Speaker Key

SG   Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG   When I was first introduced to dog training, I was studying the sport of dog obedience and I really wanted to compete with my dog. I was taught there was a learning stage where we use a food lure to teach our dogs to do what we want, and then once the dog was given the chance to know the behavior, we moved into the proofing stage.

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Today I'm going to talk a little bit about what proofing is, why we should change our mindset about proofing, and what other options there are for us as dog owners in order to help our dogs understand more clearly exactly what we want from them.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I know I talk a lot about the good old days and for my dogs, it really wasn't so much of the good old days. And I recognize that there's a lot of trainers today that are training very similarly to what I did back in the Eighties and the Nineties. And the truth is, there are still a lot of trainers who believe what was working back then is good for today's dogs.

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And personally, I don't think it was so great for my initial dogs. And I think we can just do so much better for our dogs.

Having said all that, I don't want to come off as being judgmental that there is a right or a wrong. It's what's right for me. What's right for you who is listening to this podcast, it's up to you to decide how does that sit with you to train your dog using these tools and methods, versus using other tools and methods.

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One is gonna resonate with the kind of person you want to be and the kind of relationship you want to have with your dog. Because I'm here to tell you that you can have an amazingly well-trained dog without the need of what other people might call physical corrections or verbal corrections, or blame, or intimidation.

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Okay, let's get that out of the way. Let's talk proofing.

When we say the word proofing, what comes to mind is proofreading and what are you doing when you're proofreading? You're looking for mistakes, right? You're looking for errors. When we were proofing our dogs, that's exactly what we were doing.

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We were testing how well the dog understood what we taught them. And if they failed, let's say we asked them to sit and we bounced a ball and they failed, we would first say "ah-ah" and then we would give them a light little pop on the collar and repeat the cue "Sit." That's what you were supposed to be doing.

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And we'd bounce the ball again. And if they made a second mistake, we might pop them again maybe a little harder, "Sit!" like "What's going on here? You know this!" And unfortunately, sometimes we'd assume the dog is being stubborn because they know what sit means, they know what stay means. Why are they choosing not to do what we're asking?

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Now, those of you who've listened to this podcast you realize that today I know dogs are always doing the best they can with the education that we've given them in the environment we've put them in. So, if they don't do what we expect that means our expectations are higher than the level of education we've given the dog in the environment that we've put them in.

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And so, who's at fault here? Does the dog need a correction when they really have done nothing wrong? It's the trainer who put them in that position. And so proofing is a word, and people would say, "Oh Susan, this is semantics." But proofing has a literal meaning for our subconscious brain. And that's the approach we are going to take if we are decidedly going into a proofing stage.

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So, "Okay Susan, what else can we do?" Before I tell you exactly what I would like you to think about when you're going through your dog training, you need to know that there's two real stages of training. Some people may say there's three, but first is the acquisition stage where we're really just introducing a skill to our dog.

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Remember the 5C Pyramid? Connection, clarity. So, the beginning of the acquisition stage is that clarity. We're helping the dog to understand exactly what it is we want, and then we're growing the confidence with the dog. It could be a trick. It could be a skill like a sit or a down or a stand. It could be a competition skill like I was doing back in the day for obedience, retrieve. It could be an agility skill.

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But here is the big reveal. They're all the same things, people. It's all just one trick. It's one trick. 'Shake a paw', it's one trick 'sit', 'go through the rubble of this building and try and find evidence of somebody still alive.' It's all the same thing. It's just teaching the dog a behavior. It's just a trick.

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And saying that might minimize some of the most unbelievable things that a dog can do. But if you think about all behavior the same way you think about 'shake a paw,' then you know anything is possible for your dog and anything is possible for you to train your dog. You just have to think about it as one isolated trick.

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The acquisition involves three elements. First of all, the speed. How fast or slow would we want the dog to do that behavior? Now, that could be included in the second phase which is the criteria but speed I keep as an isolated incidence because for me for most things I want my dogs to do them fast. Because here is my hallucination, if you ask a dog to 'down' and they down quickly or you ask a dog to sit and they sit quickly, that is a dog who's enjoying working with you.

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A dog who is engaged with you, a dog who can't wait to do something else with you. So, speed is a very important part. Now, I recognize that there may be some things that you don't want your dog to do fast, but the idea is you decide what the ideal speed is.

