

Make Dog Training Easy! Quick Guide To Antecedent Arrangements

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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I was talking to [a professional dog trainer](#) recently and she was sharing with me how much she enjoys our podcasts. And I said, "What's your favorite podcast episode?" And she said, without hesitation, "Absolutely [podcast episode number 16.](#)" As a matter of fact, a lot of my students say that's in their top 10. Definitely, maybe even in their top three.

But yet when we examine all of the podcast episode topics that we've put out, it barely cracks the top 100. And so today we're going to do a deep dive into the topic and see if I cannot inspire you to believe it's as important as other professional dog trainers and my students do.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. And the topic I'm talking about is 'The thing before the thing.' And it is a little heavy into applied behavioral analysis. And so, if you are somebody with a family pet who just needs them to you know, behave themselves then maybe it's a little bit too much for you to jump on board with.

But stick with me because today's episode is going to help you increase the good behaviors that your dog will show you. It will help you decrease the "bad," and I put quotes around that. If you're not watching this, that's air quotes "bad" because it's really just undesired behavior because we know our dogs are always doing the best they can, with the education we've given them. So, there's no such thing as bad behavior. It's undesired behavior.

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All the while, this information is actually going to help you be far, far, far more efficient with your training. The thing before the thing. And in actual fact, it should be called 'The *things* before the thing.' Because when you think of behavior, whether it's good behavior or bad behavior, whether it's just [a trick that your dog knows](#) like 'wave,' or it's how the [dog steals food from the counter](#).

It follows [the ABCs of learning](#). The A is the antecedent or antecedent arrangements. The B is the behavior, wave or steal the food. And C is the consequence of B. "So, what's the consequence when I wave?" "Oh, you say, good boy. You give me cookies. You're all happy. You love me. Everything's amazing."

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"What happens if I steal food from the counter?" "Oh, you're angry. You don't like me, but I still got that steak." So, it's still a very, very good consequence for the dog. And here is the challenge with that model. Yes, we can, [reinforcement builds behavior](#). We know that behavior of both stealing the cookies from the counter and waving, that behavior will increase in frequency because of the reinforcement in the consequence.

But yet, there could be faster ways to increase the good and decrease the bad. Most of the time, professional dog trainers and particularly pet owners, they look at the wrong things when they're trying to 'fix' a dog or 'fix' a behavior problem or get better behavior or get more of that darn good. People get focused and obsessed on the C, the consequence.



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So, they think, "Well, I need to get a bigger meatball." "Oh well, my dog won't lift their paw for just like dry kibble, I'll get sardines." "I've listened to that Susan Garrett, and she's talked about increasing [the value of the reinforcement](#). That's what I can do. I'll get meatball, sardines, I'll get a bigger piece of steak."

So, you can increase the value of a reinforcement likewise, and I hope you were listening to this, you do not want to go down this road. You can increase the intensity and the severity of the punisher you're applying. Those really are the only two things that most people think about. "If I need to [stop my dog from jumping](#) well, I've got to increase the severity of the punisher." "I've got to increase—."

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Whatever it is, people get wrapped up in the consequence. And listen my friend, the things before the thing, that is your salvation. That is what's going to bring you exactly what you want a lot faster. So, before we go any further, I encourage you to go back and listen to podcast episode number 16.

If it's a favorite amongst most professional dog trainers I talk to, and most of the students that we have in our online programs that I talk to, then I know it's going to impact your dog training if you allow it to. Podcast episode number 16.

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"So, Susan, I really don't get this antecedent. Like what can happen before you know, I tell my dog to wave and he waves, what happens before my dog gets on the counter and steals the food?" There is something that tells your dog to do the behavior.

That is what an antecedent arrangement is. It could be a single episode but more often than not it's a cascade of episodes or events or influences that create the prompt for the dog to do the behavior.

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So, you would think, "No, no, no, Susan, I just tell my dog to wave, and he waves." Okay. Then does your dog wave if you ask him to do it on a busy street corner? Does your dog wave when you are holding a hamburger in one hand?

And does your dog wave when you are swinging his favorite toy around really, really fast or throwing a ball in the air if he loves ball, or if you just dropped a big meatball on the floor and you ask him to wave, is he going to wave then? Not likely, because the prompt to get that wave behavior is tied up in antecedent arrangements.

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Now, can we get your dog to wave no matter what? Yes. And that's why I said we're going to increase the good in this podcast. Because once you know, what are the antecedent arrangements for each behavior, you're going to be able to eliminate the parts that aren't important and really help the dog to understand the only thing is important.

It doesn't matter if I drop food. It doesn't matter if I've got your favorite toy. It doesn't matter if we're on a street corner. If I ask you to wave, you're going to want to wave. It's going to be amazing for you. And so right now there's a lot of things that influence whether the dog will do the behavior. What is that one stimulus or what are those few stimuli that encourage him to go, "Yeah! I can wave! I got it. I got it. I can do this!" So, we're going to focus on what happens before the behavior and not after.



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Yes, this is true, both of dogs stealing from the counter and your dog doing a trick. So, what are the things that possibly could influence that? Well, for a lot of people it's cookies, right? And if you're listening to this going, "See, I told you, you shouldn't be training with cookies." No, that's not what I mean.

