

# MRI: A Simple 3 Part Dog Training Formula To Fix Problems Like Counter Surfing, Reactivity And More

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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Imagine having the confidence to tackle any dog training challenge that you come across, to know exactly what to do in the moment and what you should do next. Today, I'm sharing with you my simple three step formula that not only has the potential to change your dog's behavior but to completely change the way you think of dog training.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And if you're watching on YouTube, welcome to a new podcast venue for me. It's not our final podcast studio, but it is a temporary home. And if you're not [watching on YouTube](#), I hope you jump over and take a look at our new setup.

I'm super happy about it. It allows me to come out here and shoot podcasts anytime I want. I'm out of the house and out of everybody's hair. Now let's think about dog training challenges.

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There's just so many that anyone can have at any one time. I mean, if you have a puppy, you may have a completely different set of dog training challenges to say, somebody who has an older rescue dog who may have different challenges than somebody who has like a middle-aged dog that they've had their whole life.

But rather it's the dog not listening, running away, chasing, being destructive around the house. You might have the problem of a dog being reactive on walks, inappropriate greeting your guests, inappropriately greeting dogs, the list goes on.

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I'd like you right now to think of a challenge you might be having with your dog currently, or maybe you have a friend or a family member who's challenged by their new puppy or dog. Let's think of that challenge. Now, as I've promoted on this podcast many, many times, [dog training is a function of the science of A, B, and C](#).

The antecedent, the behavior, the consequence. If you, like me, choose to train your dogs in an environment without harsh corrections or verbal intimidation, the consequence is almost always some form of reinforcement.

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So, we have an antecedent which triggers a behavior. We've talked about this many, many times. There's so many things. Antecedents isn't just one thing. It's about what you're doing at the time. [It's the environment](#). It's the other distractions. What are all the things that trigger that behavior?

Now, traditionally, if you have a behavior that you'd rather not see in your dog, people will tell you, "We need to stop behavior." So, the C - the consequence, will be some form of punishment, intimidation.

The goal of the training is to get the dog to think about, "Don't!" "You don't do that." And as I've mentioned many times in the past, it's a difficult concept to teach to dogs because it's abstract. You want me to 'don't'. Now, we prefer to teach from a place of concrete, black and white, 'do'.



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We want you to do this. And so, for the rest of this podcast, we're going to look at the antecedents. What can we do to help our dog understand what we want? And that's a simple three step formula. As my mentor Bob Bailey always said, "Dog training is simple. It's not always easy, but it's simple."

This formula is simple and it's easy to remember. "MRI." Now, an MRI for us humans is something that is a diagnostic tool, isn't it? Well, this is very much a diagnostic tool as well. It's just not an imaging tool. So, the "M" is 'manage the don't.'

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So, we have a behavior. What any list of the behaviors I already mentioned, and maybe one that you have in the back of your mind, but let's pick since we have a four-and-a-half-month-old puppy around here, and yes, he has decided to get on the counter to investigate what's up there.

Let's pick [counter surfing](#) as our topic today. So, the M is 'manage the don't.' Puppy has got on the counter. We need to 'manage the don't.' We don't like that behavior. We need to 'manage the don't.' And I'll go into detail about what that looks like for you and your dog. I just want to get through the three phases.

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The next phase, once we 'manage the don't', we need to redirect the dog. Redirect the dog away from the environment of the 'don't.' And then the "I" - is we need to 'intensify the do'. Because for every 'don't', don't jump on my guests, there is a 'do' of what we would like to see our dogs do.

And that may be sit quietly at the door or greet my guests with four on the floor. For my dog, I know that the 'do' of counter surfing is do get in the dog bed or do recognize [ItsYerChoice](#) moments or do hang out in [Reinforcement Zone](#).

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There's lots of little behaviors that contribute to my dog's understanding, 'don't get on the counter.' They are the 'do's'. So, let's start back at, I see my puppy with his paws on the counter. Managing the 'don't', what does that look like? For me, there's five categories of what people might label as naughty behavior of dog training challenges.

The first category would be dogs who have stress, anxiety, fear, or overwhelm. That is an [emotional component](#) of the 'don't.' And if you've followed me here on Shaped by Dog, you know we preach to deal with emotional problem before you ever try to tackle the dog training problem.

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So, the 'don't' could be motivated by an emotional problem. One of the things I just listed. The number two category of 'don'ts' is also emotional, but it's one of excitement over arousal or anticipation for something amazing. And those three categories often present in the exact same way.

