

Expectations Vs Reality: Navigating The Path To Dog Training Success

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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To start off this new year, I decided let's do a podcast that's going to bring people closer to their dogs. That's going to make them be less frustrated and help the dog be happier too.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today I want to talk to you about expectations. And recently something that happened within my own training that made me say I really need to do a podcast on this topic. Any relationship we have in life carries some expectations and the expectations have the filter of our own biases that we have a certain way we expect people in our lives to behave.

Whether it be a spouse, a parent, a sibling, a child, a BFF, even a complete stranger that might be driving in traffic or waiting on you at a restaurant. We have a certain expectation. Now the expectations we have for each individual in our life comes from a cumulative thing.

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It may come from our upbringing, relationships that we were exposed to, the roles that we saw play out. They may come about from movies we watched. The realistic or unrealistic expectations we see in characters in a movie. It could come about by the five people that are closest to us in our lives. That we see them the way that they treat or what they expect of others.

All of those things help to create our own biases. And so, when our expectations of people aren't met, at the very least we can be disappointed. We run the risk of being frustrated or even worse being angry.

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Now, all of that can be true with every single dog in our lives, particularly puppies. And I see this when I jump on social media, and I start just scrolling and reading people's posts. The [unrealistic expectations](#) people have of dogs is crazy. It's crazy.

But then I have to remind myself that these are just people looking at life through their own biases. If I believe dogs are doing the best they can, I have to believe people are doing the best they can. And this came to light when a friend of mine was watching me train my young puppy, Prophet.

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I was [training an agility behavior](#), directionals, where I was teaching him to turn either to the left or to the right based on the verbal cue that I gave him. And it was probably a two, little over two-minute training session that I was watching. And during those two minutes, I would imagine Prophet made two to three mistakes. And I actually didn't even realize she was watching me.

As I was walking away from that session, she said to me, "I think I know why I have a lot of the problems I do with my dog." And I thought, well, that's a strange thing to say. "What?" She said, "I was just watching you train Prophet and to see what you did when he made a mistake." And I said, "What did I do?" And she said, "You laughed. You laughed and you had him do a nose touch. And then you [played a little tug](#) and then you had him try again."



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And honestly, I don't know exactly what I did that's [why I video everything I do](#). But I do know there's several different things that I might do when my puppy makes a mistake based on what we're training, how new it is to them, and how often he has made that mistake in the past.

So, that really stuck with me that she was taught, now our mentors help to create these expectations we have for our dogs or for other relationships in our lives, she was taught to expect perfection from a puppy.

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And [when perfection isn't met](#), a consequence must happen. Even if it's as subtle as saying, "Oh no!" or "Oops, try again.", you are still telling the puppy 'You were incorrect'. And that's not the way I see [puppy training](#). I see it as it's our responsibility to set the environment up so that the puppy can succeed.

And if they don't succeed, the emotions we need to feel are not [disappointment, frustration, anger](#), or anything else. They need to be curiosity. And I had a deep dive on this topic for myself recently when I realized my expectations of my puppy change in different environments. And I'm still carrying the bias.

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And I think some of you may be as well. I'm still carrying the bias of the [balanced training](#) that I originally was taught. In that if I'm outside for a walk with my puppy and he suddenly runs to the end of the leash, I am going to probably be somewhat surprised and maybe a little disappointed, but I'm going to stop, which is causing him to not be able to seek the reinforcement he's after.

And so, then I'll back up and I'll wait for him to come into [Reinforcement Zone](#). And if that happens more than two or three times, I have got to realize my expectations were way too high for the stage of training, education, and the environment that I've put this puppy in.

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And so, normally it's just he and I going for a walk. I happen to take him for a walk with all the dogs. And yes, he was going to be less focused on me and more focused on [potential external reinforcement](#) of the other dogs. And so, all of this, I'm like, "Wow, I have a bias." And I was curious about where did this come from? And I traced it back to the early training that I was taught.

When a puppy does X, we must meet it with Y. We must not allow patterns of misbehavior to occur with our puppy. "Be curious, Susan, be curious. What else could be happening and what else could you do?" Because back when I was originally training dogs, back in the eighties, I carried expectations because my mentors taught me to carry expectations.

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I cued my dog to do this. I trained my dog to do this. When my dog does this, I'm a great trainer. Haven't I done a great job? But when my dog does something other than what I have expected of them, the dog is flawed. The dog's behavior has been deemed inappropriate.

The dog's behavior has deemed less than what I was expecting therefore, it must be wrong because it couldn't have been my training that failed. It had to have been the dog therefore, there must be a repercussion for the dog. Now it could be something as mild as, as I mentioned before, a [non-reward marker](#). It could be something worse, the escalation to maybe a verbal corrector or a physical correction.



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It could even escalate to maybe [an electric collar](#), which I've never actually ever used. But here's what I recognized, just the subtlety. And I think there's some of you that this may be happening with you as well. With Prophet, I would say his name, and he has a lot of nicknames, as do many of my dogs. One of his nicknames is 'Pheti', so Propheti, okay.

So, I would say "Pheti" and if I don't get him to turn around, that's my expectation, he gives me a head whip because he does it most of the time. Then I call him by his formal name, "Prophet." And if that doesn't give me what I want, I say it sterner, "Prophet."

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And I'm like, "Wow, that's the same as giving a collar correction, Susan." You are trying to use your voice in an escalated way to intimidate that puppy to do what you want. And what you're actually doing is training the puppy to train you to get more aggravated.

That's not the way you want to live your life. That's not the kind of person you want to be for that puppy. So, how about we get curious to why isn't the puppy responding on the word "Pheti?" Why do you feel the need to escalate to a more formal word, and then to a more firmer tone to your voice? That is an artifact of balanced training.

