

How To Teach A Dog To Speak: From Parlor Trick To Working Dog Skill

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

00:00:00

Today's podcast episode comes from a listener who left a comment on YouTube. And I thought, wow, what a great topic. I don't believe I've ever spoke about that. And here it is from @dogswithjobs2531. "Susan, I have successfully trained all four of my search dogs to bark on cue. It's part of their search sequence when the subject is located. My current German Shepherd training in personal protection is the quietest shepherd I've ever had. I work with tug toys and cut up hot dogs to build frustration. No luck yet. Any suggestions?" So, let's talk barking today.

00:00:48

Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I know most of you listening to this want the episode on '[How do I get my dog to stop barking.](#)' Because you, like me, we have family pets that we just don't want to vocalize. But some people have dogs that barking is an integral part of what they do for their dog job.

So, when I saw this question on YouTube, I thought, well, first I'll go through how I teach a dog to speak. And let me tell you, I taught my dog This! to bark on cue about a year and a half ago. And I did that specifically to help build more drive in her. But other than This!, I have not taught a dog to bark on cue for decades.

00:01:34

I honestly don't even remember the last dog that I taught it to. So, for me, and for many of you listening to this, barking on cue is kind of like a parlor trick. Plus, barking is something I kind of like my dogs to not do. Yes, if there's a reason to bark, like there's somebody at the door, yeah, let's have it, a big bark party.

But any other time I'd rather have the peace and quiet of non-barking dogs. So, when I saw this question, I thought, let's first talk about [why a dog would bark.](#) A bark from a dog is an expression of an emotional state.

00:02:09

So, a dog may be fearful. They may be, want to show a sign that they're afraid. What we refer to as [alarm barking or fear barking.](#) They may bark because they're super excited. Someone's home that they love. They may bark because they're alerting us to a potential danger. Like "I saw the postman walking by the front door." You never know. Could be dangerous.

They may bark because they're frustrated that they are stuck in a room, and they need to get out. They may bark because they're jealous. Somebody's getting something they want, or other dogs are running, and I want to run.

00:02:47

So, it's an expression of [emotional state](#), but specific emotional states. Like your dog isn't going to bark because they're comfortable. Well, Tater Salad maybe. No. But most dogs aren't going to bark when they're like relaxed or content, or they're not going to bark to announce they're tired. And so, knowing barking is often triggered by an emotional state, how are we going to get a dog to bark on cue?



How To Teach A Dog To Speak: From Parlor Trick To Working Dog Skill

00:03:13

Well, we're going to pick an emotional state to create artificially to get a dog to bark so we can reward them for it. Now, this is something I particularly would [use a clicker](#) for, because I would like to mark the moment of time of vocalization. You may want sustained barking, like a duration bark, especially for search and rescue for an alert, you may want continuous barking.

And so, you want to eventually get to, the reward doesn't come until you bark, I don't know, five, 10, 15 times, whatever your pleasure is. However, if we want to shape barking, we are going to isolate anything that is vocalization or even non-vocalization.

00:03:58

For example, we may stimulate that emotional state that triggers excitement or frustration and then select for a dog puffing their lips or opening their mouth and whining or air snapping. All of those things aren't truly barking, but they are things that potentially could lead to barking.

So, if I had a dog air snap when they're excited, and I really wanted sustained barking, I would reinforce that a few times. Maybe two or three. Ideally, I'd like to see something in between like the puffing of lips. Because if you reinforced air snapping over and over and over, 15, 20, 30 times, you're probably going to have a much harder time moving on to actual vocalization that is barking.

00:04:44

And so, know what your criteria is and have a marker before you set off to change your dog's emotional state to get some barking. So, let me tell you what I do. Of all the emotional states that we can trigger, we're all going to rule out fear. We do not want to create an extreme case of fear just to get our dog to bark so that we can click and reward that.

So, that one is completely off the table. So, what are we left with? We're left with frustration, excitement and jealousy are the biggies. I personally will go to excitement first. I will try to create an excited state that will create barking. And I would like it away from things I don't want.

00:05:27

For example, say you have a dog who gets excited when they're in the car and they see another dog and they start barking at the window. I don't want to click and reward that because honestly, I just don't want more of that, right?

And so, when does your dog get excited? With This!y, I took her into the building away from the other dogs and I pretended, I knocked on the window and said, "Who's there? Come on in." And that got her barking. Low, because there was no other dogs to join in on the party. But I got a little bit of a woof, which I clicked and gave her a super high value reward.

00:06:02

I continued that and eventually the knock got one, two, three barks. So, once I got more than one little woof, like I got the sustained bark because she put, "Hey, if I use my voice, I get really, really good high value rewards." Once I got to that point, I put a cue on it. And I chose to use the word "scary." And that is This!y's cue for barking.

Because I wanted her to use her voice to get more confidence, to get more drive, to get more excitement into her life. Now, what if your dog just won't get that excited about barking? I decided before I answered this, I needed to bring in an expert. So, I teach barking as a parlor trick. It's like agility. Dog agility is something I know a lot about.



How To Teach A Dog To Speak: From Parlor Trick To Working Dog Skill

00:06:53

So, if somebody said, “how do you teach jumping?” Well, that could take weeks and weeks and weeks to explain because of all the nuances of really good jump work. But anybody listening to this, I bet you, you could teach your dog to jump over a broomstick. So, that would be a parlor trick.

