

All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

00:00:00

SG Over the Christmas holidays I was inspired to declutter my office, and in the process, I came across this envelope I haven't seen, I don't know, 30 years. It was an envelope that my mother had given me, and in it was every single report card I'd ever been given from kindergarten up until I went away to university.

As I went through and read each and every comment, it was a massive, enlightening study of behavior. And I thought I'd share it with you so you can see the parallel to why our dogs do some of the things that we can do and knowing this is going to be a huge benefit to each of you. I've distilled it down to seven categories of potential reasons why your dog might be doing what they're doing.

00:00:59

Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Let me tell you a little bit about what those report cards actually said and if you're watching this on YouTube I'll show you a little glimpse of them, in a preface by saying that I was very, very shy as a child, probably for the first 4, 5, 6 years. And my DNA profile from 23andMe says I have a 50/50 chance of being afraid of speaking in public.

00:01:27

Now something happened between that very, very shy four-year-old child and the human that I am today who probably my number one love is speaking in front of large groups of people. And what happened was something influenced my behavior or more than likely many, many things influenced my behavior. Before I tell you exactly what was in those report cards, I'm going to [share with you I am dyslexic](#) and probably have ADHD, or had, all of that undiagnosed.

00:02:03

Because when I went to school it was kind of unheard of. And for me, the big problem that I had that my mother took me to a ophthalmologist to try and fix was when I read the words grew to cover the whole page so I had to wait till the words got smaller before I could read the next word.

Now, when my mom took me to this doctor, I still remember it like it was yesterday. The doctor spun me around in that big chair, he put his hand on my knee and with his white coat and his very authoritative gray hair he looked at me and he said, "Susan, what would you say if I told you there was nothing wrong with your eyes?"

00:02:41

And he said that with a nod as if he was saying, "Either you are lying or you are crazy. There's something not right with your brain." I just remember a flood of blood rushing to my face feeling red and embarrassed. Why? I was telling the truth.

But this authoritative person made me feel like I was less than. That I was either lying, which I wasn't, or I was psychotic. And so, we never spoke about it again. My mother never brought it up.

I continued to struggle with reading. And it wasn't until I was a 20-year-old on 60 minutes that they were talking about dyslexics that I realized all those years I wasn't psychotic or lying. I was like a lot of other people.



All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You

00:03:36

And so, knowing that, looking at my report cards when they started to say, "Susan struggles with spelling. She needs to be more focused in her work." Then that grew to "Susan's disruptive in class. She's too talkative." What didn't get to the report cards was the number of times I was sent to the principal's office or given detention or had to stand out in the hall for cutting up in class and making people laugh.

00:04:02

And then it went to, I think it was grade four where it said, "Susan has amazing powers of observation." Aha! The brain has started to learn a different way because she couldn't learn the way the other kids were. But it still went on. "She's talkative, she's disruptive. She needs to apply herself." And what else happened was the number of absent days grew and grew and grew.

00:04:27

When I was in high school, the number of days absence was 14 in a semester. So as the behavior challenges grew obviously my release was not to go to class. And lo and behold one teacher noticed in math, I think it was grade ten math, wrote, "Susan can solve problems much faster than any of the other kids in class." And often there's a "but—" with that.

And you know sometimes I did get the odd really kind report and my art teacher said that I had a lot of talent in art and hoped I would follow that up in my life, which it's still a hobby but it is not a career. So, why am I telling you all that? Let me just share that there were things that influenced it.

00:05:13

Genetics. What made my brain operate the way it did? I have other siblings who are dyslexic, and I believe my mother was dyslexic knowing what I know now. Now when it comes to my students and their dogs, I hear absolutes that kind of remind me of that eye doctor, the authority. But the absolutes are, "my dog is too and 'fill in the blank'."

00:05:37

"My dog is too cranky, too snarky, too dominant, too fearful." Or, "My dog hates nail trims. Hates the vets. Hates getting in a car. Hates—." You put fill in the blank. Or "My dog can't—." "My dog can't tug." "My dog can't take food outside." "My dog can't learn." I've actually heard somebody say, "My dog doesn't learn the same way other dogs do." So, these are very strong absolutes.

