

Unleashing Fluency In Dog Training: Cracking The Canine Communication Code

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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My team ran a poll on social media asking people what their dog's latency was in their behavior, meaning how fast or slow do they respond to their cues. A whopping 62% said their dogs responded really slowly to cues. And even though I'd already recorded [a podcast on latency](#), I thought we need a deeper dive in this topic. So, let's go.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. You may or may not know that I am a person who loves to meditate. I meditate every day. Anywhere from 20 minutes, which is rare. Generally, 30 minutes to an hour a day. And sometimes that's two sessions a day, sometimes it's just one.

Why am I telling you that? Because a lot of the times I will create an intention in my mind just when my brain is empty, when it's all still and quiet, what can come from the depth of it or from my direct line with, you know, The Big Guy upstairs. So, I'll ask a question often about you, the dog owner. How can I serve? How can I help dogs be better understood? How can I help people to have more success with their dogs?

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And so, today's podcast is kind of like a download from Head Office. And I think the first thing people need to understand with regards to how slow or fast or if your dog responds to the cues or commands that you say is the difference between fluency of a behavior and a good grasp.

So, a good grasp of a behavior means it's a work in progress, that the dog may have an idea. Now, the problem with a good grasp is it often leads to statements like, "He knows this." If you ever find yourself saying "He knows this," or "He can do this," or "He's done this so many times," or anything like that, you need to consider what the dog truly knows.

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Because a good grasp can be you have lured your dog into a position or a behavior hundreds of times, it could be thousands of times in one or two different environments. What is fluency? A behavior that is fluent is like any other language that is fluent. It is become compartmentalized to a part of your brain where it's just second nature, where you don't have to think about the words.

Generally speaking, dog trainers will describe fluency as you have consistency, you have reliability, and you have dependability. I'm going to add a few more to that. I'm going to say that the [behavior is generalized](#). Now, generalized to all contexts, and by all contexts, I'm implying that you've generalized it to every single environment you will ever take your dog or may want to take your dog.

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I remember when [Buzz](#) came into my life, he was my first very, very high Border Collie. I knew in training him in agility that he was going to go over the top. He was going to be a dog who wouldn't want to wait to get going. He would just want to do agility, let's go. He was that kind of all-in dog.

And so, the behaviors I needed him to have more self-control on, start lines and contact behaviors, dog walk, seesaws, A-frames—.



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This was back in 1997. I took that dog to literally hundreds of different environments to train. Took him to parks. I did it off of a park bench. I would do a contact behavior. At that time, I was a pharmaceutical sales rep. So, after a call I would just ask the clinician, "Hey, do you mind if I bring my dog in (*because he always traveled with me*) and just use a set of stairs somewhere in the back?" 99% of the time I was told yes.

So, I would go to hundreds of veterinarian clinics a year and Buzzy got to practice his targeting behavior in hundreds of different locations. Did I need to do that many? Probably not. But at the end of the day, Buzz was a dog who not once in his career ever missed or didn't perform a contact as expected.

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Including after he'd been retired for two years, I took him out in the middle of a summer camp. When I was talking about generalization I said, "Let's try it." And I put him on a dog walk, boom, perfectly, 11-year-old dog nailed it.

So, generalization is the environments that you'll want that dog to work in, the distractions that that dog will have to see or work in, and the emotional states. And so, if your dog knows this but isn't doing it, chances are you're lacking fluency.

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Now I add two more things to the list. So, we have consistency, reliability, dependability, generalization, and the last two I'm going to add, and they're related, they could just be one is the dog does it with joy and the final one is with very minimal latency.

So, imagine your dog is super, super slow doing something you asked, do you think he loves what you're asking? Chances are no, right? Remember, I've said this before on our podcast, it comes down to skill, will, or environment. So, if the dog isn't showing you great will, then they don't have joy, which means there's somewhere in the foundation of how that was trained, your [dog's emotional state](#) wasn't considered.

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And honestly, at the time of recording this podcast, the vast majority of dog trainers will not ever consider the emotional state of your dog. Sadly, it's about the dog doing what's told because they're a dog and you own them and you feed them, and you have the right to demand it. I personally don't buy into that.

So, fluency is about those criteria that of consistency, reliability, dependability, generalization, joy for the dog, and low latency. That is the criteria to which I train all my behaviors.

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And I just put the [layers of learning](#) in there in a way that every layer will bring me a version of all of that criteria. Now, the one that I want in every layer is joy. So, at the very, very beginning of anything I do, my dog's got to have joy, and if they don't have joy, then that's what I'm working on, my friend.

