

How To Use A Training Den To Fast Track Your Dog's Success: No Space? No Problem!

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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As we kick off the fourth season of Shaped by Dog, I decided that I would share a lesson directly from our online classrooms. And I think this lesson, in a large part, is responsible for the successes our students do have.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. You know, this podcast originally started four years ago in order to help my online students get more clarity into the nuances of dog training.

And the funny thing is what's happened is yes, most of our online students rave about each episode, but the reverse has also happened in that people find our podcast and then want to be one of our online students.

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So, I thought it was fitting in celebration of our fourth anniversary of the podcast that I share a lesson that we share in every one of our classrooms. And the lesson is all about training environments. So, I'd like you to do a little visualization with me. Think of a dog in your household that you are training the most right now.

[Now it could be a puppy](#), it could be a [rescue dog](#), it could be a dog you're getting ready for a competition, it could be a dog that you're challenged by in a big way, or maybe even over faced by. So, think of that dog.

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Now I'm going to give you three training scenarios. And I want you to visualize yourself training that dog in each of these three environments. The first one is going to be a very popular, very busy park in the middle of a city. There's kids riding bikes, there's water slides, there's lots and lots of dogs. And you are there with your dog off leash.

Okay, our second scenario. It's a dog beach. You're at the dog beach. It's a beautiful summer day. There's kids, there's dogs, there's adults, there's all kinds of chaos. And you have your dog there off leash, and you're working on that very important problem that you really want to see success with.

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Alright, a third scenario. You're out in the wilderness and it's peaceful and it's calm. There's this vastness. And then there's a herd of bunnies that go running by in front of your dog as you're attempting to train them. Now, I don't know if bunnies come in herds. I'm sure somebody will leave me a comment and tell me what they actually come in, but you get the scenario. Those three scenarios, are any of them ideal for you to train your dog in?

And now there might be one or two of you there saying, "Yeah, they'd be great because I am really in the midst of focusing on super high level extreme distractions. Those three scenarios would be great for me." You probably are an anomaly. Because I would imagine as you visualize trying to train your dog in any one of those three scenarios, you would be getting a little bit freaked out. "Oh, this isn't going to work. I want out of here. This can't happen."



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Why is that? Well, it's obvious. None of those are ideal training environments. So, we know what doesn't make an ideal training environment, but how many times have you thought of, 'What is the ideal training environment for your dog?'

If you're like most dog owners, you actually don't even think about it. You just rely on other people to think about it. As in, you go to a local dog training school, you take your dog there to train them. That is where they learn. That is their learning environment.

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Now it's probably an improvement of any of the three that I mentioned, but is that the best environment that you could be training your dog in. So, what makes an ideal training environment? I think before we answer that question, we have to think about, 'What are the goals of any training session?'

And ideally for you, as they are for me, the goals are to build and maintain confidence while we build and maintain behavior. So, we might be growing behavior if we're teaching something new, we might be maintaining behavior if it's an older dog that we just want to continue to have them love the idea of training with us or doing fitness or whatever it is that you're training.

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So, you might be growing behavior, you might be maintaining behavior, but you're ideally every session you have with your dog, you're growing confidence. That's the biggie because confidence leads to the enjoyment of what you're doing, which leads to the dog wanting to be an active participant moving forward.

So, if that is our goal, now we can better define what that environment looks like. But there's one more thing. Because every dog is at different stages. So, that environment might be a little bit different depending on the [age and the stage of your dog](#).

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So, we might have a dog that our number one focus is emotional. We are helping a dog overcome an [emotional state](#). It could be a phobia, it could be a reactivity, it could be the dog is just a little bit nervous of people, other dogs, cars.

Whatever it is, that environment, we just want it to be simple and easy to grow confidence. Now there might be other dogs at a different stage, those environments we want to challenge the dog a little bit more.

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So, your training environment will change depending on what you are working on at the time with the dog in front of you. Remember, [train the dog in front of you](#). So, what we encourage all of our online students to do is create a place in your house we call their training den. Now, the training den doesn't have to be very big, and you may, if you have a big enough house, have more than one training den.

Because every time you train in a new environment, you help to generalize behavior. When I start out with a puppy, the training den is got to be a place that I can create a barrier away from distractions. Maybe from other people in my house, maybe from other animals in my house. Ideally, it's a place where I can create that barrier with a door that I can close, but that might not be possible depending on your living environment.



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One of my first training dens is my bedroom because I can close the door. I do have an area in there that I can set up just for training of the puppy. And it is super quiet with very little distraction. But then, I'll have a training den downstairs because there's a little bit more hubbub. There's more distractions.

And so, with every distraction, we help generalize that behavior and help the dog to become more and more focused on us and what they're doing and less and less affected by any outside stimulus. So, it doesn't matter how big or how small your home is, everybody should have a dedicated training area.

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And I'll get to in a minute, exactly what I have in my training den area. So, the important part about where you decide to put this, it's got to be an area that you would go to daily. So, if you have to, like go out to another building, it's far less likely that you're going to do that.

If you've got to deal with like an uninsulated garage where it'll be super cold in the winter or really hot in the summer, that's not going to be an area where you're going to train regularly, or you're going to be comfortable training regularly, or your dog's going to be comfortable training regularly.