00:06:06

So, if you remember from [podcast number 71](#), I talked about the dangers of labels. When you have these absolutes "My dog is too—", "My dog hates—", "My dog is—", when you have these absolutes, you have put all of this label on your dog, which means 'there's nothing you can do about it.'

It's like you bought the model of car that didn't have the heated steering wheel, and now it's winter and you wish you had that heated steering wheel. But guess what, dogs aren't like cars that come with factory-installed things.

00:06:36

Dogs learn and there's a lot of things that influence that learning. And as you've heard me say many, many times, that our dogs always do the best they can with the education they've given in the environment that we've put them in.



All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You

00:06:49

But it isn't always as straightforward as you might think because dog training is never a linear path. As much as we would like it, it would kind of be boring if it was. Dog training, you have some really, really good days then you have some, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to quit this. I'm just going to let my dog sleep on the couch. I'm not going to attempt anything." And then you have, "Oh my gosh, this is the best day of my life."

It's not a linear path. We all go through it so take heart. But dog training is really relationship building. And with any relationship it's really good to expect more of yourself and less of the other person.

00:07:30

Now I'm not saying lower your criteria with your dog. Remember just talked about that in the [last podcast](#). I'm talking about expect more of you to troubleshoot what it is that you are seeing from your dog because behavior doesn't define the dog. Behavior is information. It's potentially feedback. Think of you wouldn't go into, you know, the doctor if your shortness of breath and he'd say, "Oh my gosh, that shortness of breath, you're a bad person." "Oh my gosh, you've gotten irregular heart. You're a bad person."

Behavior is the only non-verbal communication that our dogs can give us. That's their feedback. That's their communication. That's just information. So, you need to take it on board objectively, not judgmentally. So, my two-year-old Border Collie, This!, I've made it very clear on social media that I have had some [struggles with her](#) in the training.

And so, I've made this checklist of, okay, I've gone through that, I've gone through that, I've gone through that, and I thought I need to share this checklist with all of you. So, behavior, it doesn't occur in a vacuum. There are a lot of influences on behavior. Just like my behavior growing up from kindergarten all the way through to university.

00:08:54

There were influences on that behavior. Can you think of anything that might influence your dog's behavior? Now you know your dog can communicate to you in their behavior. If you've ever seen your dog like play bow and grab your sock and run around and bounce up and down and get super happy when you're going to go for a walk. That's that behavior, the non-verbal communication.

00:09:16

But there are those other things that you've now listed, "Oh, I hate it when he does this." Or, "My dog just hates when tall men with hats come near him." Here's a list of the categories that I work through with This! to help diagnose what was the challenge that she was facing. First of all, it's genetics, right?

So, you might say, "Oh, my dog is so sniffy, he won't stop sniffing everywhere we go, he just wants to sniff and read the pee-mail on every tree." Well, you've got a dog who's bred to scent. You know you've got a Beagle, or you've got a Plott Hound, you've got a dog who has an incredible talent for sniffing.

And if sniffing really, really drives you crazy, maybe that wasn't the breed for you. Now, am I saying that it is impossible to go for a walk with that dog without them sniffing?

00:10:09

I'm not saying it's impossible, but I'm saying if you're in a relationship where you expect more of yourself than of your partner, then you are going to set up environments where that partner gets to do things that they really want to do AKA maybe [sniffing for your dog](#).



All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You

00:10:26

So, genetics drives a lot of behavior. There's hardwired behaviors, like if you have a cat and you have a Border Collie? Guess what, you are going to have an anxious cat or an anxious Border Collie or a lot of dog training ahead of yourself to have them cohabitate together. Because Border Collies were bred to herd animals and cats are amazing to herd.

