

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Today my friends, we've got a good one. I know I say that for every podcast episode, but seriously, this one answers the question, "How do I get my dog to focus on me?"

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today's episode, it's all about focus. By the end of today's podcast, you will have the tools to get your dog to want to be more focused on you and less focused on cats, dogs, squirrels, basically the environment.

And to that end, I'm going to share with you a comment that was left over on YouTube. If you would like me to potentially read one of your comments, come on over to YouTube and leave us a comment while you're there, [join the 102,000 subscribers](#). Let's get to one million.

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This is from LilithJones7648. "Thank you, Susan, for giving dogs and their people the opportunity for this to be so." In reference to the podcast that she was watching.

"Thanks in tremendous part to your Recallers program, our dear rescue dog who charged and [barked](#) and even initially roared at almost every unexpected or dog-related stimulus when we first got him out of an awful situation is now not only a relaxed, happy, and confident dog, but one who has begun amazing us with his own spontaneous and happy choices to stop himself mid-reaction, turn on a dime with a smile on his face and joy in his body. AKA giving his focus back to his guardians, to mom and dad."

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"The years' worth of positive-guided moments of Recallers have built upon each other with our dear boy to teach him who he really is and what life can really be. And it has built a strong and trusting bond between us. It has freed him to be the dog who amazes us. And, I think, himself at times, and fills our heart with such gratitude."

What a beautiful comment. Thank you, thank you LilithJones7648 for taking the time to write that. And I know I haven't read comments out recently, but I thought that one was particularly important for today's topic.

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Because when people hear [I'm a dog trainer](#), if I'm out at a social event, they'll say, "Uh, how can I get my dog to pay more attention to me?" Or, "You know, when we're at the park, if there's another dog you know fill in the blank, squirrel, cat, kid on a bicycle nearby, I'm dead to my dog." And comments just like that.

Now, old school dog trainers would teach you to tell your dog things like, "watch me" followed probably by a little collar correction. "Watch me" pop, or "heads up" pop, pop, or "no sniff" pop, pop, pop. It kind of reminds me of being in school and the teacher saying, "Pay attention!" If I had a dollar for every time I was told, "Pay attention!" and inside me this voice was screaming, "Be more engaging!" I don't know that it would have helped, honestly. I was a child who couldn't sit still, but I digress.



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I made it through school, and I paid attention enough just to do that. To all you kids listening and watching out there, pay attention. There's good things happening there.

But asking the question, "Why can't my dog just give me more attention?" to me, is like standing in the mirror and screaming at your body, "Why can't you, ab muscles pop more? Where are you, biceps? What's going on there?"

Or looking in the mirror and saying, "Why aren't you as talented as Scottie Barnes in basketball?" Scottie Barnes happens to be my favorite player, by the way. Those are ridiculous questions, right? Why does one person's abs pop and another one don't?

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Well, it's a reflection of priorities. It's a reflection of focus. The fact that I'm not as talented at basketball as Scotty Barnes is definitely a reflection of focus and priorities. And yeah, there's some genetics thrown into both of those equations.

But to say, "Why doesn't my dog pay attention?" I'm hoping there's a paradigm shift for you. I'm hoping you think about it from the point of view of focus is a reflection of both yours and your dog's priorities.

And that's what we're going to examine and hope to improve with today's episode. Think about things or times when you can give really, really good focus. Ask yourself, why does that happen?

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Now first of all it could be you might be focused at work. Why? Maybe because you have to. Reason number one, you're afraid not to. Would that be really engaging and fulfilling focus? Or will that be going through the motions, "Is the boss looking? Oh, I'll really pay attention," and "Boss is on vacation and it's like, yeah let's watch some TV here."

So, you might be focused because you have to. Kind of like me faking being focused when I was in school. Kids pay attention. Don't listen to your crazy Aunt Susan.

Number two, you might be focused because you're really enjoying what you're looking at or engaging with. And if you're really enjoying it, it's bringing you reinforcement.

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Now you might be really focused at work because you love the reinforcement of getting paid, or you love the reinforcement of the acknowledgement that your team leader gives you when you are focused and produce amazing work.

So, what about watching a good movie? Does anyone have to say, "Hey, pay attention!?" Probably not, right? Why? Because you're inspired, you're engaged, you're captivated. Now you might also be really focused if you're working towards a desired outcome. Like a dog chasing a squirrel in fast pursuit. Nobody has to say, "Stay focused, stay focused, stay focused!" Like the dog is captivated. The dog is working towards an end goal.

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Now I'm not suggesting the dog goal set before the squirrel went running, but I'm saying the dog is working to an outcome of catching the squirrel. So, we as humans and dogs might be focused because we are [earning reinforcement](#), because we are inspired or engaged, because it's going to lead to an outcome that we would like, or possibly because we have to.



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Now I know which one of those I would prefer. And I know because you're listening to this, you know which one of those you would prefer. And trust me, the dogs are exactly the same.

So, somebody nagging at them, "watch me, heads up, pay attention, no sniff," that is not going to lead to a trusting and beautiful relationship like the one that Lilith Jones described in that comment that she left on our YouTube channel.

