

Shaping Tips For High Drive, Frantic, Hyper Dogs To Stop Dog Training Frustration

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Wee! High drive dogs. You know, when you see a really well-trained high drive dog, it's one of the most beautiful things to witness. But if you are the owner of a family pet who is a very high drive dog, it could be equally as frustrating for you to even try and deal with that dog in everyday life.

But after today's episode, you will have the solutions that will give you the promise for the future that your frustration with your dog is going to be minimized if not eliminated.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. [I have got a lot of experience](#) with high drive dogs. Early on was on a number of world record setting flyball teams. Very, very high drive dogs bred just for flat out sprint speed. They just had to go over four jumps, catch a ball, come back over those four jumps. It was super simple.

So, all that we wanted was flat out speed from those dogs. And in agility, I've trained a very over the top dog, Buzz, who I actually wrote my book [Shaping Success](#) about, as well as had a great deal of success with other very driven dogs like Encore and Swagger, and now [my latest puppy Prophet](#).

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And there's a lot of myths I want to talk about. There's a lot of wrong assumptions that I want to talk about today in defense of all high drive dogs. I once heard a trainer who I know, and respect describe high drive dogs as 'dogs having an unparalleled level of drive and determination to get what they want.'

And I thought, "Wow, that is not how I think of high drive dogs." And I think how you think of those dogs will affect the way you train them. Now I personally believe, yes, there are some dogs that are [just bred by nature to be much higher](#) drive than other dogs. But I believe a lot of really high drive, frantic, over the top dogs are created.

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And I believe that that drive is just an expression of frustration. And if you remember, I've mentioned the book the [Frustration Theory written by Abram Amstel](#), and he describes four responses to frustration. The first one being 'suppression', an animal, human, dog, it doesn't matter, just gives up. They try something, get frustrated, they give up, suppression.

The second thing is 'regression', that they will go back to what worked previously. The third option is 'persistence' that they'll just persistently do what just worked last time. And the fourth option is 'invigoration', meaning the animal gets more intense and more demonstrative, more physically and more stimulated by the job at hand.

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And so, my hallucination is that dogs who are more over the top, more high drive, are dogs who by nature or by nurture have an invigoration response to frustration.

There was a paper written in 2021 by Kevin McPeake, Lisa Collins, Helen Zulch, and Daniel Mills, and it's called [Behavioral and Physiological Correlates of the Canine Frustration Questionnaire](#).



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They actually had a questionnaire where they ask owners to evaluate their dogs' level of frustration, and they put these dogs through a number of tests, but they described 'frustration as an emotional response to the violation of a given expectation.' That's truly what it is. And I'm not saying frustration is bad. I think frustration is good for all animals, including us.

I'll give you an example. I was running an agility course here at home practicing, and I made a silly handler error, and my dog went off course. I went back and did this same thing again, persistence. But because I was frustrated by the outcome of what previously happened, my persistence with what I was doing came along with an extra degree of focus and connection to my dogs.

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So, that frustration for not getting the expected outcome I wanted resulted in me being more connected, more persistent in handling my dog the best I could. So, I'm not saying frustration is bad. I'm just saying that I believe it's the dog's response to frustration that has a massive impact on our dog's natural drive states.

For example, my dog This!, whether it be nature, how she was genetically bred, or it was nurture in that the first 18 months of her life, she was fed a diet that made her feel unwell. Her response to frustration has always been suppression to "I tried that. It didn't work. I think I'll just go and sit down now."

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Now [I'm working very hard at changing that](#), but I don't believe she will ever be a dog that has the natural response of invigoration when she's frustrated. But I see that in a lot of dogs. And I think that's the difference in my last few dogs that I've been able to keep them into a healthy level of drive and not have them turn into [dogs like Buzzy](#), who were over the top and high drive.

And I say that like it's a function of who he was. And I believe it was me that was responsible for who that dog ended up being. And I want to help you make sure you don't create those same responses in your own dogs that are showing drive now.