The third category would be things that often happen when puppies are tired. So, that's where nipping and maybe some destruction might come in when a puppy is tired. The fourth category, and this is a biggie, it covers a lot of things.

Dogs are curious. A lot of destruction starts when dogs are curious. Counter surfing starts a lot of times when dogs are curious. So, the curiosity category often leads into the number five category, and that is, there is a previous [history of reinforcement](#) for the 'don't.'



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So, things like chasing other animals, chewing your shoes. There is a history of reinforcement and that's why the dog is going for the 'don't' today. So, those are five general categories of what that 'don't' might look like. All of the things your dog might be doing that you would like to stop think about what category does that go into?

And now we're going to take something like counter surfing that is definitely motivated by either curiosity or there's a history of reinforcement. And often counter surfing doesn't start with "Hey, there's something up there I'm going to see."

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It starts with, "Hey, there's a cookie crumb in the kitchen here." "Hey, the baby is in the highchair, and I can lick the food that's fallen in the foot tray." "Hey, the dishwasher's open and I can lick the plates." So, the dog's focus, which might start on the kitchen floor, works its way up until it's like, "I'm not far from the counters. What's up there?"

Curiosity followed by finding a great treasure leads to a history of reinforcement. So, let's do a deep dive now into the "MRI" - the manage, the redirect, and the intensify with something like counter surfing. So, the first thing I need to do, I know it's not an emotional problem.

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And so, when I see Waffles, which he has done this twice, when I see Waffles with his feet on the counter, I need to stop the reinforcement, manage the don't, stop the reinforcement. So, that could be by using a [positive interrupter](#).

Like if I was a long way away from the dog, I might use my positive interrupter 'ding, ding, ding', or 'wit, wit, wit' to get that dog away from whatever they're going to ingest on the counter. For me, if I'm close enough, my preferred method of stopping the reinforcement of managing the don't is to get in and to take the dog by the collar.

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Now, we have a long history of reinforcement. Before we ever give a puppy access to make choices like getting their paws on the counter in the kitchen, they would have played so many different Recaller games. And so, grabbing the collar has got an unbelievable reinforcement history. So, it isn't coming in as a punishment.

We are not grabbing the collar and jerking. We are not grabbing and twisting. We're not grabbing with any emotion. We're grabbing with a one goal of stopping the reinforcement. So, we get in, grab the collar, take the feet off.

If the puppy happens to have grabbed the reinforcement and we know there's no history of resource guarding, then we're just going to take that away from the puppy, put it back on the counter, and that's the end of step number one.

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In the moment, what do you do? Manage the don't. So, stop the reinforcement value. If it's a dog that is in an emotional situation, like they are reacting, we need to get the dog as far away from the stimulus or the trigger that they are reacting to so that we can get them to a place where they can be calm. You have to do that in a very calm way. Ideally, before the reactivity escalates to overwhelming level, we get that dog out of that environment, managing the don't.



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And the next thing you're going to do as soon as you get home, you've got to [grab your journal](#), write down everything you can about what happened and how you're going to avoid creating another event like that. And until we work on counter conditioning that emotional experience for the dog.

Step number two is refocusing the dog. So, from taking my dog's paws off the counter, I'm immediately going to take them away from the counter. I'm going to let go of the collar. Once I get one or two steps away and hope that the history of reinforcement the dog has for me and the games we've played, will have that dog now reorient, reengage with me.

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If your dog doesn't, that is a tell. That means there hasn't been the same history of reinforcement built up between you and your dog. And that is a simple fix. That's just going back and playing [Recallers](#) games or [Home School the Dog](#) games. That is creating value for you. So, all of the good things in life happen with you.

So, the redirecting of the dog is redirecting the focus away from the counter. And in this case, I just needed to back to the outside of the kitchen because again, our dogs have so much value for the Hot Zones. I don't like dogs in the kitchen when I'm cooking. I don't like dogs near the counters when their food's being prepared.

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They have a place that they need to be, and they've got tons of value for being there. So, in this instance, refocusing the dog after managing the don't is pretty darn easy. If you're out on the street, you might need to back away from the situation quite a few steps, before your dog is at a point where you can refocus the dog.

And that refocusing the dog, if it's been an emotional event, I would love the refocusing to be something that is a simple game like a Hand Target. Now, if my dog gets their paws on the counter, I'm not going to take them away and refocus them by giving them reinforcement. Because I don't want to create a behavior chain of 'get up on the counter, get a cookie'.