So, there's breed specific genetics. There's also within each breed or within each breeding. You might get a puppy that's a little more fearful, a puppy that is a little more boisterous. So that's how genetics will come into play.

00:11:05

So, genetics definitely you need to do your research before you buy a dog. You need to know the background. It isn't just about the color of dog or the fluffiness of the coat. You really need to find out, even if it's a mixed breed, there's so many great DNA tests today, you can find out what are the mixes are in there. And you should decide, "Oh, I actually like all of those breeds." Genetics number one. Can't change it, but you can work with it.

00:11:33

Number two, the health of the dog. Now dogs that are in pain guess what, their behavior is going to be really, really different. And it might be a gradual change, it might be an overnight change. For example, when my girl Feature got cancer, I didn't realize this was a sign of cancer. She started going into the bathroom and sleeping behind the bathroom door. And it happened over like gradually over a couple of years. But I've come to find out that that goes back to pack instinct when an animal, they knew they were sick, they would try to hide away from the pack. And so, health plays a big role in behavior.

00:12:13

So, if you're saying, "Wow, that's different for him or that's not really like him." Then start journaling those things that "When did that start happening?" So, over health, something as simple as parasites can cause an unbelievable change to your dog. The dog might be injured, the dog might have GI discomfort.

So, for me, going back to my behavior, I drank a lot of milk as a kid, and I didn't realize until I was in my twenties that I am actually very allergic to milk. So of course, that would influence my behavior. So, the overall health of the animal is going to have a huge impact on behavior. Number three will be obviously the education.

00:12:54

So, it is how good of a dog trainer are you. And you're going to cut yourself some grace because you're going to look at 'I'm not perfect but I think I did this pretty well.' And if you're in a good coaching program with a good coach, they're going to tell you, "Yeah, yeah, you did this really well and your dog's behavior is a little bit out of the ordinary for the mechanics that you've shown here."

That's exactly where I was with This!. She would just leave work. She would get fearful for no reason. She would never extend her stride. Typical Border Collie would put a bounce stride at somewhere between 9 and 10 or 11 feet depending you know, some might go up to 12 or 15 feet.

This! would not go beyond seven or eight feet, that's it, couldn't bounce any more than that. So, there were things that were telltale signs for me that my training is pretty good, but things aren't adding up with this dog.



All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You

00:13:53

So, under the umbrella of education though, I would put like early socialization. What kind of socializing did the breeder do with your litter [puppies](#)? What kind of enrichment? What kind of engagement? What kind of conditioned fears have developed? Potentially without even you knowing. Potentially you're doing it and you don't realize it. So, when people yell at a dog or correct a dog in the presence of something they're a little bit [afraid of](#), you might exasperate that fear and condition an even greater fear around that stimulus.

Number four would be [exercise](#), the amount of exercise and the type of exercise. So, when I say to you, does your dog get exercise? "Yeah. He gets to run around the backyard all day long." That's not really exercise. So, taking the dog out somewhere, ideally that they can get off leash that they can run. I know that's not always possible, but there's so many sniff spots that can be rented now that it is becoming more and more possible for everyone.

00:14:55

Not too much exercise, not too little. Age appropriate. So, a puppy is not going to need as much as a super fit two-year-old dog. How much exercise and what goes hand in hand? How much rest, how much sleep, and the quality of the sleep. So, if the dog wakes up every five minutes, then that's not really great quality of sleep.

So that's number five is sleep. Number six on my checklist that I went through and this is a biggie, and it is environment. So, it could be environmental stress. And if you're in a home with a lot of fighting and arguing, you know the science has shown that our [dogs absorb that energy](#). So, it could be emotional, it could be toxicity in the environment.

00:15:34

Something as simple as a scented candle or air fresheners can absolutely affect a dog's behavior and health. It could be that the dog's eating mushrooms somewhere in the backyard that you're not aware of or eating something else that you aren't aware of. It could be flea and tick products that are causing behavior challenges to your dog. Or it could be something as simple as food dyes in your dog food. Right.