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First, before I get too far into this, I really think you should go back and listen to Shaped by Dog [episode number 110](#). And actually, if you go over to YouTube, there's a playlist, a great [playlist on high drive dogs](#) and how you can help your high drive dog. But in particular, there's a series that I did, Shaped by Dog [episode number 136](#), [137](#), and [138](#). All of them will help you make sense of how to train your high drive dog.

But first, the wrong assumptions. People believe that high drive dogs just need more exercise. "Yeah, once we get the edge off, they'll be able to focus and work." No, what you'll get is a very fit high drive dog who's still going to have that same level of frustration, the same response to frustration, but they're just going to be more fit that they can do it for longer.

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So, no, I don't believe your high drive dog just needs more exercise. I believe they absolutely do need [daily exercise](#), but they don't need an excessive amount of exercise in a day.

Number two is the belief that these high drive dogs need a firmer hand. And here's the truth. A high drive dog is a joy to train because they forgive when you make mistakes like I did this morning with my handling and they're willing and keen to try again.



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But the curse of that high drive dog is they're willing to make mistakes and try and try again. And so, the perception is that they're being willful or on their own agenda and they need a firm hand. And that is not the case. I don't believe that a high drive dog needs a firm hand. I think it's the opposite.

I think the more you try to push against them, the more frustrated they will be, the more invigorated they will be, the further you're pushing them away from what their expected response was. And so, no, I don't think a high drive dog needs a firm hand at all.

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There's also the myth that these high drive dogs can take much longer training sessions. The appearance is they can because they won't give up. But what you're going to get is sloppier work and you're training that dog that 'we will do 500 repetitions until you get it right and when you get it right, we quit.'

But you're actually building in, you don't have to get it right the first time. So, rather than working for longer times and getting sloppier, less focused work, what you really need to do is have a better plan and work for shorter periods of time.

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And finally, there's the myth that the high drive dogs are stubborn, are willful, are strong willed, just want to do what they want to do, are on their own agenda, that they're self-serving, that they blow you off or any number of things. And I truly believe our dogs are always doing the best they can with the education we've given them in the environment we've put them in.

And so, none of those boxes get checked for me. And trust me when I say, I have trained so many high drive dogs. I've trained them both incredibly badly and incredibly well. So, mistakes that people make when they're trying to train a high drive dog. And I think you might be surprised by one or two of these.

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Number one, raising your voice. So, that goes along with a firm hand. You get frustrated and you start sighing. And what you're doing is you're actually putting more pressure on that dog to be right the next time when they are frantically, they're getting more and more stimulated to do what it is you want to do.

And in this paper, they talked about the cortisol release that happens in response to this frustration. And so, now you've got a dog that's going to have a very difficult time working in a thoughtful space because of the stress hormones coursing through their body.

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So, the worst thing you can do is raise your voice, get angry, get frustrated, put your hands on your hips, stamp your feet, let the dog know you're disappointed. Absolutely the worst thing you can do. Another thing is if you believe this dog is just going to do what he wants to do, you may try to control the dog. Another horrible thing to do with these high drive dogs.

Yes, they need to be in control, but we need to give these dogs autonomy so that they can make those choices. You will find the level of stress will really come way down. One thing that I found that is something that I don't recommend people do is use a clicker when they're training a high drive dog.

The sound of that clicker I find stimulates high drive dogs and they get more frantic, especially for [shaping exercises](#). They get more frantic looking at waiting for the sound of that magical thing.



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And so, my hallucination is a remote feeder is a second cousin to that. So, it is a predictable sound and even the gear changing of a remote feeder. So, I'm not saying never use it. I would say maybe at first when we're working on getting that dog's emotional state down to a more thoughtful level, consider putting those things away. At least for now.

Okay. How does a high drive dog express themselves in training with you? How do they express that training? Now, some of them might in their invigorated state, they might run off. Now somebody might call it they're getting the zoomies, but they might run off and go and rehearse responses that previously had a history of reinforcement.

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So, in agility, they might start running through tunnels or just doing obstacles. They might go off and grab a toy and run around and have a party of one with their toy. And what they're doing is they're decompressing. It's an expression of the frustration that they're feeling from the training, and they are just decompressing in the only way that they can right now.