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The dog can refocus by orienting to me. I might pat them, praise them. If they're in their Hot Zone, I'll tell them they're amazing. And then I'll move on to step number three in our process, which is intensify the 'do.' As I said off the top, 'for every don't, we have a do.'

For everything our dog is doing that we want to stop, there is a better behavior that they can be choosing. So, for something like counter surfing, there's several. It's ItsYerChoice. It's Reinforcement Zone and it's Hot Zone.

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Now, all of our Recaller games create value for me, but dogs are curious. And dogs basically seek reinforcement. Like all of us, we do what's reinforcing. And so, we need to make sure that we are guiding the reinforcement in our puppies, or our dogs lives so that it does come through us.

And so, with Waffles, the moment that he made the decision to put the paws on the counter, and in the last case, he actually grabbed something off the counter, my intensification of the 'do' looked like this. I love to play ItsYerChoice with just cookies, with cookies in a bowl, with all different stages of cookies.



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And if he goes in and I have to close my hand, that's a neon light that that puppy has not had enough, ItsYerChoice with me. Maybe he wouldn't go in with Kim. So, I would go and make it easier by carrying a dog bowl around, carrying a plate with some treats on top of it to make it easier for him to be successful and let him know reinforcement happens at all levels of life.

So, reinforcement is an ongoing game that we play constantly so that the dog understands the value has to be earned, the value is never stolen. So, ItsYerChoice is a super important game when I'm intensifying the 'do' of 'I need you not to counter surf.'

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Another game that I have already mentioned is Hot Zone. Where should you be when there's good things on the counter? Don't even bother air scenting. You need to go into your Hot Zone, into a dog bed, just outside of the kitchen.

A third game that I make a daily routine with all of my puppies is find, seek Reinforcement Zone. And this is kind of like a double whammy.

I like to play Reinforcement Zone in the kitchen, even though ideally, I want most of the reinforcement I give the dog to be outside of the kitchen, I like to play find Reinforcement Zone in the kitchen initially with nothing on the counters.

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Because number one, it helps with loose leash walking. If a dog finds value for walking at your side, it's going to make it super easy when you eventually go out on leash. Number two, as I'm walking through that kitchen, it gives that dog a focus.

The focus doesn't need to be on what's on the counter. The focus is on 'how can you earn reinforcement from me.' We raise that game up by adding attractive smelling things to the counter. And I don't wait till my dog leaves Reinforcement Zone and plops their paws up on the counter to see what's up there.

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I noticed the first stage, which is the dog being distracted from Reinforcement Zone and just doing a little bit of air scenting. Air scenting means our reinforcement game comes out of the kitchen and goes back out to your Hot Zone.

Can we then get some reinforcement in the Hot Zone? Can we then try to come back in? The moment I see air scenting, any games that are happening in the kitchen are off. I don't want to wait until it is escalated to paws on the counter. I want the dog to understand paws don't go on the counter.

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Intensifying the do for every ying, there is a yang. For every don't, there is a do. Probably, many 'Dos.' So, many 'Dos' help to create focus for you, engagement through you, and value for you.

Games like tug or release to chase can often intensify the do a lot more than a cookie can, especially if we're trying to intensify the 'do' away from a 'don't' that is reinforcing value from a dog's instinct like chasing or destructing.

So, make sure that you're super intentional about using all the things that are really reinforcing to your dog when your focus is on intensifying the 'do.'





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Manage the 'don't', redirect the dog, intensify the 'do.' A simple formula that will now tell you what you should do. And what I'd like to know from you is what is the first challenge that you're going to apply this formula to in your own life?

I'd love for you to jump over to YouTube and leave me a comment. Let me know. While you're there, if you're not a subscriber to the channel, I'd appreciate you giving us a subscribe, click the bell, and I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog. Plus, what do you think of the new digs? Right?

### Learn How To Play ItsYerChoice:

[ItsYerChoice Summit](#)

### Resources:

[DogsThat YouTube Channel](#)

[Podcast Episode 202: Getting A Happy Well Behaved Dog With The ABCs Of Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 245: Make Dog Training Easy! Quick Guide To Antecedent Arrangements](#)

[Podcast Episode 33: How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!](#)

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

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

[Podcast Episode 197: Outsmarting Distractions: How To Use Environmental Reinforcement in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 158: Stop Your Dog's Unwanted Behaviors With This Positive Interrupter](#)

[Podcast Episode 71: Pro Dog Trainer's Secret to Help Your Naughty Dog](#)

[Recallers](#)

[Home School the Dog](#)



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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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