The jumping that I teach for agility is far more detailed. The barking that somebody teaches for say, search and rescue or protection work, that is no parlor trick, my friend. That is nuanced, very detailed behavior. And so, I thought, who do I know that knows very nuanced, detailed behavior.

00:07:30

My friend, [Matt Folsom over at the Modern Malinois](#). So, I texted him today and I said, “Hey Matt—”, read him the question. And I knew Matt had already sent me a video last week of him teaching his seven-week-old puppy, not one, not two, but three of them how to bark on cue individually.

Actually, he sent me a video of one of his puppies barking at him and then switching and barking at a toy. Like mind blown. It wasn't even eight weeks old. So, he has an entire litter of puppies. Three of the eight of them were barking on cue before they were eight weeks old. And Matt teaches protection work.

00:08:12

And so, barking at an assailant suspect, the bad guy, is important. They need to bark. They need to bark on cue, and they need that steady stream of bark. Far more detailed barking than parlor trick girl knows about. So, I said, “Matt, this is the question. What would you suggest?”

And he said, “Well, there's all kinds of different ways that I teach barking.” Yes. Much like me, he definitely uses excitement. He said, if that doesn't work, you can get something that the dog really, really wants. And that's where frustration comes in. Maybe you have them on a leash, maybe you have them behind a gate, maybe you have them in a crate. Matt just said get them excited and don't let them have it.

00:08:57

So, if they have a favorite toy, you're playing with a favorite toy, maybe it's a flirt pole. So, you can have somebody hold the dog or you can tie them up. Putting them behind a gate or in a crate, maybe you don't want them to rehearse getting reinforced for barking in a crate. Maybe not the best idea, but the frustration of a barrier will trigger barking in many dogs.

So, you can try putting them on a harness and having somebody hold them back while you play with a favorite toy. Sometimes, and Matt said with his puppies, it was just using their favorite food. Sometimes it's just withholding their dinner. You've got their dinner. “Oh, what is this? This is so exciting.” You could get vocalization from that and then give them their whole dinner.

00:09:43

Matt said another thing that he will do cautiously is he will take one of the puppies that already knows how to bark on cue, and he will get that puppy barking. And when the puppy barks, he'll reinforce the barking one, but not the non-barking one.

He doesn't like to do this very often, and he won't reinforce that barking one continuously because he doesn't want to demotivate the puppy that he would like to learn how to bark. So, be careful if you're using jealousy of another dog gets the cookies when they bark, but you don't know how to use your voice yet.



How To Teach A Dog To Speak: From Parlor Trick To Working Dog Skill

00:10:19

Be careful when you use that jealousy because you don't want to demotivate your puppy. I also asked Matt about capturing barking and my reluctance to do that because I don't want to reinforce my dog for randomly barking around the house. This is what Matt said, really good take. He said, "I don't mind capturing barking."

And [what do we mean by capturing](#)? If you know the dog will bark at X, like mom's coming to visit, they see mom through the window and they start barking, capture that, click and reward that. Ask mom to go out of sight, mom comes back in sight, click and reward that. So, Matt said he doesn't mind capturing and reinforcing barking once in a while.

00:11:02

And he's not concerned that that would lead to demand barking for a week or two because it eventually will fade away when it's not reinforced. And so, capturing is something else that you can do. Think about times when your dogs are super excited or frustrated or jealous. And those are times that you can mark and reinforce on your way to getting your dog to bark on cue.

Now, once you get a little bit of vocalization, you can withhold and get two barks and then reinforce at a higher rate, and then go back and reinforce one bark, and then withhold until you get three barks, then go back and reinforce one, maybe five or six or seven times so that you keep the strength of that bark.

00:11:47

Be careful that you do not add a cue too early. Do not add a cue until you've got a really sustained bark at whatever that excitement or frustration is for your dog. Remember, I always go to excitement first. I'd much rather create that state and reinforce it than I would frustration. But sometimes frustration works better. Just know if you're frustrating a dog and causing them to vocalize that I wouldn't do that on the regular every day because really who wants their dog to be frustrated. Sometimes it's necessary when you're trying to create this behavior but try the excitement route first. I want to thank Matt and his amazing puppies for helping us out here to answer this question.

00:12:32

And just know there is something, like maybe your dog, when you go to pretend to throw a ball might start barking. There's something in your life that you maybe are not thinking of right now that will cause your dog to bark in excitement. Use that, grow the behavior. Before you know it, you either have a parlor trick and then you have a sustained bark that you're using in the line of work you're choosing with your dog. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 240: Stop Barking Dogs! Step-By-Step Action Plan And Anti-Bark Strategies To Avoid](#)

[Podcast Episode 238: Barking Dogs! Understanding Canine Vocalization To Prevent Nuisance Barking](#)

[Podcast Episode 239: Barking Dogs! How To Help Your Dog Be Quiet And Stop Annoying Barking](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 69: Clicker Training: Will It Work For Every Dog?](#)

[Matt Folsom The Modern Malinois](#)

[Podcast Episode 170: 5 Popular Ways To Train Your Dog With Food](#)



How To Teach A Dog To Speak: From Parlor Trick To Working Dog Skill

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.



Meet Us Online

- Website <https://dogsthat.com>
- Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SusanGarrettDogAgility/>
- Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/SusanGarrettDogsThat/>
- TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@dogsthat>
- LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat>
- Pinterest <https://pinterest.ca/dogsthatcom/>
- Twitter <https://twitter.com/susangarrett>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/c/DogsThat>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/ClickerDogs>