I'm not working on teaching a dog who's distracted or worried or over aroused. Too over-aroused, too much joy, I'm not going to try and teach that dog anything because the emotional state is not, say fertile environment for learning.



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And some dogs, it's just not possible. So, the difference between fluency and a good grasp, chances are you've been mistaking a good grasp for fluency. Now, let's put this into context of say an agility dog and a pet dog. So, somebody on social media recently, Kim and I were talking about it this morning. She read, "My dog is house trained until he gets mad at us, and then he poops in the house."

And so, what is your belief about your [house training](#)? You haven't considered the emotional state in your house training, so the dog is not house trained. Your dog has a good grasp, but they're not house trained.

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The same is true of an agility dog who may break their start line or dive into tunnels or knock bars. People will think or say, "He is on his own agenda. He's blowing me off. He knows this." That dog, a lot of times, will be given a timeout. Mini one like lie down, which I don't have a problem with you asking your dog to lie down in order for you to regroup and bring his emotional state down to see if you can get better behavior.

But it's rare that that is how the dog is asked to lie down. They're asked to lie down in a way like God himself is about to come down and rain terror on your life. The second thing that a lot of dog handlers do in agility is they then pick the dog up and march them out of the ring a lot of times in a very firm, gruff way.

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Now, when I was talking to Kim about this this morning I said, "You know, there's a very good chance that I was one of, if not the first, agility handler to pick my dog up and march them out of the ring." However, it was never done as a form of physical punishment. And it was Buzz.

But if he like went off and took off courses, because he was always barking which I believe made him unable to really hear my cues, and so there'd be miscommunication. Plus 1998, when we started competing, I was like 1/10th of that handler in agility that I am today. So, I had a very high drive dog and my skills as a handler were not up to his.

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If Buzzy was here today, he'd have a much easier go. There'd be a lot less frustration and a lot less wrong choices. So, skill, will, or environment. Put him in an environment where I'd be a little nervous, which makes his emotional state go a little higher. Courses may be a little more challenging than what we're used to. Skills, definitely.

His jumping was not trained to the state that all of my other dogs today is. So, skill, will, and environment. Yeah, we mistakenly consider the dog's mad at us, so he pooped on the rug. It's the will the dog is making all these mistakes in agility so he's doing X. It's his will. He's being willful.

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And guys, will is just a function of skill and environment. It's up to us to build that joy or self-control or focus for work into every single thing we do. You've heard me share the [belief loop](#) over and over again on this podcast, but I just want to walk you through it with a slightly different way.

So, it starts at the top with beliefs. These are not truths. Our beliefs are not truths, my friend. My beliefs are not truths. My beliefs are my perceptions.



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Now, there's a lot of things that will add up in my world to make it pretty clear that most of my beliefs are true, but quite honestly, some of the things I believe are more spiritual and they can't be proven. So, our beliefs are our perception. Those perceptions are not our own until we make them our own. Our perception of how things are, are formed when we're children. A lot of my beliefs and perceptions started with my big family, my siblings, and definitely my parents.

My beliefs and perceptions in dog training were initially formed by my early mentors who believed that you needed games to make a dog excited. So, I learned the valuable lesson of getting a dog joyful. But they also believed the dog needed to know 'there's no choice now, you should know this therefore, I will put you on a choke chain and you will get corrections.'

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Those were my beliefs that dogs needed to be taught with joy but corrected firmly and swiftly so that they knew there is no choice. Now, I still believe dogs must know what is right and wrong, but I believe it's up to us to teach it in a strategic way that gets buy-in from them. So, they're emotionally invested so they have joy for what you want to do. And it actually makes training a lot easier.

But back to the beliefs. They're formed by your predecessors. They're formed by your family and friends. They're formed by your mentors. Their ideology gets cemented in you, especially if you are brand new to dog ownership, or this is your first agility dog and they're authority. They're the ones holding the clipboard and the stopwatch. You believe them, instantly they have authority.

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I remember when Buzzy and I went to a seminar by a fellow from Europe who was teaching in California and everybody at the seminar had been on a world team. So Buzzy hadn't been on a world team at that point just yet, but all of the handlers including myself had been on world teams. And Buzzy just couldn't get this move.

And so, I said, "You know, he had me try it a number of different times and everybody else seemed to get it." And he said to me, "You have to accept, this dog is not going to be a good agility dog. Look at all the other ones. He doesn't have what they have the ability to think and bend fast and do all these things."

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And I said to him, "Your limiting beliefs do not have to be my dog's truths." And I found somebody else who knew the answers and Buzz did go on to win National Championships and did get named to world teams. Just know somebody else's beliefs are just their perceptions. They are not truths.