I mean, a lot of people will train a trick with cookies in their hands. And so, the dog will only do a trick if there are cookies in the hands. "I need to see the goods, or I can't perform any kind of trick. I need to see payment on the table."

It's not like the dog drives a hard bargain. It's not like the dog's trying to you know, make sure you're good for your word. It's that you've built that antecedent arrangement into the consequence of getting the reinforcement.

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And so, what we need to do is be able to identify what really are the things that cause my dog to do the thing? And can I eliminate some of those things? So, you might say, "Yeah, you're right Susan, my dog won't wave unless I have a cookie in my hand."

So, what if we put cookie in a bowl and put it on the counter and ask for the wave? Then you're just going to be patient. Maybe it's going to be a cookie in your kangaroo pouch or in your pocket out of sight and then present it.

Before you know it, okay, the cookies can be nearby and very quickly, they could be in another room, we've eliminated one stimulus attached to getting that behavior generalized no matter what. And you're just going to eliminate each of the things that you know are currently attached to the behavior until you have amazing behavior.

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Recently, I posted a video of a behavior I taught my 19-week-old puppy, Prophet. And I thought it would be cute to teach him to put one paw on each of my shoulders, drop his head, and [on the cue "selfie"](#) so that I could hold out my cell phone and take a selfie with the two of us. And so, that is a little bit more complex.

First of all, I would love him to just to fly into behind me and do it. But the stimulus of me sitting on the floor and him going in behind me is what's required before I can say "selfie." Because if I'm standing up and say "selfie," he's going to maybe run in behind me, but highly unlikely. If I'm on the floor, the probability goes up because I've done all of my training on the floor.

I actually did my training with him about six inches higher than I was. So, I was sitting on the floor. He was sitting on a raised bed. And so, it was easier for him to get his paws up. So, I then had to eliminate all of those stimuli in order to get him to understand when I say "selfie," then you are going to run around and put your paws up no matter what.

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Now, part of it was as soon as he got in behind me, he wanted to do it without the cue. That's also part of helping the dog to understand what is not the stimulus to perform the behavior and what is the stimulus to perform the behavior. So, getting that clear with you the antecedent arrangements so the dogs won't do it when you don't ask them. Even though you're sitting with your cookies, they're not going to start spinning, and waving, and bouncing, and doing every behavior they know.



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They're going to wait until you give them the one because you've split down the other antecedent arrangements and so he understands this is what will lead to reinforcement. So, what are some of those things that might get attached when we don't want them to?

Well, just think of your dog's senses. Things they can smell, see, hear, touch, and taste. So, if they can do any one of those five things while they're doing the behavior, then very likely all five of them have got built into the behavior.

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So, if you only trained when somebody was cooking hard boiled eggs, that's the only time you trained. Then you decided you were going to train one day and there was no hard-boiled eggs cooking, then you would have a much, much more difficult time getting your dog engaged, which is why it's so important when you train that you train in different rooms of the house, different times of the day.

It helps generalize good behavior because we're not attaching antecedents to the stimulus to do the behavior unintentionally. We're only attaching the ones we want to attach. But on top of those five senses, it could be things like routines.

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If you do things the same way all the time, if you always open the back door and let your dog go to the bathroom, your dog knows, 'I go to the big bush with the berries, not near the chestnut tree, that's where I always go to the bathroom.'

And then one day you're away from home. There's no big tree with the bush with the berries. Your dog actually will probably not go to the bathroom. It's not unlikely.

Some dogs will hold it for 24 hours or longer. So, even something as similar, as simple as that, I've encouraged you here on this podcast to [take your dog out on leash](#), potty them in different locations, attach a cue so that, that is what we call the discriminative stimulus that tells the dog 'Now I can pee.'

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So, for my dogs, it's usually the word "potty" that I've conditioned to mean 'now you can pee.' And I've used that in all different environments. I've used it in grass, on gravel, on concrete. I've used it in anywhere that I think I might need my dogs to pee.

Prophet has had extensive training on a potty pad. And so, he will, now I'm pretty sure he wouldn't do it if I asked him in the living room, but he will do it in all of these other environments. So, routine could be part of it.

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History, experiences that dog has had. So, if that dog has had a very negative experience say with a Black Lab, then he may see black dogs and that could be part of the antecedent arrangement that creates a behavior in him that we want to change.

So, tied into past experiences could be [emotional states](#), dogs that are super happy when they see people versus dogs that are maybe scared.

And also, motivators. So, your dog always comes when they're called but all of a sudden there's a squirrel between you and the dog. That motivator is now changing the antecedent arrangements.



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"I know to come when I'm called as long as there's no other creatures between you and I." And we just need to [keep growing our dog's understanding](#) of it, doesn't matter what's between you and I. So, now you're going to say, "Susan, well, I kind of am following this, but I don't get how I could do it."

So, let's just take the example of an unwanted behavior like the dog stealing food from the counter. So, when people say, "My dog is just a food thief. It doesn't matter what I do."

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I actually have a student in Australia and her dog was so good that she would, when they left for work in the morning, would get up on the counter and open the microwave to see what was in there thawing for tonight's supper.

