

7 Ways To Instantly Make Your Dog's Life Better

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Recently, somebody on my team challenged me and said, "Do you think there's a way we could instantly make our dog's life better?" And I said, "Well, let me have a think about that. And that would be a great topic for a podcast."

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And in order to come up with these seven things or seven ways we can make our dog's lives better, I thought about who are the dogs that I've seen in my lifetime that I would never want to die and come back in their place. And what are the ways that I work at every day to make my dog's life better?

And it was a list of, I think about 15 things, and I've whittled them down to seven things and I may have cheated. You'll see what I mean in a second. The best news of all is it really isn't going to cost you any more money to do any one of these seven things.

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Alright, point number one is to learn your dog's form of communication. Really, the only way our dogs communicate is through their body language. Yes, there's some vocalization, but we can learn so much by becoming a student of our dog's body language.

If you jump over to my YouTube channel, I have [an entire playlist](#), and there'll be a link in the show notes that goes through how you can start to understand the body language your dog is showing.

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Imagine if you are one of the people that grossly misunderstood what your dog's body language was saying about what they were feeling emotionally, if you grossly misunderstood it. And instead of thinking your dog's being fearful, thought your dog was being obstinate or stubborn, you would take a different action, wouldn't you?

So, point number one is so important, and that is become a student of dog behavior. I don't mean get a PhD in understanding dog behavior. Just understand how the dog communicates with us. And there's some rudimentary things that will instantly make your dog's life better when you understand them.

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Number two, know what your dog loves. And a lot of times we want to grow those loves so we can make our dog's lives fuller. What do I mean? What food does your dog love? If you're training your dog, what is your dog's most favorite food reward? And saying, "Oh, my dog loves everything." isn't a good enough answer because I promise you if I put a dried-up kibble and a piece of roast beef, the dog's going for the roast beef first.

So, what does the dog love food wise, what does the dog love for toys? What reinforces the dog? Do they love toys more than food? What activities do they love? What gets them super excited where they do the body wave and the helicopter tail wag? What is it that your dog loves most of all? Now that you know what they are, you can use one thing to help develop another.



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For example, your dog may not really love to swim. Some of my dogs started out not loving to swim, but it didn't take very long before I was able to [shape a love of swimming](#) by using some of the other things that they loved.

And so, I think when a dog loves to swim, they have a fuller life. And so, I put a lot of effort into teaching swimming. But it has to start by what does the dog love. And it's up to us then to grow that list, to give them that full life.

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Number three, super important. Give your dog the power of choice. You know, B.F. Skinner in his book [Science and Human Behavior](#), he had this amazing line in which he said, "We are automatically reinforced when we successfully control the physical world."

Animals, when given choice, when they have power over their environment, where they have power over their reinforcement, that is the greatest reinforcement you can give an animal. So, the power of choice is monstrous. That's why I believe all really humane, compassionate training gives that dog the choice.

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The choice to choose, yes, do you want your nails cut? And the dog every day of the week is going to say "no, thank you" until we take it upon ourself, as I mentioned in the first point, to make nail trimming the best exciting thing that could ever happen in their life. It takes some time.

That's where my program, [Pedicure Please](#), which you can find here in great detail on [podcast episode number 107](#), you can find the details how I go about doing that with every single dog I've ever owned, including my rescue dog, Tater Salad, who was absolutely repulsed by the thought of anybody touching his nails.

So, giving our dogs the choice, the choice to choose what is their top reinforcer, what is the best way to train with that dog.

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For example, Tater Salad loves working with a [remote feeder](#). My Border Collies tend to love tug games and my Terriers have often, of course, love tug games, but love food just slightly more. The power of choice includes, does that dog have an opportunity to have some alone time?

Is there a place they can go in the house where they're not going to be bugged by other people in the house, other dogs in the house? [Their chill zone](#).

Tater Salad's chill zone is in front of the fireplace. My Border Collie This!, her chill zone is lying up on my bed, flat out, stretched out on my bed. Where my other Border Collie Momentum, her chill zone is to go into one of our open crates that are in the back of the house.

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So, the power of choice means the dog has autonomy over their life. That, of course, we don't let the dogs run amok. We don't say, "Oh, [whatever you want, you can have](#)." That's where really good choice-based dog training comes in.

