

What Does “Positive Not Permissive” Really Mean In Dog Training?

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Last week I mentioned that I was a guest on another podcast. A podcast given by a very well-known balanced trainer. A trainer who's a big proponent of using tools such as pinch collars and e-collars. And I'm there presenting how we train over here. And I realized that to somebody who has no concept of how I train, it may sound like things are like cray, cray.

You know, we put our [dog's emotions first](#) and if our dog doesn't do what we've asked them to do, we don't correct or punish the dog. And the dog has the option to say, “I don't want to [have my nails trimmed](#). I don't feel comfortable doing what you're doing.” I can imagine the vision, like what kind of anarchy do you live in, lady?

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But that's not what it's like at all. Because one of the guiding principles that I've been talking about since the 90s, since I started training this way is positive is not permissive. Just because you are a positive reinforcement-based trainer doesn't mean you're a permissive dog owner. Doesn't mean your dog lives without rules, and that is a topic of today's episode.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And I recognize when people leave their former training, like if they are training with some level of physical corrections or punishment, and they want to jump over to how we train in a reinforcement-based and game-based way, [there's often a gap](#) where they get paralyzed when they don't know what to do. Like the old them would've yelled or corrected the dog, but they don't want to do that, but they don't know what to do.

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And so, guiding principle: positive is not permissive. But in order for that to work, you can't like just mind transfer your expectations over to the dog. You first have to be clear what those expectations are in your mind and then have a way to teach your dog what those expectations are. And most importantly, be consistent in how you apply those expectations.

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So, if you put some time and effort to teach a dog that sit means ‘put your butt on the ground and do this with your front paws’ and you follow up and you reinforce that. You release the dog, you go ahead and you practice that in all different environments. And then you ask a dog to sit, and he doesn't sit, and you're busy at the computer and you go, “Ah, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.”

The dog's learning [sometimes isn't every time](#). And so, what happens then is your expectation of sit is not going to be met. And one of two things is going to have to happen. Either you're going to have to retrain that behavior or you're going to have to go back to using punishment.

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So, consistency is super, super important. But what happens when you can't be consistent or what happens when yourself or your partner, “Just let the dog be a dog you know. It doesn't matter. We just love him for who he is.” There's a few problems with that.



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Number one, if you have what in podcast episode— and I'm going to share a lot of podcast numbers, so if you're watching this on YouTube, you can just click the links and save a bunch of episodes. If you're listening to this, go to the show notes and you'll see all of these episodes. So, [podcast episode number 99](#) I referred to one of our students' dogs run amok, Riko, and he is a Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier puppy and his owners didn't know how to create the bridge between that gap. Between, you know, being a reinforcement-based dog trainer but still having some rules, like Riko was completely run amok.

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And the problem with that is, is you might have a racetrack around your house for your dog that he is created on his own which, “Oh, that doesn't bother me. It's okay.” But then you have guests over and the racetrack includes your guest lap which not only would be uncool to some of your guests, but it could be very dangerous, unsafe for maybe your dog or your guest.

And you're like, “I'm going to manage that. I'm going to put my dog away.” And then there's a lack of understanding with the dog, “This is the way I always get things. Why am I locked away?” And so, they start to use their voice. And this is another big issue, is that the dog learned that his voice has power.

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“I can get you to let me out of confinement.” “I can get you to get out of bed.” “I can get you to feed me. I can get you to throw my throwy things. I can get you to, oh, I see my friends at the park. Okay, I want this leash off now. I can get you to take that leash off.” And so, once a dog understands his voice has power, then not only are you not letting a dog just be a dog, your dog is now running your life.

And running your life in a way that's potentially going to cause you frustration or what it's going to do, it really is going to decrease the quality of life for the dog, believe it or not.

I'm going to share with you why a dog understanding what is and isn't reinforcing is super important to that dog, but also think about lack of rules creates lack of clarity of ‘when I'm right and when I can expect reinforcement and when I'm not right.’

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And that lack of clarity at some point may create punishment, and if it doesn't, what it's going to create is a lack of freedom. Because that dog isn't going to grandma's house for the family reunion. That dog isn't going to get [off leash at the park](#). Because he's not reliable, because he doesn't have reliable behavior that you can count on to keep him and others safe.

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So letting a dog just be a dog definitely has fallout. Even if you go, “I'm in this conservation area, it's pretty quiet. I'm going to take him off leash.”

