

Hot Zone And Stays - How One Dog Training Nuance Can Fix Anxiety And Duration

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Dog training by nature is quite nuanced. By that I mean, there are gross behaviors that most dog owners can get to some level. [Sit](#), [down](#), and [fetch](#). But to get really brilliant behaviors, you need to understand the nuances. And the good news is even first-time brand-new dog owners can get those nuances.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And the nuances make the learning so much easier for the dog. But I'm here to share with you, even if you don't get all the nuances, which you won't, because I'm still learning them. But even if you only get 10 percent of them or less, dog training can still be fun.

Dog training can still be productive. Meaning that your dog will improve. And dog training can still lead you with an amazing family pet that you just love, even if the dog isn't behaving perfectly all the time. The only asterisk to this is you've got to understand as long as you don't get all the nuances, you have to be patient with the process, and you have to be patient with your dog.

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And trust me when I say your dog is brilliant. The more you get the nuances, the more brilliance the dog will show you. What does nuances look like? Well, it could be the difference between a dog when you throw the ball, they race out and maybe don't pick it up right away, but they kind of pick it up and meander their way back versus a dog that flies out, grabs a ball, flies right back, puts it right in your hand.

A nuance might be the dog who runs out, grabs the ball, brings it back and spits it out 10 or 15 feet in front or behind you. There's nuances that will make that dog give you a brilliant, reliable retrieve. It isn't "My dog doesn't do that. There's something about my dog." It's the nuances of the training that you just missed.

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And that's okay. You still have a somewhat decent retrieve so that your dog can have some fun and you can have some fun with your dog. But I think once you get the nuances, that game of fetch might get a little bit more fun for both of you.

If you ever went to a dog training class, probably one of the first things they taught you was how to properly hold a leash while it's attached to your dog. Now that's a nuance that makes all of the training that comes after it easier for you.

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Because you're not tripping over yourself. You don't have the leash holding way up in the air when you're trying to, you know, do something with your dog down here. So, dog training is filled with nuances. And you know many of them. Recently, I was watching two students train on back-to-back days, and they both demonstrated to me that they were missing a nuance that I obviously knew. Something that I don't believe I've ever taught before.



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And I thought, this is going to make a great podcast topic. And the nuance was, what is reinforcing their dog and what is that reinforcement reinforcing. Okay, that sounds like a riddle, but stick with me. I'm going to give you the scenario because they were both working on the same exercise and they both did exactly the same thing.

And it's something that I can't say I would never do, but it's rare that I would do. The exercise is the Hot Zone. Now, I have mentioned the Hot Zone many, many times here on Shaped by Dog, and it starts with [Crate Games](#). You could do this with an open crate, but many people graduate to a raised dog bed or a dog bed with a rounded wall on it. I've talked about this many times in the podcast.

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So, they had their dog on a Hot Zone, and they were moving down the floor to do some work with their dog. And what they did was they pumped the dog up, "ready, steady" and then gave the release cue 'break'. And from the outside looking in, you could say, "Oh my gosh, look at how much fun those two are having together."

"Oh my gosh, look at how pumped up that dog is." But when I saw it the second time on back-to-back days, that's when I went, "Wait, there's a nuance here that's missing." Because when I put my dog in a Hot Zone, or when I have my dog in a crate lying down, I want them to relax. As we very well know, the release from any control position is a massive reinforcement to the dog.

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So, if that truly is a massive reinforcement, what gets reinforced? The thing just before the dog hears the reinforcement. Now at first it could be your dog's asleep in their crate or your dog's asleep in their Hot Zone and they hear "break", and they charge and get all excited because, "Wow! We get to play a game."

But what happens is dogs love to predict reinforcement. And so that dog now is going to watch you as you move out. So, let's say you're preparing a training environment. You've got your dog in the Hot Zone, and you put out some objects or maybe you've done one training session and you're just taking notes.

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You take some notes and then you put your book down, you lead out to do another training session and you give your dog the release cue. Your dog will learn they need to always be on. If they ever did relax in the Hot Zone or as my dogs do fall asleep, it's highly unlikely that it's ever going to happen again.

They're always going to be muscles tense watching you as you walk around. "Is this going to be the time? Are you going to call me now? I'm ready." "You're going to call me now? You're going to call me now? You're going to call me now?"

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And so, what is the nuance that's missing there? When I have my dog in a Hot Zone, if I'm going to call them out to work, if they're in a crate, I will walk back in and I will tap the side of the crate. Which is a cue to sit in Crate Games or touch the front of the door, which they understand as a cue. If I've trained my dog to sit, if I slap my leg when I'm further away from the crate, but that's just kind of like a party trick. Most of the time when I'm going to release my dog from the Hot Zone, I walk up, I pat them.



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I might even give them a reward for staying there. I pick up my toy and I release them with me right there. We play together as we move out to where I've set up our training. My dogs know you can chill out. You can actually completely fall asleep while I'm taking notes or reviewing my video or setting up the next training session.

They know that because [the thing before the thing](#) that means we're going to be training again is me coming back up to them and touching them. So, even if they're sound asleep, there is no need for them to be on high alert for that touch. I will come close. Maybe they'll hear my foot falls, and they'll wake up.

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Maybe they won't wake up until I actually touch them. And maybe they're not asleep at all. They're just chilling with their head on their paws. But when you continually release your dog from a distance, the nuance you're missing is the element for them to be able to relax in the Hot Zone.