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So, the elements of acquisition would be the speed, number one. Number two, the criteria. That means how would you describe what you want for that behavior? I go into a much greater detail about the criteria in podcast episode number 172, where I explain exactly how I go about training behavior.

So, the criteria. Do you want your dog to wave, or do you want your dog to sit? What are those paws doing? Is there something specific you want your dog's head to do? Most often it's a no for me. I don't care but if I'm doing competition obedience, then yes. If I'm doing agility, then yes. There are certain things I want my dog's head to do. That's part of the criteria.

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And the third element is the latency. And that is, how fast does your dog perform the behavior once they're cued. The gap between when you say the cue and when the dog does it. Now you could say, "Well, isn't that speed?" No, no, it's not. The speed is how they do the behavior. The latency is you ask them to sit and do they go "Sit, sit, sit. Yeah, yeah. I'm pretty sure I used to know that one… hmm yeah, okay! Yeah!" So how long does it take?

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And it might be longer in one instance than it is in another. And so, for example Tater Salad when he knows I'm going to the building, he loves training, then he runs to the front door, and he sits like brilliantly. If he knows we're going for a walk he acts like he is like, "I had a hard workout yesterday and I just got to get there. I'm getting there, but I'm getting there really super, super slowly."

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Have you ever seen the YouTube video of the little boy running to home base? I think it's Tee-Ball and he's like going in super slow motion. That's Tater Salad's sit when he knows we're going for a walk. Now, I can fix that. I can create more joy for him in that behavior. Or I could say, "Listen, as what we've done now, you don't always have to go for a walk. You have that choice to say, 'I'm not going right now.'" And so that alone will help improve the speed of the sit.

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Okay, so the speed of the behavior, all of the criteria that you select for that behavior and the latency. And the latency really is what creates what I call 'power words.'

So, if your dog's recall cue, if you use the word "come" is a power word, then you're going to have very little latency, unbelievable speed and all the criteria you have, in that the dog can't stop and have a snack or pee on a tree or sniff on the way, all of that is going to be built into the power word.

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That is what we want for the acquisition stage. Now the other stage of learning is fluency. And fluency means that your dog will perform with very little latency with unbelievable or appropriate speed, demonstrating an amazing grasp of all the criteria that you've set out for that behavior. Whatever that behavior is.

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Okay, so, the criteria of a down is going to be different than the criteria of a sit. If I ask my dog to sit, I don't expect them to lie down. If I ask my dog to roll over, I don't expect them to stand. That is all built into my dog's understanding of their power words. And if your dog, when you pull out a whole bunch of cookies just starts offering you all those behaviors, then they're telling you that they really don't have a firm grasp of what are their power words. But you can fix that.

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Podcast number 172 really would be a great start for you. So, we have the acquisition stage, and then we've got the fluency stage, but the part in the middle, how do we get from a dog just learning a behavior, clarity, and confidence, to they'll do it anywhere, under any distraction, any distance away from you. We've got this dialed in, fluency. How do we get there?

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The gap in the middle is how we generalize the behavior. So, what people would like to call proofing, you could call confidence building. You could call generalization. And again, "Ah Susan, it's just a word. Proofing, generalization. Why does it matter?" It matters because, one, we expect a dog to be flawless. And the other, we are evaluating what our dog understands so that we can help them.

Now, my mentor Bob Bailey, he always says "We want a behavior to be 80% successful before we introduce a new distraction."

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So, a distraction if you go to podcast episode number 24, I go into great detail my distraction index and how I go about generalizing behavior by including individually things like different distractions. The bouncing ball, the kids on skateboards, the kids on bicycles. All of those challenges that our dog is going to learn to ignore when we generalize correctly because it all turns into what I call environmental neutrality. All of those things are white noise because you've asked me to do something, I can do that.

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It doesn't matter. Go back to Dr. Seuss. 'I can do it in a house. I can do it with the mouse. I can do it here or there. I can do it anywhere.' That's a dog who is generalized and have gone from a place of acquisition to a place of fluency. We do it by introducing one element at a time, evaluating 'do we have 80% with that element?' and then introducing a new element.

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Again, it could be distance. It's all in podcast episode number 24 for you. It could be, I'm gonna move six feet away. My dog is good with that. I'm gonna come back and reward, then I'm gonna try it again. Now, 80% success. That could be a little bit intangible or a little bit abstract for you to grasp.