Where what you really want as a pet owner and what the dog really wants as a dog becomes the same thing. You in fact have that oneness that you're working together as a team.



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Number four, give your dog variety. Now here's where I'm cheating. Variety of what you may say. Number one, variety of food. That is [the food you're feeding](#). Ideally give them at least seven different proteins throughout the year.

I remember when I was a kid growing up, our dog got kibble dog food and only chicken. That's what every single day of her life, the exact same dog food, chicken. The same brand, the same kibble every single day.

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My dog's diet changes one way or another every week. It depends on what's fresh, what fruit and vegetables are in season. But regardless, seven different proteins, sometimes eight that get routinely rotated throughout the year.

[Variety in the training treats](#) you use. So, have you, know the ones your dog really, really likes? And there'll be some they like a little bit less? And keep changing it up. Find not only what the dog loves, but also how you deliver that food. How they get their food every night.

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[Is it just in a bowl?](#) What about just putting their food in [a Kong](#) or [a Toppl](#)? Or you might put it in a, one of those food puzzles. You might put it in [a lick mat](#), or you might choose to train them with their food. So, variety, let's not have the same thing, be the same thing every single time.

That includes the variety in the [chew toys](#) that you give them. Yes, we want them safe. We don't want them breaking toys, but again, you can change the proteins, you can change the form, you can change the shape of what you're giving your dogs to chew on.

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Variety in the enrichment choices you give your dog. Now, generally when I think enrichment, it's things that my dog can do on their own. Not all the time because enrichment could be going for a walk and [letting the dog sniff](#) wherever he wants to sniff.

Enrichment can be [using puppy bombs](#) or using [Nina Ottosson's food puzzles](#), or maybe using a [snuffle mat](#), or maybe hiding food around the house and teaching your dog to find that. So, enrichment takes on all different forms, but the key is to mix it up. Don't have it be the same way every time.

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Variety also in the way you engage with your dog. So, sometimes you might just, you know, maybe give them a little body massage. Sometimes you're training with them. Sometimes you are taking them on a big adventure. If you have more time, maybe you're going to the conservation area.

Sometimes your engagement can be training in short [little training quickies](#) every day, or it could be a longer training session every day. Just keep that variety of where you're training, how you're training.

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Ideally, you're always including games in that training because again, I think that's just so reinforcing, not just for the dog, but for you. When it's reinforcing for you, it means you're going to do it more often. And so, for me, the best engagement that I give my dogs is when we we're [playing training games](#). But engagement can happen in a 10 second tug session when you're out walking the dog. And also, variety in the forms of [exercise your dog gets](#).



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Yes, dogs love going out for a walk. But maybe you're having like a big ice storm outside. So, you might choose to do exercise stations around your house. You can go to my YouTube channel where I have a playlist on activities that you can use to [exercise your dog in the home](#).

But exercise isn't just turning your dog outside on their own. Exercise, the variety in the exercise means you might be taking your dog on a walk, maybe just around your neighborhood, but you can take a different path around your neighborhood. You can go to different parks. You can maybe teach your dog to swim, take them to a hydrotherapy pool.

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There's so many different things that we can do to exercise our dogs. There is no reason not to have variety to that exercise. And also, variety can be added to the exercise by who you're doing the exercise with. Meaning, is there another person coming along? Does your dog have a favorite dog friend that he likes to do things with?

So again, not all dogs like having other dogs around. But if your dog is the kind of dog that has other dog friends, yes, that's a way of providing variety to the exercises. Having somebody there on the walk with him.

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Number five way to instantly make your dog's life better is, be open to the lessons your dog is sharing with you every single day. When you're training your dog in particular, your dog is [giving you feedback](#). They're sharing with you their feelings on what's going on. Take that feedback on board and make adjustments.

Because every time you do that, you're bringing yourself and your dog closer and closer and closer. That bond is getting more and more real. You know, if you've listened to this podcast, you've heard me say over and over, our goal with our dogs is to take them out and train them a way that what previously might've been a big distraction becomes white noise.