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And I don't want that to creep into my relationship with my puppy or to any of my dogs actually. So, if you find yourself raising your voice, repeating cues, giving non reward markers, [giving timeouts](#), all kind of on the benign scale, it's still judging the puppy as failed rather than, you being the one that's failed.

Now it's harsh. "Oh, come on Susan. I got so much to do. Do I really have to take this?" Yes, we do. Because our dogs are amazing. They're doing amazing things for us. It's on us to make our relationship as good as it can be.

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So, what can you do in those instances where I said "Pheti", and I didn't get the response? Number one, as my mentor Bob Bailey says, "Bang head here, find something nice and hard and bang your head on it." Because you put the puppy out there to test something that the puppy wasn't ready to be tested on.

And don't really bang your head, please. But it's, you know, it's just a saying. If the pain of the puppy's behavior didn't bother you enough, maybe the big bump to the head might. But you want to go and stop the reinforcement or the access to the reinforcement that the puppy might be getting.

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So, if it's a small enough puppy, you can pick them up and just move them away and put them back down and then call their name. But that incident has to have impact on you so that you can say, "Okay, he was sniffing coyote poop." So, you might pick up a little piece of coyote poop in a dog in a plastic bag and bring that home with you.

And then you're going to test recalls with the name "Pheti", you know for a week before you bring out some coyote poop and put it maybe 50 feet away. You're going to give the puppy the tools that they can respond when you ask them to. And you're also going to do a little internal check. "What was I feeling? What were the expectations that I had that made me feel that way?" [Get curious](#). Curiosity is what's going to be that bridge to build that amazing relationship between you and your dog.



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Because if you're feeling disappointment or frustration or bitterness or anger or any of those emotions, I promise you it's because you had unfair expectations of the dog or the puppy or your spouse or your kid or your BFF or the waiter serving you your meal. So, what can we all do right now?

Number one, don't create a choice between yourself and an external reinforcement opportunity unless you're willing to bet me a hundred dollars your dog is going to choose correctly. Because unfortunately, this is what a lot of people do in the training, is they manage. The dogs on a leash, the dog gets tons of cookies for making good choices. But the behavior is constantly managed, managed for weeks, for months, for maybe even a year.

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And then all of a sudden, it's freedom. But management without the opportunity to make choices doesn't allow the dog to understand that even [when they aren't on a leash](#), they should choose to come to you. They should choose to ignore the distractions. So, you need to number two, evaluate with smaller distractions.

Now I said the word evaluate, not test, because test has a pass or a fail. And if the dog fails, that makes them a failure. Evaluation is critiquing the training you've done. And so, you're going to evaluate your dog's responses around minor distractions.

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And if you go to [podcast number 24](#), where I talked about the Distraction Intensity Index, I give you the steps you can introduce higher and more severe distractions to your dog so that they constantly make the right choice for you.

Number three, question your own biases and beliefs. You don't have to know or care where your own biases are coming from, but question what you currently believe. Question, do you have the right to have these expectations? Because there's a lot of trainers on the internet that will say, "We do have the right. We feed them, we house them, we are their alpha. They should do what we tell them to do."

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And I'm here to say, it doesn't have to be that way. You can have amazing success. You can have an amazingly trained dog. And if you've got a breed that maybe is a little more difficult around, say wildlife as a distraction, it might take you longer to train than it would say somebody with a different breed of dog.

But that doesn't mean it's not worth you investing that time or ensuring by using more [management around those distractions](#). Because nothing is foolproof except good training that the dog is always given the choice to choose correctly.

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And finally, [give yourself grace](#). Remember, we're all humans. And I think as Louise Hay and Brené Brown says, "We're all doing the best we can." And just like our dogs, all that we can do is expand, be curious, continue to grow, expand our knowledge of what works right now, and keep being curious about your dog's behavior.

I hope this makes sense. You couple this podcast with Shaped by Dog [episode number 248](#), where I share a strategy for goal setting and creating milestones to have a better trained dog. I think these two episodes are going to make a massive difference to you in the coming year.





Episode: #250

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Please [jump over to YouTube](#), leave me a comment, let me know what you think of this approach. And while you're over on YouTube, please be sure to like and subscribe to the channel.

Like the video because that's what tells YouTube that it's worth sharing to other dog owners. Let's spread this good word because more and more people need to have this kind of relationship with their dog. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 218: Puppy Development Stages And Your Dog's Behavior](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Agility Training and Dog Sports Tips with Susan Garrett](#)

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

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

[Podcast Episode 1: Done Is Better Than Perfect](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 230: Finding Joy Amidst Frustration And Shame In Dog Training – DeCaff's Story Part 2](#)

[Podcast Episode 146: Balanced Dog Training: Does It Really Exist?](#)

[YouTube Video: Understanding Your Dog's Reinforcement Zone \(RZ\) with Susan Garrett](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 64: Help! How Can I Tell My Dog He's Wrong?](#)

[Podcast 214: England Banned Shock Collars, Here's Why That Could Be Sad News](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 227: My Foolproof Strategy To Overcoming Dog Training Challenges](#)

[YouTube Video: How To Get Your Dog To Listen Outside Off Leash \(Step By Step Guide\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 24: Distraction Intensity Index: Help For Dogs Who Chase Chipmunks, Bicycles, And Neighbor's Cats](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 150: Adding Mindset To Your Dog Training Tools: Who Do You Become?](#)

[Podcast Episode 243: Training My New Puppy, What He Knows So Far: Susan Garrett's Plan And Puppy Schedule](#)



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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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