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So, it's better to have a smaller area inside your house because you will use it daily. If you have to get in the car and go somewhere, sure you might train every now and again, but you're far less likely to just sit down in your pajamas and have a quick training session. You're far less likely to do three or four [quickies during the day](#).

So, create a training den somewhere in your home. So, why do we need a training den at all? Well, the obvious is we control distractions then. We focus our dog's attention, our puppy's attention on what the job is. What we want them to find value within their environment. It's right in front of them. It's you. It's me. It's the thing in the training den.

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But one of the biggest benefits of having a dedicated training den, especially when you're starting out with a new puppy, but super important when you're starting out with a rescue dog, is this is an environment that you go to bond with the dog. This is an environment where good things happen.

If you're one of our students, this is an environment where you go to play games. And do you think after you've gone there two or three times that your puppy or new dog is going to be like pulling back in the corner and going, "No, I don't want to go in there." No, they're not. Trust me.

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They are going to be bouncing at the door, super excited because good things happen in the training den. And why is that? Because of something you've heard me talk about on the podcast before, CER's, [Conditioned Emotional Responses](#).

You will see the dog show you, 'I have a conditioned emotional response to this room.' Meaning "I like going here because good things happen." And then guess what else happens. Guess what else you get a CER to? To training itself.

The dog learns that good feeling that they get in this room, they get when they do training. And it will generalize to other areas of the house. And when you take your training on the road and guess what else gets a CER? You.



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Because you are the source of this fun. You are the center of this training. And so, all of that happens as a side benefit of training in the training den. It's focused. You minimize distractions until you want to introduce distractions. You grow that dog's confidence because it's all strategic planning.

It's all strategic training. Especially if you're following a lesson plan, which of course we give our students. But it's all happening intentionally for the dog. The experience the dog has happens intentionally because of the way you're training and the place you're training.

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And the really cool thing about having a training den that your dog has this amazing positive CER for, that if there's ever a time when like companies coming over and you need to put your dog away because they're not as used to being around people, or maybe they're a little bit afraid of thunder, you can go to this area that has positive vibes for the dog and help counter condition the fear that they have for anything.

Okay, what would you put in that training den? Now that really depends on how big it is. For example, I had a home theater downstairs that I really didn't use that much. It now is a massive, big training den. So, I can put a lot of things in here. I'm going to tell you all of the things you might want to put in there, and there'll be some that are going to be more obvious for you.

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First of all, there'll be training tools. Things like a crate, [a hot zone](#), a raised dog bed, AKA hot zone or a dog bed with sides on it. There'll be a clicker, maybe some dried treats. I often bring fresh ones down from the fridge, but dried treats are there on hand in case I run out. A journal, of course a tripod for your [video camera](#). You don't want to train without that.

A pen to write in your journal. Empty dog bowls that you can use for feeding stations when you're training. [Tug toys](#) and retrieve objects. You may have a [remote feeder](#) that you put in there and you may have an enrichment toy that you might just store in there or you might use it before or after.

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I actually have a traffic cone as part of my training equipment. [Targets](#), paw targets for my dog, [target sticks](#), all various types of targets that I may use in the course of training. Now, I also have a collection of fitness equipment in the training den.

Things like my [Klimb](#), my [Propels](#), my [Cato Boards](#), planks, boxes, those rubber feed bowls that you may have seen me use from time to time. Anything that I might use for fitness with my dogs. There's probably one or several of them. Mostly I have things by twos, but some things I have collections of.

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Other things that I would have in there, things like a stool for me to sit on. You know, I often use the Klimbs, but I do have a small stool depending on what I am working on. A mirror so that I don't have to be staring at the dog. I can see what the dog's doing in the mirror. So, I love training with a mirror. A whiteboard.

I'll keep the dog's [grooming tools](#) there. So, while we're working relaxation, we may also be working our [Pedicure Please](#) AKA [nail trimming](#) protocols. And finally, I make sure that the floor that I'm training on in that training den is something that is not slippery for my dogs. So, it could be something soft. It could be just as simple as having a mat that you train on.



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Have yoga mats handy. If you've got lovely carpet in there, you can roll out yoga mats that you can train on. It would be easy to clean up any treats or if you have a Tater Salad, the drool piles that accumulate when you're training your dog.

So, there you have all the things that you could put in your training den. And it really depends on how big or small your training den is. Clipboard is another thing I like to keep in there. So, I take the lesson plans, I put them on the clipboard, and then I can refer to them super easy.

For some of you, it may be more digital. So, you all going to have a separate tripod that holds your iPad or whatever it is that you have your lesson plans on. There you have it. I encourage you, think about it today.

Where would you put a training den in your house? Do you have one? Try it. Try it for a week. It doesn't have to be fancy. See if you don't see a positive CER from your dog just by setting up your very own training den. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Training Den Tools:

[4MyMerles Tug Toys](#)

[PETGEEK Treat Dispenser](#)

[Microfiber Feather Duster Target Stick](#)

[Textured Silicone Coasters \(for paw target use\)](#)

[Blue 9: Klimb](#)

[Blue 9: Propel](#)

[Cato Board](#)

[Dremel Lite 7760N](#)

[Casfuy Dog Nail Grinder](#)

Resources:

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

[YouTube Playlist: Helping Your Rescue Dog After Adoption: Success Strategies for Rehomed Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

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

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

[Podcast Episode 183: What Does "Train The Dog In Front Of You" Really Mean?](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 176: Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training](#)

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

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



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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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