What if you lose him? What if his lack of compliance, his lack of understanding to come when called means he runs off and he is lost. And you are putting up lost dog posters all over your neighborhood.

Okay, so there definitely is a massive downside. Not just in how you live with your dog, but how that dog gets to live their life. And that can also lead to you loving your dog. You're not going to punish him. But what can end up happening is, let's say your dog's pulling on a leash and you don't want them to pull on a leash.



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So, you say, “Hey buddy, get back here. I don't want you to pull. No pull, get back here.” And he's like, “No, no, no, no. I see really good stuff up here.” And you keep nagging and nagging and nagging and you know, you might escalate that to yelling at him. And then, for the love of all that is holy, you just let him off leash.

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So now he's learned your punishers aren't really that punishing. And so what ends up happening now is you're even more frustrated and you have to escalate that punishment even more because you have a dog that's not listening. Let's go back to being positive.

Positive but not permissive.

And when you live with a dog where you are reinforcing and you are being positive, but you're not being permissive, you then don't have that dog that does flybys and bites at your face and jumps off your guests and grabs things and runs away and shreds your favorite things and you have expectations, and those expectations lead to behaviors that you can count on the dog.

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So, think about it right now, what behaviors that you have in your dog now would you really like to see replaced? Like what ones are, “Yeah, we could probably do without that.” I bet there's one or two. Now there's some that you truly might not care about. For example, my dogs bark when someone drives in the driveway and when they come in the house. And I'm okay with that because I live in the country.

I welcome barking dogs when people drive up the driveway. People that I may not know. And if they're people I know when people come in the house, I just tell them, “That's enough,” and we're all good. Except maybe the puppy. She's not quite there yet, but we're making head road.

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And so, if you have a dog that barks to get you out of bed, go to [episode number 26](#). The ‘Don't Wake The Mama’ episode, where even if you have a puppy, you can figure out when that puppy really needs to go outside and when they're just trying to wake the mama. And what your role in reinforcing that behavior has been.

So, what does amazing look like to you? What would you like more of in your dog's behavior, and what would you like less of? I'm going to share with you what a day in a life might look like for you and your dog when you're training this way, and what behaviors are super important to get on top of that you can create that kind of relationship where your dog does want what you want.

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But the first thing I've got to make clear is that what we do is 24/7. Now that sounds exhausting. “Oh, I'm lucky if I train my dog like once a week. That's all I, that's all I can put out there, Susan. 24/7, I can't do that.” You're sleeping for part of that, but ‘the don't wake the mama’ means like the 24, sleeping part of the 24.

But rather than thinking of dog training as dog training, think of it as [relationship building](#). Like you have relationships that you build with your children and in those relationships, you are educating your kids to you know, do certain things around the house or perform certain ways out in public. You don't say, “This is child training time and now we're going to go off and we're going to do our child training hour every day.”



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No, it's woven into the fabric of your communication, of your interactions of the games you might play. Board games or out in the backyard, learning to play baseball, it's woven into the fabric of your life. That's what relationship building is. And that's what dog training the way I'm suggesting. That's all it is. It's woven into the fabric of your day. But there's a hierarchy of behaviors that I would encourage you to consider. But let's just go through a day in a life.

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So, you wake up, that doesn't mean your dog needs to wake up. Now your dog might sleep loose with you, or your dog might be a puppy and still be sleeping in a crate. And I've got that protocol you can go to our YouTube to the [playlist on puppy rearing](#). And when I get out of bed when I have a puppy, they don't get out of bed. They might not get out of bed for an hour or maybe more depending on the age of the puppy. But once that puppy gets up, they get released from the crate.

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And of course, they get taken outside on leash to go potty. And if it's an adult dog, I would still take them out on leash if you are trying to reestablish that positive is not permissive. Because a dog door in a fenced in backyard actually is a bit of a relationship killer. Now it's something I've never had. I've never had a dog door and I never actually had a fenced in backyard in all the years that I've owned a dog, which means I go out with my dogs when they have to go to the bathroom.

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And so, by doing that you can put in your first what I called in a [podcast episode 190](#), your first 'Daily Quickie.' You can do a little quick little dog training session as you're going out to potty with your dog, or once the dog is finished doing their business. Now, if you've got a dog that responds well and you want to take them out in the backyard and they will do their business and then come back and play a Daily Quickie with you, then of course you could let them off leash.

But if you have a dog that isn't as likely to respond when you say, "Hey, you're done. Come on over here," then keep them on leash for the next few weeks when you're doing this.