So, environment, I'm pretty much a stickler for environment including for me the EMFs in the environment. So how many repeaters do you have for your WIFI all around your house? I turn my WIFI off at night. I'm a big stickler for that one because I live in a, the house is all concrete here and we have a lot of repeaters because you know, the signal doesn't transfer through the walls or the floor.

00:16:22

WIFI gets turned off at night and most weekends I don't even have the WIFI on. Okay, so that's the environment. This is a biggie, and that is nutrition. And this is the one that I landed on for This! and it's going to require a whole new podcast for me. But I feed my dogs amazing diet. Up until Feature, my last few dogs [lived to be almost 18 years old](#), and they had amazing quality of life.

00:16:49

They were active. They were still going for walks at that age. So why would I ever think that nutrition was a problem? Nutrition might start with when your puppy was in utero, the nutrition of the bitch or the nutrition of the dog that sired that litter or the nutrition that the puppies got when they were being raised. And of course, the nutrition that you're giving them now. You might be feeding like me, the best nutrition possible, but guess what, that wasn't what my dog needed.



All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You

00:17:20

Okay, so there's seven categories that you can look to for altering your dog's behavior. Now obviously [dog training, educating](#) is going to be a biggie, but if you feel that you're doing a phenomenal job, then I wanted to give you opportunities to look in other areas of things that might be affecting your dog's behavior.

And so, if somebody says, "Your dog's doing that because they're [dominant](#)." Or if you say, "My dog just has to be in front of me when we go for a walk." I want you to ask this question. I want you to ask, "What else might be true?" "If that wasn't true, what else might be true?" Or, "Maybe it is true in an addition, what else could be true in this scenario?"

00:18:02

Keep asking yourself. That's what I had to do. What else? I said I feed the absolute best dog food money can buy. Okay, what else might be true? Keep asking yourself that question. Give your dog unconditional love and show them that unconditional love by not defining them by their behavior but allowing them to communicate through their behavior.

Take that feedback, go in a new direction, go through the checklist. Be an investigator. Keep expecting [more of yourself and less of the dog](#) and you will find that relationship with your dog will be amazing. Look, our dogs deserve the best from us and that's us giving them unconditional love, recognizing that they are doing the best they can with the education we've given them in the environment and those other five things that I mentioned. That if things aren't going the way you want or things aren't going the way you expect, just get curious.

Go through the checklist, expect more of yourself and keep asking, "What else might be true?" I think if everybody who owns a dog would ask that question, more and more dogs would be trained without blame and without punishment. And more and more people would have the most amazing relationship with their dog and that's exactly what my dream is for everybody listening to this podcast. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 50: Can Your Worst Challenge Make You a Better Dog Trainer?](#)

[Podcast Episode 71: Pro Dog Trainer's Secret to Help Your Naughty Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 186: 2 Types Of Connection With Dogs: Dog Agility And Daily Life Case Studies](#)

[YouTube Video: Normalizing Imperfection in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 188: Why You Should Change Your Strategy Rather Than Your Criteria When Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 74: Yes, Susan Garrett's Dogs Sniff On Walks](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Puppy Essentials with Susan Garrett Dog Training](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Fearful Dogs Help with Susan Garrett](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Exercising Your Dog's Body and Mind: Tips and Games with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 120: The Rhythm Of Life With Puppies And Dogs](#)

[Podcast Episode 62: 12 Keys to Helping My Dogs Live a Long and Happy Life](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 46: Is Your Dog Trying to Dominate You and What You Can Do About It](#)

[Podcast Episode 150: Adding Mindset To Your Dog Training Tools: Who Do You Become?](#)



All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You

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.



Meet Us Online

- Website <https://dogsthat.com>
- Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SusanGarrettDogAgility/>
- Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/SusanGarrettDogsThat/>
- TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@dogsthat>
- LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat>
- Pinterest <https://pinterest.ca/dogsthatcom/>
- Twitter <https://twitter.com/susangarrett>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/c/DogsThat>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/ClickerDogs>

