

Matching Law In Dog Training: How To Get Consistent Behavior Without Corrections

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Do you ever wonder why a dog might listen 100 percent perfectly to you at certain times, but other times like [completely tunes you out](#) as if he can't hear you at all. You may be surprised to learn there is actually a scientific reason for that happening.

And today, I'm going to give you a deep explanation as to what's happening and why you see that. Why people say, "Well, I have to use punishment in my training, Susan, because this cookie is not going to overcome this problem." I'm going to share with you how it can.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today I want to talk about a scientific principle, which many professional dog trainers either have never heard of or choose to disregard, which is crazy, or just can't figure out how to apply it in their own training. And that scientific principle is called Matching Law.

And I'm going to read you the description of what exactly matching law is. And matching law states the probability of your dog choosing one behavior over another is all dependent upon the reinforcement history of each of those behaviors.

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So, you might think, "Okay, if my Whippet has had the chance to chase a bunny out in the field five times, matching law then states, I just need to give him a cookie six times to overcome that, right? No. It sounds like a reasonable explanation based on what I just said matching law is, but today we need to dig deeper into what matching law is really talking about.

Because [all reinforcement is not equal](#) to our dogs. And so, you really have to keep this principle like close to your heart. If you want to be a trainer like me who chooses to never use physical corrections or verbal intimidation in order to have a dog fit into your world, into your life, regardless, if you choose to do sports or you just want a really well-behaved family pet, matching law will help you, so you don't need to turn to punishment.

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And so, you need to consider matching law says the probability for a dog to choose one behavior over another. It all comes down to the reinforcement history of each behavior. But let's consider what reinforcement is. It has to do with the value of each reinforcement.

So, we need to consider, does the value of a dog, and I use the example of a Whippet who [loves to chase](#), does a value of a dog chasing a rabbit equal the value of a dog getting a yummy treat? Highly, highly improbable for dogs who have high prey drive.

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Now it might very well be probable for some dogs who really have no interest in chasing other animals. Those are few and far between quite honestly. So, it comes down to number one, value. Also comes down to the recency. Like if a puppy got to chase something as a 10-week-old puppy, but never had the opportunity to do that and had lots of reinforcement for walking with their people.



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As the months and months and years go by, the probability of the chase being more reinforcing than walking near you gets very, very low. So, yes, the rate of reinforcement, how frequently the dog gets reinforced for each of those behaviors counts. But the recency, when was the last time the dog was able to get reinforcement from that behavior?

The value. Let's talk about the value. Because if you remember in podcast episode number 232, I talked about something called [the Predatory Sequence](#). And there are different breeds, different types of dogs have more of an evolved predatory cycle. I'm just going to remind you of those eight parts of that predatory cycle.

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There's a dog orient. It's a great episode, you should go and listen to it. Orienting to something. Catching their eye catches that something, they might stalk the something, they chase the something, they bite to grab, they bite to kill. This isn't all dogs. Don't get too worried about your dog. They then eviscerate and then they consume.

Those are the eight parts of the predatory cycle. Now in all of our domesticated dogs, they'll be one part or more than one part that has been bred to be more, strong than another part. For example, my Border Collies, they have a very strong orient, they have a very strong eye, they have a very strong stalk, and chase.

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The rest of it, not that important. Although I find a lot of my Border Collies love to eviscerate, which is why I give them puppy bombs. We'll put a link to the show notes because those [puppy bombs](#), I still use it at adult dogs. But I digress. "Susan, why did you bring up the predatory cycle?"

Because the value of that reinforcement to your dog can actually be outrageously strong depending on, if the value of behavior A actually reinforces one of the internal drives of that predatory sequence the dog may have. And that is why I got a question recently on one of my YouTube videos. I'm going to read it to you because it's a question I get asked so often by those who do bitey dog sports.

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Okay, this one comes from Bettina Wenhe, who said, *"I've been a protection dog trainer for 35 years, have always tried to use much positive reinforcement as possible. Unfortunately, with very high drive dogs, I think it's tricky to not have to use corrections."*

"In our sport, we have three different parts. A - tracking, B - obedience, C - protection. A and B, tracking and obedience, you can absolutely train those with positive reinforcement. C is different. It's like we want the dog to hunt, in this case fight and allow him to do it."

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"And then we want to be able to stop him in the middle of that action. And many dogs don't understand this. If you have any ideas, please, I would like to know." Okay, Bettina, matching law. Matching law and understanding what is reinforcing.

So, I've done so many podcast episodes on what is reinforcing and how, if you want to be a reinforcement-based dog trainer, you really have to understand all the parts of reinforcement. Now, you can be a reinforcement-based dog trainer who's learning. I'm not saying you have to use punishment until you dial it all in. Absolutely not. We're all on a journey. So, none of us has all the answers.



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I love the discovery of new ways of evolving my training. What I'm saying is you have to have the curiosity and the drive to want to learn all about how the application of reinforcing a dog can overcome any need to use punishment in your training. And I'm going to get to your answer in a second, Bettina.

It reminds me of [a podcast episode](#), I was a guest on a podcast about a year ago, and the person who was interviewing me was telling me how sometimes he tells his dog to heel, like if he was in a competition and the dog has to do very perfect heel work. Other times he'll say heel and you'll maybe have the dog in a flexi and the dog can anytime he wants leave heel and go off and sniff and do whatever he wants.

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And so, [when you have punishment](#) as one of the tools in your toolbox, you care less about matching law. So, the dog understanding heel means something precise, and heel means find your reinforcement away from the handler. Matching law works against you.