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So, we get back in the house, you're going to decide what does confinement look like for that dog? Is it an ex-pen? Is it the kitchen? Is it a living room? Do they have complete run of the house? And if they do, how's that go for you?

Because we want them to be in an area where they can interact with you and you might be making your breakfast sneak in one more Daily Quickie, or maybe it's just building a Hot Zone area for them outside of the kitchen area, so they learn the appropriate way to behave. You might like, give them a stuffed Toppl out there, whatever. And then there'll be an engagement game.

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So, when you're ready to sit down to eat your meal, you don't want to have to be supervising your dog. So put them back in their ex-pen, give them one of those engagement games, a brain puzzle, something that they can work on that they can earn some little food rewards from.

Now you finish your breakfast, you're going to do another Daily Quickie and then give your puppy or dog their breakfast while you go off and shower and do whatever it is that you need to do. If you still need more time, you could give them another stuffed Toppl but then you've got to take them for a walk.



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Daily exercise super important. If we're going to get a dog that can relax, that we can minimize anxiety, that we can have them be calm in the house, especially if we're going to leave them and go out to work. You come back in, you're going to put them wherever they're going to stay while you go out for work, and they'll be confined in that area for three to four hours.

Ideally, somebody comes in at lunchtime, maybe does another little quickie with them, or a very least a little leash walk puts them back in wherever that confined area would be. For the next three to four hours, you come home guess what, another Daily Quickie. Think of how many little tiny dog training sessions that have been woven into the fabric of your day so far.

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I would then, you know, [take the dog for a walk](#). That's a great time to take them for a walk. You get to release all the anxiety from your day as you're having this enriching walk with you and your dog. That's the way to end your workday in my books. Now the dog comes back in and you're going to give them some freedom in the house while you prepare your own dinner.

Now, that's where you might prepare their dinner first, then get your dinner ready. It really doesn't matter. I would use part of each of your dog's meals as reinforcement for your Daily Quickies, but I still like the dogs to get some food from the dog dish.

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Now again, your enrichment games, you can put the dog in an ex-pen while you're eating or while you're busy, but if you can supervise them let them be loose. And maybe that's an opportunity to build more time in a dog bed helping them to understand what their release word is. We don't put them in the dog bed, give them some cookies and then let them wander off. Release words are important.

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So what are those lists of behaviors that I think will help build that amazing relationship with your dog? Well, the first one and you've heard me mention this many times on this podcast is ItsYerChoice and we'll leave a link to the [ItsYerChoice Summit](#) in the show notes here so you can learn how to play this foundation game that we have in all of our online programs. It is our foundation game and we will give you access to that 100% free.

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So, ItsYerChoice and Crate Games. [Crate Games](#) because if you've got a bit of a run amok dog and that's not a breed, that is like run amok in that they have no rules, they've lived without rules, then we want them, like Crate Games and ItsYerChoice is the first places we can empower the dog.

Your behavior controls your reinforcement. Giving that dog control is such a massive advantage for you in your relationship with your dog. Because they never have to wonder. It's clear that when you guys are working together, they have the ability to keep the game moving on and earning reinforcement. ItsYerChoice and Crate Games.

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The next behavior I encourage you to teach to your run amok dog. I gave the details of how to teach it in [podcast episode number 191](#), and that is functional relaxation. The protocol it isn't 'just get in a Hot Zone.' It is to be relaxed for the dog to be in a position, whatever it is relaxing to them that they can be calm in that position.



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The next behavior, if you have a dog that's gotten into a little trouble around the house, positive interrupter, great thing to teach a puppy. And that I talked about in [podcast episode number 158](#) where the puppy or the dog has a unique sound that can stop them from doing what they're doing. And that unique sound isn't “no.”

It is a positive interrupter that they know there's no fear. There's no need to fear you. That if they come to you, you are disrupting the behavior and making a mental note to yourself of what you would like to do to replace that behavior you didn't want to see. Alright, so positive interrupter is a bridge until you can grow a more appropriate behavior in place of what that puppy or dog was doing.

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Next up is Reinforcement Zone. And that is the dog understanding the area on your hip. Jump over to YouTube. I've got some [great demonstrations of what that looks like](#) and why that's important and how you can teach it. I'm going to give you a little hint though. Reinforcement Zone, walking beside you, loose leash walking, that all should be introduced in your home.