You might see it in a Border Collie with them just starting to do an outrun like you're a sheep. You might see it in a dog by redirecting and biting either, on your sleeve, inside of your thigh is a great redirect for a high drive dog. I'm speaking from experience because I've had it. You will see that the dog's intensity, the frustration is growing because of the intensity at which they grab their food.

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They might go from having a soft mouth when they're taking food from you to having a very, very hard mouth. The same with a nose touch. They might start nose touching with their teeth. They may get more vocal. Whining, barking, also more agitated movements, more staccato kind of movements, more frantic paw movement when you're trying to shape them.

So, all of this, I can just feel the frustration when you're trying to train that. It's going to be hair pulling because you don't— "How am I going to get you to go around a cone when you're like, or have your open mouth breathing, you're staring at me with the whites of your eyes seeing, and I just don't know how to deal with that."

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High drive dogs, here's a list of needs I think are really great to meet. Number one, a relaxation protocol. If you go to [podcast episode number 191](#), I give you in great detail how to start a relaxation protocol.

Start that at home just as a way to get the dog to accept lying down on their side. And during that relaxation protocol is where we're going to build in some actual calm reinforcement that you can use in your training down the road, but we've got to build it in a calm state at home.

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So, it could be watching TV. It could be a purposeful time away in your bedroom or another quiet room where you just get the dog to lie on their side and you work through the relaxation protocol as defined in that episode.

These dogs are served by having ultra short training sessions. So, set a timer. Your first training session of the day should always be one minute.



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And ideally, you're stopping the timer before the timer goes off because you know 'I need to change some of the environmental stimulation for this dog to make the correct response the obvious response.' It's really important when you're training any dog, but particularly a high drive dog that you're aware of what is the goal. Is the goal learning for the dog or is the goal evaluating for you?

So, if you're truly focused on teaching something, then you are not setting the dog up to be frustrated. This high drive dog needs clarity. Your antecedent arrangements need to be spot on. Once they've built up a reinforcement history for the right thing, that high drive dog is going to be able to repeat that for you forever.

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Now you can start adding distractions. And the distractions at some point, are going to be your emotions, how you move, how you squeal. Early on, anytime I'm in a learning phase, I am the yang to my dog's yang. I am calm. I am quiet. I am very soft spoken. So, that high drive dog needs ultra sharp focus from you during the session.

Another reason you need to keep those training sessions short. We're humans. We don't have the ability to have laser focus locked in for like three to five minutes. So, one to three minutes for the high drive dog, put them up on a Hot Zone, let them decompress. [You can look at the video](#), give them a bone to chew on, give them something to shred while they're on that cot.

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That they can bring their emotions down a little bit while you're taking notes and then bring them back for another session. That dog needs a very high rate of reinforcement, especially in a learning phase. Of course, once they learn it, the behavior actually takes on the value of the reinforcement used in the training.

So, these high drive dogs are willing to work without the reinforcement. Not to say that we do that. We actually do give reinforcement, but maybe we stretch it out more. That only happens after we've done our learning phase of training and our evaluation phase of training.

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Remember [Jean Donaldson's Push, Stick, Drop](#). You're going to work this with your high drive dog, everything done in sets of five. So, you know where you are and what you should do next. As I mentioned, you're going to have a very succinct training plan. If you're using distractions, use [podcast episode number 24](#) with the Distraction Intensity Index.

You know exactly what that dog is ready for. Do not overface that high drive dog because you know they're going from zero to 355 in the blink of an eye. You want to give that dog a way they can decompress in the midst of training. So, if you have a dog who loves to chew, I like to use [beef cheeks](#), rolled beef cheeks on hand for my dog, get up in the Hot Zone.

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I'll give them something to chew on, or I might give them a [puppy bomb to shred](#). Depending on what I'm doing, if I'm just looking at my video, my dogs actually will just relax on their own now. They'll get up and lie on their side.

And as I'm taking notes or looking at my video, I can just toss them or go over and give them a cookie occasionally to reinforce that. Or it might even just get them a long body stroke to reinforce.



