

Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

00:00:00

SG If you follow my podcast, there's a very good chance that you, like me, want to train your dog with reinforcement. It aligns with the kind of person you want to be both for your dog and for the world. In order to train and get really good behaviors, you have to get masterful at all that is reinforcing. And that is the topic of today's podcast.

00:00:34

Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And if you have spent any time on my YouTube channel, you would've noticed that I share some lesson plans on how to teach simple behaviors. Everything from [targeting](#), to a [sit](#), to a [down](#). There's a lot of knowledge to be learned by spending time over on our YouTube channel.

00:00:54

Now those little things, I don't think they really are too impressive for people. They're like, "Well, I can just put a cookie over my dog's head and teach them to sit." But it's the bigger processes that really make a difference. So, I'm going to share a video and for those of you listening I suggest you jump over to YouTube when you can and watch this, but I'm going to walk you through it.

00:01:15

This is a video from, I think 1997 or 1998, and I'm going to share this video in two parts. The first part is my then very, very young, crazy red Border Collie, Buzz, retrieving various items. So, the first item I think is just a fleecy tug toy. And I throw it out and I get him all revved up. I throw it out and he picks it up and he doesn't bring it right back.

00:01:43

He mouths it. When I say mouths it, I mean he picks it up in his mouth and he chews it a bit. He might paddle his feet on it. He might roll the fleece over a few times. He chews it. He paddles, he chews, and he paddles and eventually I think it, I mean I'm showing this in fast forward, and I think it still takes him like 15 seconds to get it back to me.

00:02:04

Then I throw out another toy, and I think the next one's a tug toy, a cow tug. Same thing, picks it up, mouths it, paws it, brings it back eventually. Then I throw another one. It's a big, I don't even know what these are called, if you can even buy them anymore, was like a big fluffy ball on a rope. And same deal. Dives on it, mouths it. And the last toy I think is a Frisbee. Picks it up, mouths it, flips it over. That's the way he just got into toys.

00:02:32

Now, I did competition obedience back then and I would look at that and go, "That's going to be nasty on a dumbbell." So, any of you who do competition obedience, any of you who've ever done competition obedience, one of the exercises is, if you haven't, is you throw out a dumbbell and the dog picks it up and retrieves it to you. Well they have to hold position while you throw it, yada, yada, yada.



Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training

00:02:54

You get points for the dog holding position and not moving and then leaving and picking it up and bringing it back and holding it and not mouthing. Now, my late husband, John, was an obedience judge and he used to share with me how many points Buzzy would've lost on each one of those retrieves.

Now, half a point for every mouth, depending on how bad it was, maybe one point. He was in the negative points with any one of those throws that I just described. So, I didn't teach him a dumbbell retrieve. And for any of you who are watching this on YouTube and you're looking at that, what would you do if this is your dog?

00:03:30

And here's where people say, "That reinforcement-based training, yeah okay. It's good for you know tricks or you know maybe simple stuff but how are you going to troubleshoot with that? How are you going to fix problems?" And this came to my mind because I recently was interviewed on a podcast and I shared this video because I know anybody who's ever tried to fix a dog who wants to mouth their dumbbell, quite often they are banging their head against a wall because it's a very difficult behavior to change. Sometimes, and I hate to say it's innate, because is it nature or is it nurture? Knowing what I know about how to train using reinforcement, I think some of what Buzzy exhibited was definitely nurture.

00:04:18

It was - I wasn't doing a great job as a dog trainer using reinforcement, so he did get a lot of time outs, which creates anxiety in dogs, any kind of punishment. So negative punishment, it sounds maybe it's a little kinder than positive punishment, you're still causing emotional stress to the dog, and Buzzy demonstrated it by getting more and more anxious in his work. Mouthing possibly, was that an artifact of that anxiety? I don't know. Nature, nurture, who knows, all that I knew is anything I threw he had to mouth it and play with it.

00:04:49

Now there's lots of Border Collies who do the same thing, so I'm not going to beat myself up too bad and say that I caused it. He did it right from the time he was a wee baby. Now but the challenge is how do you fix that?

Here's some of the things that I was told back in 1997. "Well, every time he mouths you have to spray him with something that he doesn't like, like bitter apple or some disgusting spray. Spray that in his mouth." Or, "Have a spray bottle and just squirt them right in the face." He loved water. Probably wouldn't have worked even if I wanted to.

00:05:17

Or I was told some really nasty ones like, "Put an elastic band around the middle of the dumbbell and then hold his mouth and muzzle closed and snap the elastic so it hit him in the nose." I don't know why I'm describing this on this podcast.