And so, behavior and dog training, great and fellow Canadian, Jean Donaldson. You know, I'm going to claim her for our own even though she's lived in the United States for the last couple decades. But you know what, Jean, Canadian at heart.

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Jean Donaldson has this great little method for anyone to remember how to get to 80% with their dog. And she calls it 'push, stick, or drop.' And it goes like this. Any behavior that you want to help generalize for your dog. You're going to do one set.

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One set is five repetitions of you cueing the dog using one of your power words. Let's say it's 'sit.' You ask your dog to sit, you evaluate the latency, the criteria, the speed. And if it's a "Yeah, that was a good one." then obviously you're going to reward them, break it off, do it again. You're going to do five repetitions of the same behavior under the same conditions. Good science people, you're not mixing it up. You're only changing one thing at a time. Five repetitions and you're going to evaluate.

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And so, if you get four out of those five repetitions, a check like 'yes, I've got the latency, I've got the criteria, I've got the speed I wanted, it's a check.' Four out of five or five out of five, then that's a push, meaning you push to another layer of distraction.

You introduce another element of distance, duration, or distraction. If you get three out of five, then that is a stick. That is not enough information for you to decide one way or another. So, you are going to do another set of five and see if that changes.

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And if you only get two out of five or one out of five or zero out of five correct under your current environmental conditions, then that is a drop my friend. You will just go back to an easier level and ask your dog the same question. Now you could say, "Well, why would I drop? I don't want to drop, I just want to keep moving forward."

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Alright, you've done five sits in your kitchen, you've done five sits in the living room, you've done five sits in the bathroom. My dog got four to five or five out of five every single time. By the time we were done "yeah, five out of five. Five out of five, yeah, no problem." Okay, now let's take your water loving Labrador to a busy park.

Have your dog sit 25 feet from the water while the kids are screaming and splashing in the water, and skateboarders and bicycles are going by, and you ask your dog to sit, and you walk over to see what the water is like. Is your sit for duration going to be as good as it was in your five other locations?

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Just because your dog has been perfect in the environments you have been trying him in, doesn't mean you have the right to expect him to be perfect in all environments.

Take for example somebody who lives on a tropical island, a beautiful tropical island like the Philippines. Beautiful tropical island, and they drive there, and they've been driving in the Philippines their entire life, 10 years' experience of driving in the Philippines.

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Hey, they've got some pretty horrific storms that they have to drive in. The rain, the torrential rain, and the bright sunny lights and some overcast days, I imagine they would get some fog. I don't know, I've never been to the Philippines. All that experience.

Now, if they were to come and visit me in say March and they had to drive in the snow and my criteria is you got to maintain the speed on the highway. In the Philippines, you can drive a hundred kilometers an hour. Why can't you drive a hundred kilometers an hour when you get to Toronto and it's in the middle of a blizzard in March?

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That's because the environment changed. So, should our expectations of behavior be the same? No. You need to train the dog in front of you in the environment that the dog is in. You need to look for 80% success and just because he could do it yesterday, there are so many things that could influence behavior. You just need to trust the dog and train the dog in front of you. Looking at where you are in your process of generalization and know you're not there yet.

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And so, if I was training a dog to be a family pet that I wanted to go to a busy park, I would just take one of those elements at a time. I would work them from a distance. I would work them so my dog could listen under any condition.

And all of that is just an amazing time to bond with your dog as the dog's growing this amazing behavior and maybe it will take you what? A year, maybe two years, maybe three years? If your dog lives to be 15 or 20 years old, that my friend is an amazing investment of your time to have a dog, have a life of freedom and joy with you.

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I can't think of a better way to spend your time, because in all of that you are saying to your dog, "I see you. I'm training you where you're at. I understand, we're going to drop on this five and we're going to test you at a lower level."

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Push, Stick, or Drop. Clear information on how to work through that confidence building, generalization, and how you know this is not your grandma's proofing. This is a brand-new way at looking at sharing the joy of dog training with your dog. 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 24: Help for Dogs who Chase Chipmunks, Bicycles, and Neighbor's Cats (Distraction Intensity Index)

Blog Post: Head Games

YouTube Video: Susan Garrett Riffs on Transfer of Value in Dog Training (and water loving Labradors)

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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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