The other people that will influence your beliefs are your peer group, your friends, the people you spend the most time with, their beliefs about, "Oh, that's Susan Garrett. She talks a good story, but I bet at the end of the day her dogs get you know, a pinch collar and an ear correction." That could be their beliefs.

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Years ago, when I was teaching in Japan, a woman actually who had a dog very much like Buzz and she paid a lot of money to be at the seminar. After the first half a day, she packed up and went leaving. And when the translator asked her where she was going, she said, "Nobody in this room knows that this woman is a fraud. I'm the only one who has a dog like her dog."



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Now, I didn't bring Buzz, but I showed videos of him. She said, "She's telling us all she did all of that with that high drive dog without a pinch collar or an electric collar or severe corrections? I'm the only one who has a dog like that that knows she's a liar and I'm not standing here for anymore." And she left and didn't come back.

Her perception of what was possible was not what I was teaching. It didn't fit into that box. So, your peer group, the people who you look up to as your training mentors, the authority figure, you immediately give them clout to place beliefs in your brain.

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You're listening to this podcast, you are allowing me to create suggestions that don't have to be beliefs until you adopt them, which I really hope you do, because I think dogs and the world are better off when everybody adopts this way of thinking.

And of course, social media gurus in dog training are just abundant. The people that have millions of followers instantly get the clout, the legitimacy. And honestly, you have got to be careful who you allow to rent space in your head, who you allow to pollute your perception with alternate realities.

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So bottom line, the belief you have about your dog knocking bars because they're just being stupid or not thinking or not in control, or not listening, pooping on your floor because they're mad at you, your beliefs are not your own. Your beliefs are a perception. They're not true. You need to question them, more on that later.

Your beliefs are a direct pipeline to how you think, what you think. So, when a dog knocks a bar or goes off course, you may be one of those people that instantly tell the dog to lie down.

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Now, I haven't given a dog a timeout in agility for probably a decade or more. Here's my belief. I was trained with corrections, physical correction, and verbal intimidation. I morphed. I made a conscious effort in 1992. I wanted to transition my dog training to a place where I didn't use physical corrections.

So, 1996 was my first dog Buzzy that I was there. But all I did was replace those physical corrections [with timeouts](#), which may have not been physically stressful to the dog, but definitely was emotionally stressful. And a lot of people trying to make this transition. A lot of people trying to train in a reinforced based system are still using a heck of a lot of punishment, but it's just not physical. But it's still punishing, and it still has fallout.

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And so, your beliefs lead to those thoughts. "The dog knocked a bar therefore, he needs to be punished. I need to stop him. If I let him keep doing agility, I am rewarding him knocking those bars and not being thoughtful." Or knock bars could trigger curiosity, and I think that is why I am such a successful dog trainer is I'm probably one, of if not the most, curious learners in any sport of dog training.

I'm constantly questioning what I believe. I'm constantly questioning what I'm being told. I'm constantly questioning what is my dog's behavior trying to communicate to me. So, if your thoughts are, "My dog's mad," or "My dog's being stubborn," then that creates an emotional state inside you. What emotional state does my curiosity create about me?



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“Wow, I'm going to backtrack. I'm going [to journal](#). I'm going to [take more video](#). I'm going to do a deeper dive. I'm going to look outside my box. I'm going to see what other influences are on my dog's behavior.” But when I see something I don't like, like Thissy never being able to be engaged in the things that any other Border Collie should love to do, that creates this emotion.

Now I am human. Are there times that I wasn't just frustrated or like overwhelmed because I have tried a lot of things and I am not moving the needle here? Yeah. Guess what, that doesn't mean I've reached the limits of what's possible. That means I'm at the limits of what I know currently and I'm about to break through into new worlds of new possibilities. And that's exciting.

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If your thoughts are, “He's mad,” or “He's just being over the top,” or “He is not listening,” or “He shouldn't be allowed to carry on like this,” then your emotions are going to be one of anger, frustration, disappointment.

If anything you are doing with your dog is constantly putting you in a state of frustration, anger, disappointment, my friend, please, our dogs are in our life for us to have joy and love and connection.

So, if anything you're doing is rather than bringing you joy, love, and connection is bringing you overwhelm, frustration, and anger, then either you're going about it the wrong way or you're doing the wrong thing for you and your dog.

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Consider that, because I believe it's possible. I believe any dog can learn to have joy with whatever it is that you find joy in, whether it be agility, or hiking, or protection sports, or obedience. You just have to have the right approach to get you and your dog there. So, we've got these toxic emotions that are flooding through our body, filling us with cortisol.