They were all nasty things and there was no way because I had taken an oath to myself and to that puppy. Maybe he wasn't going to do this great but I was going to leave everything that I knew, and with you, I'm going to train you only with reinforcement-based dog training. And yeah, sometimes it was frustrating for both of us because it was new. You know, I was having success. I already had won a national championship in agility. Actually, I might have won two by that point.



Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training

00:05:57

I already had many high end trials in obedience. I'd had perfect scores in obedience. I was on world record holding Flyball teams, I had achieved so much success. I was walking away from that all and training a completely different way. And so, what do you do? We'll leave that one for later. I will show you the results of what I did.

00:06:18

Now, the next video I'm going to talk to you about is [posted on YouTube](#). I'll leave a link in the show notes. And it's you know, every once in a while I'll do an update on my dogs. And so, my youngest puppy, Belief, is nine months old, and Kim and I have both been sharing the training because she's both Kim's dog and my dog.

00:06:36

And I just put a little, you know, mashup together, put it out there, and I got somebody who sent me a direct message. "Oh, saw your video of your puppy. Yeah, my dog won't recall out of play or when there's other dogs around. Can you tell me how you did it?" So, in that video, I think I counted 24 different behaviors.

So, there were 24 layers that brought me to the place where the very last behavior I showed was the puppy really roughhousing with Tater. You can hear them growling and she's right into it and in a calm, quiet voice I just say her name, "Belief." And she just immediately flies over. And says, "Yeah, did you call?"

00:07:17

And so, she's like, "I'd like to get that from my dog." And reinforcement-based dog training as I said off the top, works when you get really, really good at reinforcement. And as I mentioned on this podcast I was on today, that there is some dog training like the more balanced approach where you use both punishment and reinforcement.

That's been around a long time, like hundreds of years. I liken it to golf. Like golf doesn't change a lot. Like nobody's going to come out and be like a katrillion times better than anybody else because the sport doesn't really change. It's still got the same 18 or however many holes. It's still got the same, I don't know, nine clubs. No, that's a really short bag. You still have the same ball. I mean, there's equipment tweaks. It's basically the same game.

00:08:10

So, [balanced training](#) or training with punishment is an old sport. Reinforcement based dog training is really new. It's like the pickleball of sports. Like I started in 1992, I decided I wanted to leave corrections in my dog training. And I evolved, between '92 and '93 I really started to question and look at what I was doing and do a lot more places where you might have used corrections, like dogs missing weave entries. I stopped correcting dogs for those sorts of things.

Back then everybody said, "That's not going to work. Oh no Susan, you have to correct them. They have to know that's wrong or else they're just going to keep making mistakes."

00:08:50

And you know, people even said, the young dog I was training at that time, my Jack Russell Terrier Twister, people said, "She's never going to weave in competition. Not what she doing here."



Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training

00:08:59

Because nobody was doing it. And so Buzzy was the first dog. Twister, I had started the old way. Buzzy was the first dog. There was nobody I could call up and say, "Yeah, you trained your dog entirely this way and you excelled at this sport. Can you help me here?" Nobody had done it. And so that tells you the recency of reinforcement-based dog training. Yeah, Bob and Marian Bailey and B.F. Skinner, they were all doing reinforcement.

00:09:26

They were all creating some great behaviors with reinforcement. But nobody was doing it mainstream. Nobody was doing it in dog sports. Everybody was saying, "Dogs won't be reliable in the recall unless they're corrected. They need to know they have to come when called." And so, it was a risk. What I've learned is, it's not only possible, it's probable. And it's actually a heck of a lot more reliable when you train without the corrections.

The dogs don't need to be told, but what they do need is somebody who really understands the use of reinforcement. And so, getting my puppy to come out of play, there's a lot of layers. I'll go over some of those layers with you at the end of this podcast so you can have some clarity into what goes on.

00:10:12

So, when you say, "Can you just tell me how to get my dog to come when they're playing with other dogs?" What does that look like to you?

And then there was a layer of her walking off leash with a couple other dogs around there. The dogs, you know, only Tater Salad was really close. And she was staying in [Reinforcement Zone](#) AKA heel position while she was off leash. So, is that something that your dog would do? Like, stay in a really good heel position?

00:10:35

And then when she was told to, she could go for a run, she took off like a bullet. She understood what 'go for a run' meant. Before she got to catch up with the other dogs a strategic recall happened in that she was called back. She turned and flew back. Is that something your dog would do without a lot of like mild distractions, there was one other dog there.

00:10:56

Then she tugged when she had just been given cookies. She switched to go tug, "Okay, we'll tug." So, there's all these layers that were in that video. Things like walking, jogging and running in good heel position we call Reinforcement Zone and switching from one side to another. That was all there.