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So often people set the dogs up for failure by trying to get loose leash walking in the distraction of walking your dog on the street. So really those could be simple quickies that you're doing every day, contributing to your dog walking on a loose leash out in an environment that is filled with distractions.

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This is a game that is from our Recallers Program that I haven't talked about. I don't think I've ever talked about it on a podcast, but it's a great game again for teaching the dog control, it is Play With A Toy That I Have. And so, we want to get the dog tugging on one toy and that should be a fairly high value toy. And then you might get another toy out here that might be equal to value.

And as soon as they see it, they might go, “Oh, I like that toy, too,” and they go to switch. But you might cover it up with your hand, like if they understand ItsYerChoice. “No, you were doing this, and you tug with me until I give you the cue.” We use the cue “spit.” That means you're allowed to spit that one out and you can have this one. I used to use the word ‘this toy,’ but having a dog named This!, that wasn't a good idea.

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So, Play With The Toy That I Have is a super important game. Again, a game about the dog understanding how they can continue to earn reinforcement. Remember, we like the dog to think they're in control, rather than us feeling the need to be in control of the dog. It's a complete change in the way you look at relationship and life of the dog.

Number seven in my top ten of things I think in this environment we should have our dog and that is the “bring me” cue. That is a retrieve game. Now, for those of you who are either in Home School the Dog or Recallers, you get that program for free.

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So go and look in the bonuses and you will see ‘Bring Me’ will be there. And it like one of the most important, I would put it in my top three skills. Number one for my dogs is a recall. I want a brilliant recall. Number two is a brilliant retrieve. It's just so darn important and will bring so much value to you.



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It could be like, they've run away with something that they shouldn't have. “Bring me.” “Oh yeah.” It comes back because of the value you put in to the Bring Me program. So, teaching a really rock-solid retrieve, super important.

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And as I just said, behavior number 8, we want our dogs to have an amazing Recall. And now I do have some [games over on my YouTube channel](#) that will help build that recall. But really, Recalls is a place to be. It is a yearlong program where we put in so many layers of learning for you to have like this amazing dog that will reliably come when they're called.

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Game number 9 should be easy if you've done the relaxation protocol, and that is just [the Hot Zone game](#) where you can walk in the kitchen. If my dog is in a hot zone, they don't have to be relaxing. They can be sitting, they can be you know, looking around. They can be lying down. They could be scratching themselves.

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They can be doing anything they want. They could be actively looking at me waiting for another game. So Hot Zone, they could be sleeping. But that's different than the relaxation protocol where we want the dogs relaxed. They don't necessarily have to be sleeping but they might, but we want them relaxed. So, it's very, very different.

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But once you've got taught the relaxation protocol, teaching Hot Zone will be super easy.

And number 10, that's going to help your run amok dog is teaching functional tricks. Functional tricks. If you're in Wag Nation, you get a trick a month. There's lots of them there. But even on my YouTube channel, I've got lots of great tricks for you.

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Things like teaching your dog to target either their nose or their paws. Teaching a dog to place their face to get them used to [wearing a muzzle](#). If for any reason at a Vet they have to wear a muzzle or a head halter, there's just so many functional tricks. And tricks again can be woven into the fabric of your day with your dog.

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Here's the truth. Well-behaved dogs rarely just are a blessing from God. I mean, we might think that that's the way it happens when we remember past dogs, but truly it's rare that a well-behaved dog is genetically just appears and they just listen to everything you want and do. The truth is a well-behaved dog is a product of a well-educated dog owner.

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And so, with you being here, I know you are keenly interested, and I hope you take the time to dig through. This is podcast episode number 198, so two away from our big celebration of podcast episode 200, but there's 197 others here guys. If you haven't listened to these podcasts, please do a deep dive on them. And if you like what you're hearing, please share them with other dog lovers.





Episode: #198

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If you're watching this on YouTube, please like this video and be sure to share it with your other dog loving friends. Remember well-behaved dog is just a process that comes from a well-educated, dog loving, human. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

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[Podcast Episode 99: When Reinforcement Based Dog Training Doesn't Work](#)

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[Podcast Episode 178: Dog Walking: Why To Start, How Often, And Where](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 158: Stop Your Dog's Unwanted Behaviors With This Positive Interrupter](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Loose Leash Walking with Susan Garrett](#)

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

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

[Podcast Episode 153: Dog Muzzles: Everything You Need To Know And How To Muzzle Train Dogs](#)



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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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