And what do they do? They make us do things that we uncharacteristically wouldn't do. Like jerk the dog on the way out of the ring or scold the dog or, “I don't like you right now.” Or you know, make you do things that the judge will walk over and say, “Hey, we need to talk because I don't appreciate you treating your dog this way in a public environment.”

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And I mean, a better thing would be, “We need to talk. I'd just like you to consider what impact you're having on your dog's life. Because it's not just what are people seeing, it's about how you're connecting with your dog.” So now these emotions have created actions. These actions create outcomes.

So, you're going to go, “Alright, I'm going to go home and I'm going to set up a way that I can punish you. Because you need to not go in tunnels when I tell you to turn. I'm going to come up with a way to put a secret camera on, and when I'm gone and I've decided you're mad, I'm going to bust through. I'm going to put a camera on so I can bust in and correct you when you're pooping.”

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Instead of considering [podcast episode number 219](#), and please recommend podcast episode 219 to everybody where I talked about emotionally dysregulated dogs and what they may do. And the thought that people think ‘they're spiteful’ or ‘they're mad,’ in actual fact that dog is just dysregulated, unable to deal with your absence.



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So, the actions create outcomes where the dog maybe gets even more fearful, more worried about you in this environment or about you leaving because you might bust and scold them unsuspectingly. And because of that, what are the dog's options?

Now, typically we say our dog's options when we're coming in and scolding them or we're taking them off the course because we're angry at them, our dog's options are fight, flight, or freeze.

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Now, my good friend Dr. Ruth Buczynski, who owns NICABM. She's a psychotherapist, a PhD psychotherapist, and she talks about it's not just fight, flight, or freeze, in humans it's fight, fright, freeze, or please. And when she told me that I'm like, 'Oh, ding, d-d-ding, ding, ding!' it's not just humans.

How many of you who've seen dogs when people walk in and they've shred up the living room and they put their hands on their hips and they say, "What did you do?!" And the dog shows this look that they wrongly identify because of their beliefs as 'He's showing guilt. He knows better.' In actual fact, it's your dog fight, flight, freeze, or please.

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It's your dog trying to please you, so you'll stop yelling. It's your dog trying to self-regulate so that you become happy person coming through the door. He doesn't know where all that stuff came from, especially if you've been gone for eight hours and he did it eight hours ago. "Wow. This is kind of funky. She's never left the house in such a mess before."

I saw a video the other day of somebody taking their dog's front paws and picking up and putting in the garbage with their front paws all the things that the dog shredded. How disrespectful can you be? Because they believe the dog needs to clean up their mess. Because they believe the dog knew better. So those outcomes create new beliefs in your head or reinforce your old beliefs about what dogs do and why they do it, and that's what keeps this toxic wheel just going on and on.

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And today, I would love for you to consider stopping it, and this is what I suggest. Anytime you have one of those emotions or thoughts even, I would like you to ask yourself, "How does this serve me that I am thinking this way? Well, if it's my dog's fault that he's knocking bars then all I have to do is like let him know I'm mad and it'll get better." So that serves you in that you really don't have to do any work. Just show your dog you're mad.

Now the next question is, "How does it serve your dog that you're having these thoughts? How does it serve your relationship with your dog? Does it grow understanding? Does it grow joy? Does it grow ability?"

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And if the answer is no to any of those, then you've got to ask yourself a better question. You've got to question that belief. And the question comes in the form, I believe Brené Brown might've been the first one to say this. "What if I'm wrong? What if what I'm currently believing is not true? What else might be true?"

And with Buzzy, he was the first dog I ever did any form of jump education with, and it was all horrible jump education. But that led me to finding somebody who really understood how to train jump work.



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Oh my gosh, it changed his abilities as a five-year-old dog. It changed his abilities by me questioning, what if I'm wrong?

What if he isn't just blowing me off and being obstinate and not being able to control his emotions?

What if he truly doesn't understand how to jump properly?

So, questioning your beliefs will lead you to, I promise you, a better relationship with your dog and a deeper understanding of dog training, more abilities because you are now moving from a place of fixed mindset to a place of growth mindset.

Opening up possibilities to try new avenues to help your dog to find ability, or to find joy, or to be emotionally more regulated.

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Because in dog training, we need to be teaching the dog from a place of environmental success, meaning you've set up the environment so that the correct thing is the obvious thing. And then you've built in those six criteria that I said that allows a dog to move from a place of good grasp to a place of fluency.

And that should be done in layers that inject joy into what you are doing so that you'll practice every day. And what your dog's doing so that they become more engaged, more invested in whatever it is that you are trying to teach them.