What's going to get you there? As I said off the top, focus is an expression of your priorities and your dog's priorities. Now, before I get into this list of how you can improve them, let me suggest you [give yourself grace](#). Because you may be a mother of three, of five, of 12, of two, of one, or you might not be a mother at all, but you have priorities that I don't have.

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And so, my level of excellence of expectations of my dogs doesn't have to be yours. All that I ask is that once you've gone through this episode, you, number one absolutely know how you're going to improve your dog's focus on you. And number two, you absolutely know what is your roughly right.

My excellence can be your roughly right. You do not have to adopt my priorities. All that I would love for you to work for is better than it was yesterday.

So, give yourself grace. You have not failed. You have not let your dog down. You just were a product of all you knew up until listening to this episode. And now that you know better, as Maya Angelou once said, you can do better.

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And so, number one, what are the priorities that our dog has? Now, when I got Prophet, he was 11 weeks old, and I think his top five priorities would have been dogs. Any other dogs that he could play with, jump on, chase, dogs definitely, definitely were number one. I would put probably food, number two.

Stones, sticks, and poop, any kind of poop that he could find out in the yard, he's very interested in all of that. Toys would probably be somewhere in there. And I'm way beyond five. I'm down on the list because as an 11-week-old puppy, he didn't know me. I had no right to expect anything of him.

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That's not how relationships start, with me saying, "Hey, hey, hey. I'm the one that's the boss now." No. They grow because my priorities are going to be, I want a connected dog. I want the dog that finds joy in my presence. I want the dog who loves engaging with me because he's being educated in the form of games that are really reinforcing and lead to outcomes that he really enjoys.

And when the dog's priorities start to morph into my priorities, that's when you have a more harmonious relationship. So, at now 17 weeks of age, I would say this is what Prophet's priority list looks like.

Susan, definitely number one. I would say dogs would be a 1.1 like we're pretty close to being tied, but he will still come when I call him away from dogs.

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So, maybe it's my ego speaking, but right now after just five or six weeks together, I have jumped the line. I have jumped the queue, and I am definitely at least tied with other dogs. And things like sticks and stones and poop, they've fallen way off the list.



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Because Susan, other dogs, food, toys, games, those have all filled the list. And it's just been a little over a month of playing together.

And so, that's what I would like for you. Your priorities and your dog's priorities, when they become the same thing, that's when you have a harmonious relationship.

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And that's what I would love for you to have. So, how do we get there? I would like you to turn to your journal at the beginning of each month, and that's going to be today. I don't care what day it is or what date it is you're listening to this podcast episode. Today is day number one.

I would like you to list all of your priorities. What would it look like if you had that harmonious relationship with your dog? What could you do with your dog that you're not doing now? What would you do with your dog? And how would your dog respond?

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Just write five to ten things down. What now are your dog's priorities in life? So, it's not a coincidence that a bunny chaotically bouncing around my backyard can captivate any puppy.

Heck, last week I was walking from the building to the house, and I let Prophet [off leash](#) and there was a bunch of leaves blowing. It's autumn here in Canada and he'd never seen leaves blowing and off he went. He was probably 200 meters away from me.

I was just letting him play when I [called his name](#). He turned on a dime as much fun as chasing those moving leaves were, he turned on a dime because my priorities and his priorities are getting closer and closer together.

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I'm going to share that little video clip with you at the end of this episode over on YouTube. So, jump on over if you want to see that, that few-second clip. I'm so happy that I got it on video.

What I didn't get on video was what happened the week before when he was [chasing a bunny](#) and did exactly the same thing. So, why is it that those bunnies are so captivating? It's because the sight, look at their fluffy, they got little bouncy tails. They look cute.

It could be the smell. If it's a squirrel, it might be the sound. It definitely is the movement. Right? So, those are the things that are going to help you become more enticing and captivating to your dog.

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It's not that I want you to bribe your dog with being like a crazy person all the time. I want you to think about reinforcing the dog in that way. So, when Prophet came, when I called him of course I praised him, and I you know turned off the camera and I went crazy [playing tug with him](#) and letting him have just a great time letting him know that was a massively good choice.

That's what I'm saying. The movement happens after the good choice is made. The movement doesn't happen to create that good choice.

So, you've got your two priority lists. I would like you to every 30 days, take a look at that list and see if you're moving it. And if you're not moving the needle in any of those things, then you have to reevaluate what you're doing to get there.



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Step number two, you've got to eliminate the habits that are creating value for your puppy or your dog away from you.

So, it's so much easier to start off without those bad habits. So, you're starting from a clean slate, and you can just start building things that are fun.

Which means I don't let my puppy go out in the backyard and just dig holes and find things and eat things and learn that there's tons of reinforcement away from me. When we go outside, I play games with him.

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Sure, [I let him sniff](#), but then I call him away and play another tug game, or maybe give him a handful of cookies or maybe throw some cookies on the ground and let him sniff those out. I mix it up. I'm surprisingly, chaotically reinforcing. I am not just a Pez dispenser that he can predictably get cookies when he wants.