And that's something that we really, really want. We want it when we have our dogs chilling in the evening when we want to relax and read a book or watch TV. So, we want our dogs to not think when they get put in the Hot Zone, be on high alert, something amazing is about to happen. It's just a nuance that will be your best friend.

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And another thing that's going to help your dog with their ability to really be relaxed in the Hot Zone is if you refer to [podcast episode number 191](#), where I described the relaxation protocol. I think those two things go hand in hand. I love doing relaxation protocol with my dogs and puppies.

And I think growing that behavior around my house makes it an easy behavior for them to do anywhere. Even if I'm out and about and I stop somewhere downtown, my dogs, if I'm going to be in one spot for very long, they have no problem curling up and falling asleep at my feet.

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So, the nuances of how you release. Now in Crate Games, we do have a stage where it's "Yer out, Yer in", your dog goes to the crate, we call them right back out. And we also will encourage you to practice your recall from the crate. Those are just isolated games and I still have no problem with you doing it.

But as a routine, you want the thing before the thing is for you to come close and recognize that dog is relaxing, giving them an opportunity to know 'I'm going to come back here before I release you.' Does that mean I can never release my dog from far away? No, but it means at least 95 percent of the time I will come in to release them.

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And while we're on the topic of Hot Zone, let me share with you another observation that I see, and that is dogs coming off the Hot Zone, whether it be with two paws, whether it would be that something exciting is out there and they jump off the Hot Zone to investigate further. Hot Zone or being in a duration location isn't something that you train in three sessions and the dog has it.

It's something that grows constantly over their life because all behaviors are either eroding, getting worse or maintaining and hopefully maybe even getting a little bit better. And Hot Zone is one of them that will erode very, very quickly, especially if you're putting the dog in a high distraction environment.



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So, what I see is dog gets off the Hot Zone and the person will say, "No, hop it up. I told you hop it up, hop it up." If you could have a video camera or somebody, take notes for you and tell you all the times you've told your dog to hop it up over the last two weeks when you've put them in their Hot Zone.

Knowing this nuance, your cue to hop it up is a reinforcement. What is the thing before the thing? What is happening when your dog heard the cue hop it up? They had hopped it off. They had made the decision to leave the Hot Zone. You reinforced the decision by telling them to hop it up. The likelihood of that behavior going away dramatically decreases the more you tell them to hop it up.

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Second cousin to that is the dog gets off and you might say, "Well, Susan, what would you do?" And I'm going to tell you both what I would do and at the same time, tell you what people do that's wrong. So, if my dog came off the Hot Zone, I would quietly go back in and take him by the collar, which they know the game Collar Grab is a fun game, and I would just put them back on the Hot Zone.

I would then say to myself, "Okay, that's one mistake. What's my record keeping telling me about my Hot Zone in this environment?" "I was at an agility workshop and my puppy could not stay with his front paws on the Hot Zone. That was maybe a month ago." "This week we had another agility seminar here. Lo and behold, only once did I had to remind him by taking him by collar and putting back up there that paws belong on the Hot Zone."

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So, what is the problem with going back and taking the collar and putting him back up? And then five minutes later, taking the collar and putting back up. Eventually, you've got to recognize you're punishing the dog and the punishment's not working.

So, if you believe your dog's got a really strong Hot Zone, recognize, remember what I said, the release is a very powerful reinforcer. So, sometimes go back and give the dog cookies for staying in the Hot Zone. But whenever I'm teaching any [duration](#) behavior, whether it be sit, or stand, or down, or even hold something in your mouth, I don't just reinforce with food or toys that the dog likes.

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A big, big reinforcement is the release cue. Meaning, I don't ask them to do it for 10 seconds, then 15, then 20, then 25, then 30, and keep going more and more and more putting pressure on that. I use the value of that release by saying, "You did it for five seconds. Boom, let's get off."

And then they can choose to go back on, and we can start the game again. If your dog is not staying there, the nuance you might be missing is the intensity of the distractions that you've put that dog in while you're trying to get them to hold and maintain duration on a Hot Zone.

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So, what might've gone awry, it could be the distance you've gone away from that Hot Zone is too much for that dog. And you could say, "No Susan, I'm standing like right beside him." Well, it could be the time lag you want him to be on there. He needs a release, but more than likely it's the intensity of the environment.

Like maybe, you're like me, took your dog to an agility workshop and all the dogs running and maybe some crazy barking dog is just too much for your dog. So, you could get your Hot Zone, put it further away.





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Or you could just say, "I need to work in a lower-level intensity environment, build my dog's confidence, build my dog's understanding, multiple releases." And then you're going to have a solid Hot Zone that your dog like mine is going to become relaxed in all environments.

Nuances of dog training, there's thousands, probably hundred thousands of them. And like I said, even if you only grasp 10 percent of them for now, you're on your way. It's a journey. And you've made the first step.

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Just remember, your dog is brilliant. You just have to understand more nuances before they get the opportunity to show you how brilliant they are. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Get Crate Games Online:

[Crate Games Online](#)

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 155: 10 Ways To Teach A Sit WITHOUT A Food Lure! Unreal Results For Puppies And Dogs Of All Ages](#)

[Podcast Episode 145: 10 Ways To Teach A Dog To Lay Down And How To Shape It Without Luring Training Program "Bring Me!"](#)

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

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

[Youtube Playlist: Sit, Down, Stand, Stay! Dog Training Duration Behaviors 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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