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And I'm going to create this opportunity for you. At the time of me recording this, we are in the midst of my Birthday Celebration. And what that means is all of our programs we have available at prices discounted like 45%.

Now, if you're in our programs, congratulations. Let's keep going. If you're at a place where you're willing or you're wanting to see a different way for your dog, then this is your opportunity.

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I'm going to offer no matter when you listen to this, I'm going to offer you a chance. If it's agility that you want to improve your dog's ability, you can join Handling360 at a 45% reduced investment.

If you have a pet dog and you really want to start with your pet dog, building those layers that successfully teach those six criteria, then I want to give you the opportunity to join us in Home School the Dog at that savings.

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And if that's you, contact my team at wag@dogsthat.com with the subject line "Belief Change." And one of my coaches are going to send out information about either one of those programs to you. Okay.

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But before you leave, I want to recap the critical things that I really would love for you to take on board. Remember that beliefs are perception.

And changing beliefs are eradicating those perceptions that no longer serve you, that no longer serve the kind of person you want to be, that no longer serve the kind of relationship you want to have with your dog.



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That you never find yourself in a place with your hands on your hips, being frustrated, disappointed, or angry with your dog. And here's what I need you to know.

Number one, these beliefs start with you. So, I want you to take these mantras on board.

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Number one, "I do deserve this." You may have past experiences that have convinced you this may be one of your limiting beliefs, that bad things happen to you, you never get the right dog, you never achieve what you really set out to. You're never able to finish things and maybe you just don't deserve it.

Number one, you need to know you absolutely do deserve this and so does your dog.

Number two, "I will release any guilt or shame I may be feeling about some of the decisions or beliefs I've had about my dog in the past." And I will release any guilt or shame I have about the people I allowed to lead me. I'm just going to release that all now in order to have a clean slate and move forward.

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Number three, "I am good enough to do this." Any of the past protocols that you've been taught to follow with your dog didn't lead to the success that maybe even others could have.

But let me tell you, there's far more flawed protocols that bring success with just certain dog and handlers than there are really good strategically layered protocols.

So, know that and believe that I am good enough to follow through and do this.

Number four, "I am ready to let go of any excuses that I've been carrying." Excuses of, "Oh, I just don't have time. I mean, I'm busy. I'm a full-time mom. I got the kids. I got my in-laws."

Those beliefs have got you locked in a place where you haven't made time for your dog. It could be as little as three minutes, twice a week. And then it could grow to ten seconds, five times a day.

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It's possible to train in these [bite-sized training quickies](#) and have success with your dog as long as you're following a strategically layered program.

But you've got to release any excuses that have kept you where you are today, that have prevented you from taking that step outside of your current limiting belief box.

So, moving forward, I encourage you to question the beliefs, question authority, question mentors, question anything that has put you in a place where you feel stuck.

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Number two, you need to ask yourself, "How does this belief serve me? How does this belief serve my dog?" Because it will serve you, because we won't carry on doing things that aren't reinforcing us. And the sad thing is, is punishment reinforces the punisher.

So, whether you're yelling at your dog, you're physically correcting them, or you're giving them timeouts in agility, that is punishment, and it reinforces you because you do not have to think about what you could do to make it better because it's the dog's fault. So, question beliefs.



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And number three, skill, will, environment. Believing that your dog training woes or your dog's behavior is only a function of will or is mostly a function of will has you locked in a place that you will not ascend from. But believing that it's the environment you've put the dog in or the skill that you've trained that dog up to frees you.

You know there's possibilities now. You know there is places you can ascend to with that dog. And I hope that's what you do moving forward.

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I know this has been a long podcast. I thank you for sticking with me on this. And I would love to hear your feedback on how this makes you feel and what your next move is.

I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Handling360 or Home School the Dog:

Write to us at wag@dogsthat.com with the subject line: Belief Change

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 222: Get Your Dog To Respond Faster: Latency In Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 184: Proofing Vs Generalizing In Dog Training To Grow Skills And Confidence](#)

[Book: Shaping Success by Susan Garrett \(Buzz's Story\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 176: Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 171: Dog Training With Layered Shaping: Why Classical Conditioning Must Come First](#)

[Podcast Episode 48: Potty Train Your Puppy in a Week \(Easy 3 Step Process\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 8: Get Your Dog in the Belief Loop of Awesome](#)

[Podcast Episode 34: Time Outs for Dogs: Does Your Dog Need One?](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 133: Become Your Own Dog Training Coach With This Video Strategy](#)

[Podcast Episode 219: Self-Regulation Helping Shy, Hyper, Anxious Or Fearful Dogs To A Better Life](#)

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



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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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