target Training for Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)



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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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