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“Yeah, I'm doing my thing. You're doing your thing. You are not on. You don't have to be on right now.” And when you're done, what are great ways to help your dog decompress? Well, taking them for a walk and just letting them sniff is a great thing to do. Some dogs, they don't care to sniff.

And if that's your dog, it might be giving them something to chew on when they get home. That could be you doing some body work, doing a five-minute massage over their body. Could be putting them on [a PEMF mat](#). It could be ending your session with something that is physical but easy for them to be successful.

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I love little balanced low jump grids where I can put a bowl with a cookie on the end and it's not difficult for the dog. It's so easy for them to be successful. It's a great bodybuilder and it gives them something easy that they can do either at the beginning or the end of your training. And if you're doing agility, it can help with their agility work either.

Okay so, what about the shaping? We're shaping that high drive dog as a trainer if you're in that teaching phase where you're teaching the dog and the dog is learning, you need to be energetically neutral. You're not going to go, “Oh, good boy, good boy, good boy!” You're just going to be nice and calm with your praise.

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Even your marker words need to be different. So, instead of saying “cook!”, because ‘cook’ means cookie and cookie is exciting. I might just go “cook” with those dogs. Really quiet cook. Or instead of saying, “bring me!” for my retrieve, I might say, “bring me.” So, your motions are slower. Your voice is calmer and more neutral.

Yes, you're happy. You're enjoying the training, but you're not being crazed. You're not trying to match that energy level. The dog has their energy level. You're going to be in opposition to that. Just neutral and calm. And also remember to breathe. Your dog's going to be frantic and that might make you go, get your shoulders away from your ears, nice deep breaths.

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And if you need to give yourself a moment, just get your dog to hop up on their Hot Zone, give them something to chew on. Take a few deep breaths and then go back to work. Okay. One of the things I recommend you use sparingly as you're training this high drive dog right now is the ‘search’ cue. The search cue which means go and find the food on the floor.

Anything that involves a hunt and the food is bouncing in a weird way may stimulate that high drive dog. So, what you can do is you can go to the ‘chow’ cue. I use the small dog dish. I'll put a cookie in that. I'll say “chow”, and at first, I'll just deliver it right to the dog. Then I'll say “chow”, and I'll lower it.

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You want to have a dog who knows [ItsYerChoice](#). So, you can go to put it on the ground, but if they die for it, just put your hand over it, walk around with it a little bit more, say “chow” and give it to them, or walk by and say “cook” and give them a different cookie.

We want them to know the difference between chow and cook. So, rather than saying “search” and having the dog frantically you know, going through walls, trying to get the cookies. I'm not saying we're never going to use search again, but for now, let's just go and use ‘chow’, food is in a bowl.



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'Cook', I'm bringing you a cookie. And if you're going to use tug, you can use whatever your [location specific marker word](#) for take the toy is. If it's on the ground for me, it's 'bring me'. If it's in my hand, it's 'strike.'

But again, with these dogs, I keep the game of tug at the beginning and the end. And maybe I'll do something for a decompression in the middle of our game, but I'll usually end that with them hopping up on the Hot Zone.

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Now remember I said when you're teaching your relaxation protocol, I'd like you to build in some reinforcement triggers. So, I want you to do things like long body strokes, and you might use another reinforcement word like 'gold', which is a nice body stroke. Gold might take your thumb and go from just between the eyes all the way up between the dog's ears or a nice long pull stroke on the dog's ears.

Find out what your dog's like. They either like the long pulls from the base of the ear up to the tips. Prophet loves to have his chest scratched or the back of his neck where his collar is scratched. So, those are things that you can add a nice calming cue.

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So, they're in the midst of work for if I want to reinforce a stationary behavior, let's say they're standing on a plank, I'll come in and just give a long body stroke and then say "cook" and give them their cookie. So, use a cue, make up your own that it might just be a calm "good" means I'm coming in and giving you a body stroke.

"Good" is going to be followed up by if your dog is in [Reinforcement Zone](#) at your side, it can just be a nice calming stroke on the back of the neck. This isn't a dog that I'm going to be slamming in the ribs and getting them more excited and invigorated. Calm, especially during the learning phase. Calm strokes, calm voice.

