

### What Professional Dog Trainers Want Everyone To Know: Talking Dogs With Kamal Fernandez

#### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

KF Kamal Fernandez

#### Transcript

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**SG:** Our next guest is a good friend of mine. Kamal Fernandez is a professional dog sports coach, international seminar speaker, longtime student of our programs. And he's been here and trained with me in person over the past 20 years. He lives with a variety of dogs of various breeds.

He had a Boxer, Punch, who was just such an impressive dog to watch. Competes and coaches at the highest level. He currently is a head trainer of his own [Kamal Fernandez Dog Training](#), where he offers both online and onsite training. Welcome, Kamal. What time is it over there?

**KF:** It is now sunny one o'clock in the morning. So only for you, Susan Garrett, only for you. I had to [follow Elliott](#) of all the early people though. I was like, "Oh my God, look at this, listen to this amazing human. I want to talk about nonsense dog training.

**SG:** I just thought [for our 200th episode](#), I want to inspire people. I want people to bring out their best to get in touch with their highest self and be that person for their dogs.

**SG:** Okay Kamal, tell me, what is going to happen in your life this year that's going to be amazing?

**KF:** This year— we're talking dogs or we're talking life? Ok. Dog-wise, I'm literally at Crufts starts tomorrow officially, and I'm competing there on Saturday and Sunday with two dogs. So that's pretty, and two dogs that I bred. So that's pretty exciting. And so that's, yeah, that's pretty cool. And then—

**SG:** Well, I appreciate you being on the call at one o'clock in the morning.

**KF:** I told you it's for you Susan, you know what I think of you, so it's never a problem.

So that's coming up. And then there's an exciting project that's due to be, I don't know if I can say yet, but it's on the lines of it's pretty great.

It's coming out in the end of March. It's [a television thing](#). That's all I can say at the moment. I don't think they've done the big press thing, so that's quite cool. All on reinforcement-based dog trainings.

**SG:** That's really cool about the television show. Okay. So, I've got a question.

What do you feel that first time dog owners, what is the biggest stumbling block to them having success with their dog?

**KF:** Oh God, that's a great question. I think it's consistency and probably mindset, I think are the two things. Consistency, I think that it's very easy to let things go.

[Reinforcement is all around us](#) and I think people aren't always aware of that. And which being aware of what you're reinforcing I think is a huge part of people getting results that they want.

And their mindset, [the belief system](#) that you know, they can't, or they won't, or the dog, the label they attach to the dog, whether it's the breed label, [the rescue label](#), [the re-home label](#), whatever the label is that people attach their dogs, which stops them from achieving the things that they absolutely can.

And I think it's a self-fulfilling prophecy, isn't it?



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- SG:** Because that just, that impacts your belief about your dog or about your own abilities, you know that there's that belief loop.
- SG:** It just impacts your thoughts, it impacts your emotions, it impacts how much action you take in your dog training. And then the lack of action or the wrong action ends up with outcomes that proves your original beliefs that I am not, I don't have value, I don't know what I'm doing, my dog is stubborn, my dog is spiteful, whatever those are. Those are two really good ones, Kamal.

And I look back, think back to when I— no, I was always a keener with my dog.

My very first dog that I trained formally. Like I would come home from class, and I would, no computers back then, I would get out the graph paper and I'd make a chart of all the things they told us to practice and how many times we had to practice, and I'd make a square for every time we were supposed to practice in a day, and then I would check that off every time I did it, I was a keener.

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- KF:** You know, I'm a huge fan, follower of what you do. Recallers, I always say I was there with the brown Recallers, the original brown Recallers.

And it was the misconception that you had to dedicate an hour of solid time to dog training. And it's just that whole five-minute thing. Five minutes.

Five minutes. And it's been present and intentional about your training and the way in which you [interact and engage with your dog](#).

And what I love about your approach to training and your philosophy is it isn't just about which is, we're [listening to Elliott](#) was really profound because it goes beyond the realms of dog training.

Dog training is your conduit to send that message and the methodology, and the approaches obviously echo that, but it goes beyond that.

And having been around you and seen you it, it isn't, this is not just Susan Garrett for show. This is Susan Garrett all the time, 24/7, which I'm sure Kim loves.

- SG:** Let's not go, let's not go there. Because sometimes it's a bit much maybe.

Back then we, the Recallers, the original Recallers, we called it 'The 5 Minute Formula.'

And that was what we were trying to get across to people. It doesn't have to be, dog training actually shouldn't be an hour.

It should be woven into the fabric of your life with your dog. And you do what [on the podcast we've called the Quickies](#), that you're just getting in those little five-minute training sessions.