Therefore, you will have to use punishment in order to overcome the value you're giving the dog for the same cue to do other behaviors. So, what can we do? For example, my friend, Matt Folsom, who runs a [YouTube channel called The Modern Malinois](#), amazing, amazing, gifted dog trainer.

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He trains Malinois for protection. And the Malinois he has are the most, what I would call quick trigger Malinois, I would guess on the planet. They come from an area of Belgium. They're very well known for their hard bite. And actually, he told me recently that his line is almost dying out because that quick trigger to bite has a very fine line between having great temperament and being slightly aggressive towards people.

Now, Matt's dogs are lovely. And Matt actually has a litter of eight Malinois puppies that he is raising currently. I think they're around seven or eight months old. So, as he's been raising this litter, Matt and I have been in touch with each other. He sends me videos of what he's doing.

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And what I see a lot of is him rehearsing one behavior over and over and over and over again. Because Matt, like Bettina, has come up against a wall at how to get a dog to release when they want. But what I see in the videos on social media of anybody doing bitey sports, what do you see? You see five-week-old puppies hanging off of somebody's sleeve and them encouraging it.

You see people with a protective sleeve encouraging the puppies to bite. They're constantly wanting to build this drive to bite. Remember the predatory sequencing? Malinois have that great instinctive bite to grab, bite to kill. It's there.

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And so, what these people are doing that I see on social media is fanning a flame of something that's already hot before they ever put any value into what Matt's doing. Yes, you can bite, but immediately out. Yes, you can bite, but immediately out.

If you've got the great genetics, why do you need to get six-week-old puppies violently biting on sleeves and people? So, you're taking something that's already genetically driven and you're turning it into an unbelievably hot, overpowering fire, and then you want to teach an out.



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Matching law dictates that's going to be problematic. Does that mean you have to use punishment with these dogs? I don't believe so. Honestly, I've never trained a dog for bitey sports. That's not my deal, but I do know it's possible if you're curious. Maybe, just maybe the absolute answer has yet to be found.

But that doesn't mean the answer doesn't exist. It's really kind of pompous to think you've uncovered all the answers. So, you don't need to look to reinforcement anymore. Matching law doesn't matter in your world. You have to use punishment. And so, how does this affect you, the pet owner who just wants to train your dog?

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“Susan, I got a rescue dog, and he's chewed up three different couches. Does that mean because he's got strong evisceration drive in his predatory sequencing, that the cookie is never going to be more powerful than the reinforcement value he gets for destroying a couch, which means my rescue dog will always destroy couches?”

No. Of course not. Our rescue dog, Bulldog Pug and Terrier Cross, Tater Salad, he shredded three couches in his former home. And yet he has never touched a piece of furniture ever while living here over the past five years. And no, we never put them in a crate anymore when we leave the house.

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It just means you need to [manage his environment](#) until you can help him understand a more appropriate behavior. So, whether you have a rescue dog, whether you have a five-year-old dog who you've allowed to run and chase animals, and now you want him to come when he's called, he's not going to come when he's called.

But this explains why you see punishment-based trainers all over social media taking a dog that might be reactive or taking the dog that might want to run away and say, “How are you, cookie trainers, going to get this dog to behave with a cookie?”

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Yeah, we understand matching law. So, we understand in that state, we aren't going to try to get that dog to overcome anything. And no, we're not going to turn to punishment because we don't believe it's our right to use intimidation or pain to get a dog to fit into our world.

Okay. So, what can you do? You can go back to past episodes I've done on things like the hidden world or reinforcement for dogs. Where is the [hidden reinforcements](#) in your world? What is the most powerful reinforcement you have and use that to your benefit?

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So, my Border Collies, chase is very high at the top of my dog's best, most favorite reinforcements. So, I build that in as part of my [high value reinforcements](#). When I have puppies, before I let them chase the pack of dogs that they live with, before I give them the opportunity to learn to chase squirrels or rabbits, I build an amazing recall.

And now, the recall might be, at first, rewarded with food because there's no distractions. There's no, ‘you can chase a bunny’, or ‘you can come for food.’ It also will be reinforced with a chance to chase me. Ah, using what they love. It also will be reinforced by walking two steps with me. And then saying, “Go for a run.”



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[The chance to run](#), which is what my Border Collies love to do, is a valuable reinforcement that I use with all of my dogs now. I start them as puppies and then that is a massive reinforcement to my recall. So, you have to be curious, number one.

You have to then value the relationship you have with your dog and want it to be based in one of trust and kindness. And then you're going to become a detective and look at what are the most reinforcing things in your dog's world and how you can use that to help reinforcing the behaviors that make that dog fit best into your world.

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And that is when training becomes a win-win situation for both of you. I hope all this makes sense. If you have any more questions, please jump over to YouTube and leave them.

Or if you just have a comment about this episode, I'd love to hear from you. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 144: Teach Your Dog To Listen No Matter What... Even If You Think They Are Stubborn](#)

[Podcast Episode 196: Why Mastering Reinforcement Is The Linchpin To Reinforcement Based Dog Training](#)

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

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

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

[Podcast Episode 265: Dog Training Community And Controversy: Can We Draw From Our Positive Reinforcement Values?](#)

[Podcast Episode 102: Transitioning Your Dog Training: From All That Is Wrong To That Which Is Right](#)

[The Modern Malinois YouTube Channel](#)

[Podcast Episode 6: The Art of Manipulation](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 59: Why Your Treats Aren't Working for Your Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 11: The Power of Permission in Dog Training](#)



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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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