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One of the worst things that could ever happen to a dog is for them to become the white noise of your life. That they're in your house or they're in your backyard and you know they're there. And if somebody says, "do you have a dog?" you go, "yeah, I've got a dog." But they're really not engaged or involved in your life on a regular basis. So, being open the lessons that your dog is sharing means that you're going to know when your dog maybe needs more focus from you on how to chill and relax alone at home and not need to be touching or pawing you all the time.

Or they maybe are going to give you feedback on [placement of your reinforcement](#) when you're training or the rate of your reinforcement that they just didn't understand what you were trying to teach. And they ultimately are the best critique of the [antecedents that you've arranged](#) in your training sessions. So, be open to the feedback of the dog, super important.

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Number six, be compassionate in everything you do with your dog. If you're present to evaluate the actions you're taking when you're cutting your dog's nails or when you're putting on your dog's harness, or when you're training your dog, even when you're maybe a little tired, be compassionate and understand that you're trying to give this dog the best life possible.



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And for me, being compassionate means you're tuning out the broadcasts of the trainers that are trying to convince you that your dog is being stubborn or spiteful or disobedient or dominant or they're blowing you off.

You're tuning out all that information because you've bought into dog training that myself, and many others have proven to be unbelievably successful, far more successful than a lot of other dog trainers even want to know about.

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You've bought into the dog training where you can have the dog of your dreams without the need for any physical corrections or verbal intimidation. And when you do so, you make the decision that you're going to lead every interaction with your dog with compassion first.

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Point number seven. If you've seen any of my videos and seen what my house looks like, this one will make a lot of sense. But I truly believe the way we can make our dog's life instantly better is by giving them a variety of different dog beds. Now stick with me on this one.

I believe my dogs prefer double decker beds, meaning one bed on top of another bed. But in particular, if you take a raised dog bed, a lot of dogs aren't going to stay in that raised dog bed. But if you put a nice cushy dog bed on top of the raised dog bed, then you've got a dog bed that most dogs are going to love to have.

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My dogs love beds that are kind of a donut, that they can rest their head on. But Momentum for example prefers beds that are a little flat, maybe one side that she can rest her head on, but the other side so she can lay her legs out flat.

Know your dog's preferences and give them varieties. I think one of the nicest dog beds that I have in my home, none of my dogs will ever go in. It's beautiful. It's like a little couch. I think it's gorgeous. Why do our dogs prefer our couch? I think because they're like a double decker.

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They're raised and they've got big cushy on top. So, test out a raised dog bed with a nice cushy on top and tell me that I'm not right. So, there you have it. Seven ways to instantly make your dog's life better.

Know their language, know their preferences, give them the power of choice, create variety in their life, be open to the lessons that your dog is sharing with you, have compassion in everything you do, and get the dog another dog bed.

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I'd love to know if you have any additional ways, you think people can instantly make their dog's life better. Jump over to YouTube, leave me a comment. I'd love to hear from you.

And while you're over there, please hit the subscribe button, turn on the notifications and give this video a like to let other dog lovers know that the DogsThat team is providing educational information that everybody could benefit by. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.





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Resources:

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Body Language, Communication Signals, and How to Read Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 162: Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water](#)

[Science and Human Behavior by B.F Skinner](#)

[Podcast Episode 107: Pedicure Please: 3 Steps To Dog Nail Trimming Or Grooming Success At Home!](#)

[PETGEEK Automatic Pet Feeder](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 166: Puppy Freedom: How Much Is Too Much?](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Feeding Dogs, Training Treats, Dog Food and Raw Diets with Susan Garrett](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 225: Keep The Food Bowl! Why Dogs Don't Need 100% Hand Feeding](#)

[Kong Toy](#)

[Toppl Toy](#)

[Messy Mutts Lick Mat](#)

[Wood Dog Chews](#)

[YouTube Video: DIY Puppy Bombs: Easy & Affordable Enrichment Toy for Puppies](#)

[Nina Ottosson Food Puzzles](#)

[Snuffle Mat for Dogs](#)

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

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

[YouTube Video: 15 Ways To Exercise Your Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 189: All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You](#)

[Podcast Episode 31: 5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster \(Reinforcement Process\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 245: Make Dog Training Easy! Quick Guide To Antecedent Arrangements](#)



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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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