They could be five second training sessions, right? We all have them.

- SG:** So how do you think about managing reinforcement all the time for your dogs? Because it's not just cookies. We all know that.

- KF:** Yeah, that's the thing.

Just to qualify this, Susan has not given me any priming to say this.

It's once you switch your mindset into understanding that reinforcement is all around us and the way in which you engage with your dog, the way in which you orchestrate your dog's life, the way in which you see the world through the lens of the dog.



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**KF:** Well, it's a game changer and it's— I constantly I slightly jest and slightly banter with people that have puppies from me. Because I actually have a litter in the background of puppies, cute puppies. And they'll obviously be going to their homes.

It always makes me laugh about they say on a little Facebook chat, “Aw, my puppy’s been doing this, and my puppy’s chewed the sideboard, my puppy chews the curtain.” And I always respond, “My puppy hasn’t because it’s in a crate, [in a gated community](#).”

Why would I let my dog do that stuff and then go and okay, they’re amazing people but what I, the point of you go once you’ve adjusted your mindset to ‘why would I let my dog do that in the first place?’

So, understanding that reinforcement always happens is often, and I would say this, I say this literally tonight when I was teaching class, “What are you reinforcing?” Ask yourself that constant question.

**KF:** Understand that reinforcement. People get so stuck on it being the tug toy and the food in their hand, but never mind their dog’s barking at them and they put the hand down to say, “Stop barking,” and that’s it, bang, the dog’s being reinforced, things like that. Or the dog that pulls on the lead and you persist going forward, you are reinforcing that behavior.

So many things in which [reinforcement constantly happens](#), and I think that’s the biggest thing that people just don’t get their head round enough that which is where, which is why the other option of “I’m going to use compulsion or aversives” comes into question.

And this is something that obviously you talked about extensively. That’s why it becomes an option because it’s not truly understanding that reinforcement is all around us.

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**KF:** And if you can view the lens well from your dog’s lens you are going to be able to change things and not have those issues or understand where the value is and [how you switch that value back to you](#). Like had a question, somebody that asked this about this afternoon about they’ve got two dogs and they constantly play. How do they, and the dog won’t bring the ball back because it runs off with the other dog.

And it was, that’s a reinforcement issue. Where is the reinforcement? Where is the value? Let’s like try and [manipulate the environment](#) and therefore the dog’s choices.

**SG:** Absolutely. I had some people, I have a little get together of people on Saturday, we are running courses getting ready for world team tryouts.

And so, they’re not my students necessarily and they trained differently obviously. And I think we’re at week seven of these get togethers. And finally, I said, because a lot of them have these [start lines](#) that are not that great.

And I’m like, “Can I just interject that the reinforcement is the jump?” That’s it.

Because in this, if your dog is really keen on agility and if you’re thinking of trying out for the world team, they probably are, then you’ve got to realize that’s the biggest reinforcement. So, you going back and giving them a cookie, you going back and getting them to tug, you going back and saying “ah,” all of that is reinforcing the wrong thing.

Well, it’s just to recognize for the individual dog what is reinforcement. Like do you remember my first dog, Shelby and it was a rock. That was her number one reinforcer. All right, we can go with that.

**KF:** And Decaff— what was it? Fly swatters.



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**SG:** Yeah. Fly swatter. And This!, it's the opportunity to chase her mother. So that is, would say, that might even trump swimming. That is the biggest thing. And so, it's about knowing what that is for your dog that you can strategically reinforce other things.

So, I [strategically reinforce the start line](#) by knowing the ability to do agility is the biggest thing.

And then the ability, and so now I've got probably one of my nicest walk in heel position with any of my dogs is with This! because it's always been reinforced not so much with cookies, but [with the chance to run](#).

**KF:** And it's the understanding, obviously This! has been raised with Recallers, et cetera. That's innate within her. And no amount of you tugging, et cetera, is ever going to substitute. Because she's a herding-bred Border Collie. That's her ultimate thing.

And I think that's where often people don't and always appreciate the dog that they have in front of them and the dog that they're training.

**KF:** So, you know, that's going to differ from This! to Tater for example or from Belief. They can have very different desires that it's your job as their owner to tap into what does this dog need, what does this dog want? And then utilizing that to get ultimately what you want.

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**SG:** Exactly. I'm trying to put in another layer with Tater Salad because I started this game to keep him out of hunting in the woods. I started a game, I don't know last summer but maybe the summer before, where he walks beside me and I count 1, 2, 3, and then I'll throw a cookie somewhere in the deep grass that he has to find it.