She wasn't just looking to see what was in there actually, she was looking to steal what was in there. So, what do you think was an antecedent arrangement that caused the dog to start that behavior in the first place? Probably the smell of something thawing in the microwave all day long.

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And so, a lot of times that's what happens. It's the smell, it's the sight. "I smell something," air scenting, paws up, "Ooh, I see something." So, "I smell, I see, maybe I can lick it from here." "Oh, I lick it. Oh, I taste it." That's the taste.

So, this is the antecedent arrangement that says, "Now how can I get up on that counter?" And dogs are so creative. I saw a Beagle, a video of a Beagle pushing a kitchen chair over to the counter so that he could get up on the counter.

So, all of these antecedent arrangements, how are we going to change things? How are we going to get our dogs to stop stealing food from the counter? Well, first thing we want to do is create a game that helps the dog to make better choices.

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And we just happen to have a game for you called ItsYerChoice. [ItsYerChoice](#), I'll leave a link in the show notes. If you haven't played it, it's a hundred percent free summit that allows you to learn the intricacies of the game taught by myself in a way that will help you generalize it to all parts of your life.

So, we're going to start by the dog understanding 'when you make good choices, good things can happen.' If you choose not to take the cookie that's in my hand, you can earn the cookies that's in my hand. But that's not ItsYerChoice alone. There's a lot of dogs who know ItsYerChoice, but they'll still steal food from the counter because too often that ItsYerChoice is a party game.

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So, the other part of changing the antecedent arrangement is creating an incompatible behavior. So, that's where [Crate Games](#) comes in. We have these lovely [built-in crates](#) that are part of my living arrangement so my dogs love hanging out in there. By them hanging out in there, guess what? They're not in my kitchen.

The likelihood of them air scenting, putting their paws up, taking a lick has gone way, way down because they're not in there scenting. For those of you saying, "Yeah, but Susan, you're vegan. There's nothing in there that they really want anyway." Just know I haven't always been vegan, and my dogs have not been counter surfers, ever.



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So, for those of you who are still struggling with this, you create a place where we want our dogs to be. There's no need for dogs in the kitchen. We create value for what we call the Hot Zone, but you grow that through the understanding of Crate Games.

So, we keep growing the understanding of Crate Games and Hot Zone that 'this is where you stay, you have no business in the kitchen,' and we grow the understanding of the layers to where it's okay to air scent.

So, does your dog air scent the counters? Alright. Well, what about your kitchen table? Check yes. Check that, yes. What about a coffee table? Yes, check that. What about the dishwasher? If the dishwasher door was open, do they come in and have a little sniff? Yeah, check that.

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What about if you're eating on the floor and you have food on your lap? "No, no, no. I would tell him no and he wouldn't." Oh, but you've taken away his choice. If you didn't say no, would he come in, put his head on your lap and maybe even take a lick? Probably, right?

So, all the way down from the top layer of the counter, all the way down every level of life, your dog understands the antecedent arrangements leads to consequences he likes aka sight, smell, taste of things he wants.

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And so, we need to change that. You start with that simple game of ItsYerChoice and you grow it from there to include all of life. The problem with dog training is when you only focus on the consequence. "I'm going to give you higher value rewards and Susan says that will stop you from doing something."

It's going to lead to more frustration for you because you're going to go, "I thought I was doing what you were saying!" You have to look at the things before the things. You have to alter the antecedent arrangements to be in your favor so that what we're doing is we're altering the environment so that the choice we want our dog to make is the correct choice.

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It makes it so easy for him to go, "Look how smart I am. I'm doing what you want. Isn't this awesome?" And it's not like the dog is going, "I'm going to sacrifice. I'm going to make the choice you want me to make, mom." No, they're saying, "Hey, this is the easiest choice. This is the right choice. And it leads to amazing reinforcement from my mom or my dad."

And so, we want to grow that challenge only when they can make the easy choice over and over again. I love this saying that my mentor Bob Bailey says, "When training is right, it's easy." And if it's not easy, then you've got to consider the antecedent arrangements.

I hope this makes sense to you. Please jump over to YouTube. Let me know if now the thing before the thing and the things before the things are amongst your favorite podcast episodes. And what else are your Shaped by Dog favorites? I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.





Episode: #245

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Learn How To Play ItsYerChoice:

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

Get Crate Games Online:

<https://get.crategames.com/>

Resources:

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

[Podcast Episode 16: The Thing Before Your Dog's Thing](#)

[Podcast Episode 68: 3 Easy Tricks Every Dog Should Know](#)

[Podcast Episode 33: How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!](#)

[Podcast Episode 202: Getting A Happy Well Behaved Dog With The ABCs Of Training](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 59: Why Your Treats Aren't Working for Your Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 121: How To Stop Dogs Jumping Up On People](#)

[YouTube Short: 19 Week Old Prophet's Selfie Trick](#)

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

[YouTube Playlist: The Emotional State of Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 144: Teach Your Dog To Listen No Matter What... Even If You Think They Are Stubborn](#)

[Blog Post: Built In Dog Crates For Home Decor](#)



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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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