I am mixing up those things that he loves and embedding them into games that we play together. So, eliminate opportunities for your dog to gain reinforcement in the environment. So, you've got to look for those hidden reinforcements.

Where are they happening? And where are you going to find them? Look on your dog's priority. Those are priorities because there's some reinforcement for him in there somewhere.

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Number three, increase the good habits that are going to create more focus for you every day. Good habits are a synonym for games. Increase [the games that you play with your dog](#) that's going to help them make good choices to want to give you their focus and attention.

People, it's inspired focus. It's not forced focus. It's not "watch me, heads up, no sniff." It's "I just don't want to take my eyes off of you because we're a team, right? You and me." And they might go, "Hey Fred. There's Fred, Mom. Did you see Fred? Yeah." My dog will look over and whatever is going on and look back at me.

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And then if we're out for a walk, they can do what they want. They always check back in, giving me that, "Are you still back with me? Yeah, that's good. Okay, we're going. That's good." That's when I know that we are a team together throughout life. That's when I know our relationship is at a place and just like any relationship in life.

It's not like check, "Yeah, I've done that." No. Every day I pay into that relationship. Every day because I love my dogs and I love playing with them. And that in turn creates that inspired focus for me.

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So, we've got your journal of comparing your priority lists. We've got the elimination of the bad habits that are leading to value somewhere we don't want our dogs to get it from. It's the increase of [daily habits](#), those games only need to take you a few minutes a day.

And number four, I'm going to give you the suggestion of [Hand Targets](#), which you can find the step by step over on my YouTube channel of how to play it. I'll leave a link in the show notes. And [ItsYerChoice](#).



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Those are two big games. And I'm going to show you how you can work them together. If you don't have ItsYerChoice, if you haven't learned it from me, click on the link that leads you to the ItsYerChoice Summit, a hundred percent free. You will learn the way I teach ItsYerChoice.

So now we have a dog who when you put your hand out you don't say "target, touch," you just put your hand out and that creates inspired focus. If you have to call your dog's name every time you put your hand out, then you're allowing the dog, "you be distracted by everything in your environment, and I'll tell you when there's an opportunity to earn reinforcement." If you just put your hand out, the dog might just glance, "Hey, how long has that been out?"

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And then they're going to learn and check in more often because the hand might be out. Now I wouldn't like, walk around with it out there till the dog, I would put it behind my back and then bring it out, maybe back away from a distraction if the dog is being distracted by their environment.

We really want them to go, "Oh yeah, hand touch. I love that game." Once ItsYerChoice is really, really good and Hand Target is really good, you're going to combine them. Meaning, I want the dog to have a choice.

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You're going to take a cookie. You're going to put it maybe, on the ground beside you on the right side and the dog is on the left.

And you're going to put your hand out and the dog's going to be, "Uh, no, there's a cookie on the ground over there. I'd really like the cookie on the ground."

And we need the choice. Your focus is there. I want it on me. If the dog can't deal with that high [level of distraction](#), we're going to put that cookie, we're going to move it a little bit behind you, a little further behind you.

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Maybe we're going to move away from the cookie. When we get the Hand Target, then we go, let's get the cookie and we're going to run over and tell the dog, "Search."

You're going to keep that up until the cookie can be on the ground. You put your hand out and the dog will say, "Oh, oh yeah, I can do that."

That, my friend, is the first time your dog has been looking at something they want, and they've turned and said, "I will focus on you and the work you want to do because I'm inspired to do so because it leads to an outcome that I desire."

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From those two little games, we can keep growing just like Lilith Jones talked about, adding more and more layers until you have a dog who looks at distractions and looks back at you. And that is the inspired focus I want for every single dog and their person worldwide. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.





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Help! Why Won't My Dog Pay Attention? (Secrets Of Focus)

Learn How To Play ItsYerChoice:

<https://recallers.com/iycsummit-join>

Resources:

[DogsThat YouTube Channel](#)

[Podcast Episode 238: Barking Dogs! Understanding Canine Vocalization To Prevent Nuisance Barking](#)

[Podcast Episode 37: Dog Training as a Career](#)

[Podcast Episode 205: The Hidden World Of Reinforcement For Dogs And Why You Need To Know](#)

[Podcast Episode 228: Navigating Failure In Dog Training: What's Your Plan B?](#)

[Podcast Episode 147: Teach Your Dog To Listen Off Leash And Far Away](#)

[Podcast Episode 152: Off Leash Listening Skills For Dogs Part 3: Training Steps](#)

[Podcast Episode 24: Help for Dogs who Chase Chipmunks, Bicycles, and Neighbor's Cats \(Distraction Intensity Index\) #24](#)

[Podcast Episode 89: Why Dogs Should Not Tug: The Truth Revealed](#)

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

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

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

[Blog Post: How to Use the Distraction Intensity Index to Help Your Dog](#)



Help! Why Won't My Dog Pay Attention? (Secrets Of Focus)

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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