And I'm like, "Okay, I don't want it always to be about cookies." So I was going to transfer it to 'you pick up this tug toy, only this one little tug toy. You find it on the path, then you give me cookies. It works great in the house.' But he's, yeah, no, I need primary right now. I'm not really going to anything else outside. You want me to stay out of there? So, it's interesting.

**SG:** Okay. Kamal, as a dog trainer, what do you feel is your superpower?

**KF:** Oh God. Oh, this is one I didn't think I actually had. It was actually empathy and compassion. And I didn't think I had that funny enough.

And that I've developed that with time and age and experience.

**SG:** I would think to be a cop you'd have to have some empathy?

**KF:** That's where it stemmed from. So, I didn't have it. And it was being in situations that required a great deal of empathy and compassion when you know it's really tragic circumstances when you are having to deliver awful news to a parent for example.

The most extreme end of needing the requirement of compassion and empathy. And it's just to do your job at your best.

And I have to say prior to that, when I was teaching, I definitely didn't have it. And I would say it's something that, I'd say humor. Yeah, maybe.

But yeah, definitely I think that's something that I have grown to develop and it's something that again like all of us, and it's interesting [listening to Elliott](#), it's something that you have to do daily work on to remind yourself of those key things that you know, your aspirations aren't necessarily the person in front of you.



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**KF:** You have to align yourself with what their goals are, what their ambitions, what is it that they want from their dog, and really dial in from that and appreciate that.

People are often doing the best they can.

A bit like dogs in the circumstances that they've got them themselves into. And as a dog trainer, you are there as part of their journey and their processes to try and facilitate them moving to a better place. Certainly, some of the behavioral cases, people are in a really raw state.

I know there has been talk about [separation anxiety](#). People live in really, they almost alter their whole life to accommodate for their dog's behavior because it's all-consuming and it's a really life-changing behavioral challenge, as are so many [reactivity, aggression](#).

And when somebody invites you into that process, that journey, however you want to articulate it, to me that's something that should be treated with the utmost compassion and respect and empathy to do the best you can for them and always be willing to put down your ego I think is a huge thing that I think dog trainers can often recover from.

And we're only you know, great trainer that was a huge mensch to me always said, "You're only as good as your dog on the day."

And that's a great thing to remind yourself. In respect of the level that you are at, you're only as good as your dog in the day. At the end of the day, the dog's got to do the best it can in the circumstances that you have chosen to put them in.

**KF:** Give them a break and remind yourself that at the end of the day, as amazing as they are, they're a dog and they're doing the best they can. They're invincible creature, that's infallible. I think [ego as well is something](#) to remind people of as well.

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**SG:** Huge. I think that for me, the evolution or the fanning of the flames of empathy for me, because it was not my strength 20 years ago.

I always had empathy for dogs. That was never a problem for me. And that empathy for dogs is what taught me to have empathy for people. And yes, and I think that's why we all have dogs is that they help us rise to our highest self and to bring that out.

**KF:** And I think that often people that have that gravitate to an approach training that allows them to extend that. But I think that, and this is something beyond just dog training, it's if we could be kind to our dogs then we often we should be kind to each other.

And I think that's something that we all need to do. Work on reflecting on ourselves and I include myself in that statement. None of us certainly are perfect. And to remind ourselves that everybody's going through their stuff, and I think that being kind is a huge thing that we should always remind ourselves to be.

**SG:** And I think that's part of the evolution as well is when we are truly reinforcement-based trainers, we become reinforcement-based people. And that kindness is to people even that can't hear us. When they're cutting us off in traffic.

So, our language towards them, because I love the line from Wayne Dyer, and I've [said it on my podcast before](#), that when you squeeze a lemon, all that can come out is what's inside, and that's lemon juice. What comes out of you at times when you're pressured, that's what's really inside of you, and examine that because is that what you really want to come out.



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**SG:** And it happens behind a keyboard, it happens on a phone (I was on hold for so long today), but that's where we can show up at our best to our dogs is when we can show up that way to everybody.

**SG:** So, thank you Kamal for being here. Swagger says thank you and he say come on over, it's been a while since you've been over across the pond. Hearts everybody for Kamal.

**KF:** Good night for you, Susan. Just on a final note, thank you for all you do, and I'm probably going to do you out of a lot of money here by saying this, but you can watch Susan Garrett's podcast and probably train your dog without doing any of her courses.

However, I have to preface that by saying, I'm probably on all, I've done all of Susan Garrett's courses, so I'm contradicting myself here. But you are a game changer. You are changing the way people see this world and for that massive gratitude.

**SG:** Thank you, Kamal. I appreciate you.

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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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