There was a clip where I had her in a sit beside me and I threw out a cookie onto the ground, she saw it. She was staring at it, but she still held position. I released her. She dove on that cookie and then I called her, she came right back. She didn't sniff around, "Was there a second cookie I missed?" She came right back, right into Reinforcement Zone.

00:11:35

Then I threw another cookie out, which she held position. I released her. She went to dive on the cookie. Right in front of the cookie I said "sit" boom, she went into a sit. Those are layers, can your dog do that? Because those layers all contribute to my dog saying, "You called me while I'm playing with another dog. I can come. Yeah, I can come."



Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training

00:11:54

Those are all those layers. Things like in that video there was also her lying on her side to get her nails trimmed. So, do my dogs magically like to [have their nails trimmed](#)? No. We work at that. Those are some layers that are important to me. That I don't do things to my dogs that they don't want me to do to them.

00:12:13

That it's cooperative. That they're like, "Oh yeah, nail trim time? Yeah. Oh, I'll stand in line. Wait for it. It's my turn, I want my turn." So, there are things that I share that the process is small. That is how to teach your dog to sit.

I can teach those things in small steps. Now, I think there's a lot of layers that go in that make it very reliable, that make the dog more engaged in wanting to learn these things with you.

00:12:38

But those processes are relatively small compared to how do you get your dog to not mouth a dumbbell when they want to mouth everything else? How do you get your dog to recall out of play when they're right in the midst of growling and they're on top of another dog? Those are more detailed processes. There's more involved in that.

00:13:01

And so where should you guys start? "Where should I start, Susan?" And I've gone through some of the [layers of learning in other podcasts](#). I'll leave them linked in the show notes. But you've got to understand what is of value to your dog. You have to know it. Not, "Oh yeah my dog loves cheese sticks." No. No, your dog loves a lot of things.

Your dog loves greeting people. Your dog loves going for a car ride. Your dog loves maybe chasing other dogs. Your dog loves tugging. What is it that your dog values? Your dog loves playing in a kiddie pool. Chasing the hose when you spray water out of it. What is it that your dog values?

00:13:36

So, you need to know what does your dog value? Make a list. And *where*. "My dog loves kibble, loves kibble, except when we're outside. Yeah. Loves cheese and roast beef. And we'll take roast beef outside but kibble and cheese really, it's just in the house." Okay, what rooms in the house?

Really get specific. Really become a diagnostic person when you're looking at training this way, so we know what does your dog love, and in what environments.

00:14:04

Now, so that's really what's of value. Now we have to grow the value because remember, reinforcement-based dog training is all about reinforcement.

So, first thing we're going to do is grow the number of reinforcements your dog will work for in the environment they are most comfortable in. So where are they like, "Yeah, I love playing with you! I love training with you here!" Now let's grow.

And that could be as simple as taking your kibble and your cheese and your roast beef, putting them in the bag with four other different kinds of food. That's it. Now we're growing. We're picking something out. A piece of carrot, a piece of apple.



Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training

00:14:42

You're picking out different values. Maybe some higher value [homemade tuna brownies](#). Or maybe some lower value. Mix it up so that you know what's high value, what's super high value, what's lower value.

So, we're growing the number of reinforcements in the environment the dog's comfortable in. Next, you're going to grow the number of environments your dog will take the reinforcement they're most comfortable with.

00:15:05

So, "Yeah, he'll take it in the kitchen, the living room, all the rooms of the house, in the backyard, and in the front yard, but nowhere else." Okay, let's grow that. Front yard, front walkway, front back into the front yard, back into the backyard.

Just grow by playing games that the dog likes, engaging them. So, holding them back, saying "search," tossing it on the ground, that adds value because you're adding motion.

00:15:26

So, we need to grow that reinforcement and grow the environments that they'll take the reinforcement. Now, ideally that reinforcement is going to involve things like tugging and tugging on different things. It maybe even involves retrieving.

So now what we're doing is [transferring value](#). First, it's from reinforcement to reinforcement. Then it's from reinforcement to behavior, meaning we help the dog understand they can earn reinforcement, not we put the reinforcement out first.

00:15:54

If you've been listening to my podcast, you know that's not how we roll. It is they can earn reinforcement and then you get a behavior that they get really good at, and the behavior takes on the value of the reinforcement.

Now that behavior can be used to reinforce another behavior. Like, if you hold the sit, then I'm going to throw a toy and then you can get the toy because you held the sit. Behavior for behavior. I use walk in [Reinforcement Zone](#) as a chance to go and chase the other dogs. Behavior - behavior.

