

What Does "Train The Dog In Front Of You" Really Mean?

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Have you ever been in a training situation, and you just felt, "I'm in the wrong place. My dog is not responding the way these other dogs are." It could be a class or a workshop. It could be working in an online class, and you see other peoples' videos and you go, "My dog's not like those dogs." Well, if you've ever thought that, then this video is for you.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And I often tell my students this line, 'You need to train the dog in front of you.' or 'You need to meet your dog where they're at.' And I've been saying that for years. And recently one of my students said to me, "Susan, I'm not sure I know what that means." And it dawned on me, I don't think I've ever explained fully. I just assumed people knew what I meant.

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And so, in today's podcast I'm going to explain more fully what exactly I mean, and how you can go about training the dog that's in front of you. Because it's obvious "yeah, the dog's in front of me, I'd like to train her. So how can I do that?"

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I'm going to first tell you a story that has stuck with me for many, many years, and my late husband and I, we were members of an obedience club, a local obedience club. And he actually taught classes there many, many, many years before he passed away. Anyway, one night we were there, and we were just visiting.

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There was a little Jack Russell Terrier in class, and I have a soft spot for Jack Russell Terriers. It was a little rough coated Jack Russell, and it was in a lineup of stays. Now, if you've ever been to a formal training class, often they'll put dogs side by side, you know, a good distance apart, six feet apart, 10 feet apart in a line to do the stay behavior where the owner instructs the dog to stay and often with a big wave of a hand in front of the dog's face and then they go and set distance away.

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You know, in most training classes they might start just pivoting out in front of the dog, and then going halfway across the hall, and eventually going the full distance across the hall. I have no idea where they were in this young dog's training life, but what I saw was a dog who wasn't being met where he was at. I saw both an owner and an instructor of a class that weren't training the dog in front of them, because this dog had its ears pinned, its tail clamped to its butt, and it was shaking.

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From outside the ring, I could see the dog shaking. The owner would tell it "stay" and would go to leave and the dog would belly crawl and try to follow it, and the instructor would say "Correct him. He should stay." And she would give him a pop on the collar and tell him more adamantly "stay!" And this happened, I don't know, two or three times and I was going wild outside of the class.



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Now John, he didn't like to make waves and he didn't like that I made waves and I'm like, "You got to call somebody or I'm calling Humane Society, because this isn't right. And before anybody could do something about it, the woman had left the dog one more time. Now the dog, this poor, pitiful soul was just sitting there quivering and it was staying, it was like, "Okay, I'll stay, I'll stay."

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And what did the instructor do then? Went in behind the dog and banged on the wall. And then of course the dog just ran to its owner.

And that's when I blurted out, "I am calling the Humane Society!" and then all hell broke loose, and John said he was never going back there with me again. But that's not the point of my story.

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The point of my story is that owner was put in a position because she trusted the authority of the classroom.

She trusted the design of the classes. She trusted the instructor. She trusted the person of authority, and all of that failed that dog. Because when a dog gives us feedback on our training, we need to believe them.

Now, if you've been listening to this podcast, you've heard me talk over and over and over again about the [5C Pyramid](#). That is the formula that I do all of my dog training, and my dog training has been so successful, not just for me but for thousands, tens of thousands of students that have come through my programs.

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And the first thing we need to do is connect with the dog. And then we need to grow clarity with what our expectations are. Now, if I said to that instructor and to that woman, "Would you be willing to bet me a thousand dollars that that dog is going to stay?" And if the answer is no, then why are you putting him in that situation?

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So, we haven't got clarity. The dog doesn't know with great certainty what is expected of them. And when they have that clarity, then what we do is we grow the dog's confidence over and over again in different environments, so we generalize good behavior, so the dog is happy to do what you ask, even if it is stay.

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And then the fourth element is we add challenge. Now that dog was put in obviously a very challenging situation right from the get-go. And then the top of the pyramid is you can add complexity of fancy behaviors if you want. Now, I don't know that class, I don't know that dog, I walked in on and I saw that, and this was my photograph of that moment.

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But what I would ask that person in that situation is, I'm the instructor and I would say, "Now this has been something we've been going doing for weeks. Have you been practicing at home?" And they would say yes. "Now, would you say the dog has practiced ten times, a hundred times, or a thousand times?" "Well, probably closer to ten."



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"Okay. Would it be in one location, one room? Three rooms or ten rooms?" "Oh, no I don't. I just always practice in the same time." Okay, same room and very few repetitions. What are the chances that this dog is going to do it with the challenge of other dogs, and it was a very busy building with three other rings going and a lot of commotion.

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Why? Why can't we meet the dog where they're at? And the moment you see that that dog is worried, what you would do is say, "Hey, instead of you working your stay in this row of dogs, why don't you go on the opposite side of the room, and you just do your first stay beside your dog. Can we do that?" And if the dog can't do that, then the dog, maybe they're not feeling well, maybe they're just not themselves. It doesn't matter what the reason is. We train the dog that's in front of us.

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So, you might have a dog who in a [similar situation is crazy happy](#) because they love people and they love dogs, and "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh! I want to see you and I want to see you and I want to see you!" And they're just super, super happy. Will you have success getting that dog to do that stay in that situation? Highly unlikely, it's going to end up in a similar situation to the first one.