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Okay so, what about the actual shaping? The first thing we're going to do, those location specific reinforcement markers, right? Calm, we want to reintroduce them in a calm way. And you're going to use big pieces of food so that the dog doesn't get frantic about trying to grab it.

Big pieces of food. I know it might mean your sessions are going to be shorter because your dog's going to be full faster, but big pieces of food to introduce those new location specific reinforcement markers.

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Then what I want you to do is go to the Blanket Targeting exercise that I spoke about in [episode number 261](#). But this time, instead of saying "search" and throwing the cookie off the blanket, I want you to put a cookie in a bowl and say "chow".

So, when the dog comes on the blanket, you could say "cook", and then to get them off you could say "chow". And that's permission for the dog to turn around, get off the blanket, and grab the food from the bowl. They can predict where the bowl is, they can predict where the food is, so they're not going to get so frantic.



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I would have higher value food coming into the mouth from your hand right now. So, they're not tempted to just go off and try and steal the cook from the bowl. Again, you're going to be doing your relaxation protocol at home. And I would try and do it in more locations, so the dog just learns to breathe deeply and be relaxed in all different environments.

Now you're not going to try this like when there's other dogs running around but eventually you will get to a place where you can. Once you've got that target blanket, you can now put it in your crate. It will help the dog with Crate Games.

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The dog understands that there's value for going on that blanket. So, you can help build the dog's understanding of Crate Games. The final thing that I want you to shape with this high drive dog is a 'stand on a plank.' A plank, I'll put a link to [Anna Lee Sanders website](#) where you can get the exact length that you need for your dog.

It can be either two nice big wide planks for one for the front paws, one for the rear, or one solid one. What I want you to do with these frantic high drive dogs, I want them to learn to sit, stand, and down on a plank. So, duration where you can give them strokes, you can give them cookies, you can give them quiet releases. That is going to help you establish, alright, now we can work on things like [Hand Targets](#) because you've got a place for your feet.

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They can be more successful because they know exactly how you want them to hold their body. So, I like a long plank. I myself use two separate ones as well. All of that you can be found at Annalise Saunders website.

Okay, I know very long podcast, but I think this one is super, super important. I've given you the step by step to help bring down that frustration for your dog. And once they learn to learn in a calmer state, you my friend will be able to have a lot more fun training your dog and a lot less frustration because you know, they're doing the best they can. I hope this all makes sense to you. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

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Episode: #262

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Resources:

[Podcast Episode 247: Redefining Expertise In Dog Training And What Counts More Than Years Of Experience](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 232: Canine Predatory Motor Sequence: Understand Your Dog's Prey Drive To Enrich Your Life Together](#)

[Book: Frustration Theory: An Analysis of Dispositional Learning and Memory by Abram Amsel](#)

[Paper: Behavioural and Physiological Correlates of the Canine Frustration Questionnaire](#)

[Podcast Episode 206: First Dog Agility Competition: Creating Joy For This! By Maximizing Reinforcement](#)

[Podcast Episode 224: Unleashing Fluency In Dog Training: Cracking The Canine Communication Code](#)

[Podcast Episode 110: Is Your Over-Aroused Dog Just Over-Faced In Training?](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Help for Over-Aroused, Over Excited, Hyper, Frantic, High Drive or Out Of Control Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 136: Help Your Excited Dog Calm Down And Stop Barking, Lunging, Spinning, Nipping](#)

[Podcast Episode 137: Is Your Dog Hyper At Home? How To Teach Relaxation](#)

[Podcast Episode 138: Frantic Dog? Are You Training Both The Hold And The Do?](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 259: Use These Simple Shaping Hacks To Expedite Your Dog Training](#)

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

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

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

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

[Beef Cheek Rolls Raw Hide Free Dog Treats](#)

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

[Respond Systems Inc. Canine Bio-Pulse PEMF](#)

[Podcast Episode 151: How Location Specific Reinforcement Markers Will Improve Your Dog Training!](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 261: Common Misconceptions Around Shaping: Why You May Find Dog Training Frustrating](#)

[Canine Conditioning Coach: Anna Lee Sanders](#)

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



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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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