00:16:26

You can also use reinforcement to create value for our location like we call a Hot Zone. Getting up on a bench and holding position. A crate is building value. See, we're [transferring value](#) and every time you transfer value to a different position, a different location, a different reinforcement, you're ultimately transferring value through you, so you become dramatically more reinforcing to your dog.

00:16:54

All of that contributes to the dog coming when called. It's not going to give it to you, but it's going to contribute to it. And then there's things like training your Quickies daily. You're interacting and engaging your dog in a very motivational way that grows towards something like I talked about in [podcast episode number 190](#) where I talked about Quickies.

And you're going to be rehearsing things like our foundational games: [ItsYerChoice](#) or [Crate Games](#) or Call Once or Collar Grab or Hot Zone or Restrained Recalls, or even the lower process games like sit and down and stand. All of that will contribute to you being of more value.



Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training

00:17:32

And yes, joining one of our online programs, if that is a possibility for you, that will give you some more strategic layers. All of those layers of learning bring understanding to the dog. All of those layers of learning give you something to go back on.

So, when your dog is mouthing, you know what's possible. So, for me, I wanted my dog to be just as excited about the dumbbell as he was about mouthing all of his toys. I didn't want to lose that joy he had for work, or the joy for retrieve.

I didn't want him to be thinking, "Oh, I've got to do it this way. I've got to hold it and I can't mouth it. Oh my gosh. I can't. I can't. I can't. I can't." I wasn't teaching my dog not to mouth. And that is just traditional thinking that is, "Oh, the dog's mouthing. We've got to get them not to." Instead, I was teaching him how to hold. How to hold is different than mouthing.

00:18:27

And so, if you watch this podcast, I'll show you the video clip of Buzz. I'm going to get him just as revved up. He's just as excited. I'm holding him like in a restrained position, throw the dumbbell out. He's so excited. He actually smashes into the back wall when he picks up the dumbbell. He picks it up and he comes in and he sits. No mouthing.

Now I go down the first time with one hand because that's the game that I played with him. One hand, you can mouth, and we'll tug. Two hands, don't ever touch it. So, then I could do a formal retrieve as I would do an obedience, throw it out, pick it up, bring it back. He doesn't know how to mouth a dumbbell because it's different.

00:19:06

And those layers of learning were put in intentionally so that he would never associate a dumbbell with mouthing. So how do you troubleshoot problems with reinforcement? You just come up with better strategies. Every one of us is just one question away from a different life with our dog. You've just got to ask yourself a better question and hang out with the people that can help you with that answer.

Hey, by the way, this is podcast episode number 196, which means only four more episodes and we are at our 200th. Okay, that's a lot of fingers that I'm flashing here. 200th podcast episode! I'm really, really excited and I really thank you all for the support in helping us get to podcast episode number 200. That's going to be coming out in just a week or couple weeks.

00:19:52

And we're going to have a celly. We're going to have a big live event. I'm going to give away prizes and gifts. And if you want to be invited to the celly, I'm going to leave [a link in the show notes](#) that you can give me your name and email address and we will tell you when and where the live celebration for our 200th event is going to happen.

I can't wait. I hope you are as excited as I am. And yes, back when I talked in one of our most popular podcast episodes where I talked about [the relaxation protocol](#) and I said if there's interest, I'll talk more about separation anxiety. I think that's a good topic for podcast episode number 200, so you don't want to miss that one.

00:20:30

I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog. And hey, if you're new to the YouTube channel where you're over checking it out, hit the like and the subscribe button for me, will you? Thanks.





Episode: #196

Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training

Shaped by Dog Episode 200 Online Celebration Event

[Register to get the news to join us for an online party for Episode 200!](#)

Resources:

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

[Podcast Episode 155: 10 Ways To Teach A Sit WITHOUT A Food Lure! Unreal Results For Puppies And Dogs Of All Ages](#)

[Podcast Episode 145: 10 Ways To Teach A Dog To Lay Down And How To Shape It Without Luring](#)

[YouTube Video: Puppy Belief's Training Progress Update: 9 Months Old](#)

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

[YouTube Video: Understanding Your Dog's Reinforcement Zone \(RZ\) with Susan Garrett](#)

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

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

[Tasty Treats Recipe eBook](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Reinforcement, Permissions and Transfer of Value in Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)

[Blog Post with Video: The Transfer of Value in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 190: Using Daily Quickies To Fast Track Your Dog Training And Grow Your Dog's Skills](#)

[Learn to Play ItsYerChoice](#)

[Crate Games Online](#)

[Podcast Episode 191: Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation](#)



Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based 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.



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>