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What if you have a [dog who's reactive](#) to other dogs? "Yeah, my dog's not going to be normal." You're going to feel like a failure. "My dog can't do what the other dogs do." "My dog can't be put in the same situations as the other dogs." That doesn't make your dog bad. That doesn't make your dog wrong. And that doesn't make you any less important than anybody in that classroom.

So, you could have a dog who's super excited to see other dogs. You could have a dog who's [reactive](#). You could have a dog like I suspect this Jack Russell was, who was just a little bit [fearful](#).

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You could be one of the lucky ones and have a "normal dog." Now, I don't even know if there is such a thing.

Every one of us who gets a dog, we are going to be gifted with a problem or two. And it is those problems or two that allow us to grow a deeper connection because the dog learns, "Hey, they've got my back. They're going to help me through this situation."

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And you learn to be a better dog trainer, even if "No, I don't want to be a dog trainer. I just want to be a dog owner." You who own a dog, you are the one training the dog. Whether you're training it very well or very poorly, you're still the trainer. And so, every problem, every challenge that we're given by the gift of owning and loving a dog, allows us to have a deeper understanding of how dogs learn.

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We get a deeper understanding of how to read our dog's emotions, and we learn for this dog and for every dog after, the 5C Pyramid. And what does the dog in front of me need right now? That's what I mean when I say, 'we got to meet our dogs where they're at.'

And so, if we have a dog who is in that situation and they just love people and they love dogs I would go in there with my, what we call a [Hot Zone](#), a raised dog bed.



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"Hey, my dog is just way too happy. So I've been practicing her – She can't sit stay, she can't, she just wiggles and gets too frantic. I've just been allowing her to jump on this dog bed. As long as she stays on the dog bed, she can sit, down, or wiggle. And I've practiced this in three different locations inside my home. Plus, I've gone to five other locations outside my home. We've got a hundred repetitions on this. I think we're going do good. That's what I would like to do in class when we have our stay." That might work for our dog who is fearful or reactive. But if chances are they're fearful or reactive dog, we aren't even going to go in that ring with other dogs.

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We're going to go outside the ring, we might be at the concession booth with the people that are waiting for their dogs, the friends that are training their dogs. There just might be people, unless our dog's afraid of people, then we might be in the parking lot.

We would be at home learning this from the comfort of our own home until we could see that the dog in front of us has moved from being worried, to being confident. Confident where? In the living room. Then we're going to grow that behavior of 'hold a position' in our crate in the bedroom. 'Can you hold a position while I bounce some balls? Can you hold some position with distractions?'

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Everything you do that the dog's earning reinforcement we've grown a little bit more confidence. We're going to go to a different room. So, it starts with [Crate Games](#), and then it would go to a Hot Zone, and then maybe you would do it outside. It depends. It depends on what? It depends on the dog in front of you.

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You know, I had a dog named Buzz. He was born in 1996 and he was super excited. He loved to work, he loved to see other dogs. He would like claw, he just wanted to see the people. He would pull so hard into his collar when he saw people. First, I went to an agility class when he was quite young. I don't remember, maybe nine months old, it was a few years ago.

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And he was great. His first level of agility, I think there were six classes. We went back for level two, and it was like he was demonized. He remembered the fun he had in that building and he was screaming as we tried to walk through the door. The other dogs were there, all the toys, "toys", that was the little low agility obstacles that we were going to be working on. They were all there and he could not control himself, screaming! And so, I went out into the parking lot, and I looked through the window what they were doing, and I played my games in the parking lot.

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And then next week I asked, "Can I come early and do some of those games in the building with no dogs?" I was meeting my dog where he was at back in 1996.

Meeting him where he was at allowed him to get to a place where he didn't need to get corrections. He just got confidence.

I don't know when it's going to happen. And the key is guys, it doesn't matter. It can't matter. You can't be forcing this. "Alright, I'll meet you where you're at, but you got to get where I want you to be at in a month."



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We can set goals for our dogs, but it's our dogs who set the pace of that training.

They set the pace by telling you where they're at. And if you honor your dog in this way, then you guys are going to grow together as a team.

You're going to end up with a confident dog. A dog who knows they can trust you. A dog who knows you're not going to put them in a situation they're not ready for.

And a dog who knows you're going to incrementally increase their challenge in dog training only when they're absolutely oozing with confidence.

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The 5C Formula. Now, where do you go from here?

If you jump over to my YouTube channel, you're going to find some playlists there. A [playlist on targeting](#) would be a great one to look at, and if you're unsure what I mean about the dog showing you their emotions, then go and check out the [playlist on your dog's body language](#).

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The targeting will give you some great little skills that you can work on at home that will build your dog's confidence, that will help you grow as a team, that will allow you to meet your dog where they're at and help them get to a better place.

I hope all of this makes sense and I hope I can continue to ask you to train the dog that's in front of you and you go, "Yeah Susan, I got it." I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 172: How To Teach Your Dog Anything With My Training Plan – 5C](#)

[Podcast Episode 138: Frantic Dog? Are You Training Both The Hold And The Do?](#)

[Podcast Episode 29: Understanding and Preventing Reactivity and Aggression in Your Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 168: Creating Confidence For Anxious, Stressed Or Reactive Dogs Part 1](#)

[Podcast Episode 169: Dog Training A Stressed, Anxious Or Reactive Dog Part 2](#)

[YouTube Video: Susan Garrett's Perch Work Dog Tricks \(Pivots and Spins\) – Hot Zone](#)

[Crate Games Online](#)

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

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Body Language, Communication Signals, and How to Read 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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