

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Our last Shaped by Dog episode, <u>podcast number 297</u>, created a lot of conversations over on YouTube. And I thank each and every one of you for contributing to that conversation regardless of what your opinion was, there was a lot of respectful back and forth dialogue. The topic was, 'Does reinforcement-based dog training really work?'

And a lot of the commenters suggested that some dogs need training from all four quadrants. And I decided, let's talk about how a reinforcement-based dog trainer intentionally and inadvertently might be using all four of those quadrants.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. In <u>Shaped by Dog episode number 146</u>, I explained what the four quadrants of animal training were and that they were negative or positive, but that didn't mean anything like good or bad. Negative punishment, positive punishment, negative reinforcement, positive reinforcement.

One doesn't designate good. All of them are described by the behavior of the dog. So, if the dog finds something reinforcing, then the behavior increases in frequency. If the animal finds something punishing, then the behavior decreases in frequency.

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And you might say, "Well hey, reinforcement-based dog trainers, of course, they don't use all four quadrants. They just use one." Well, that's not true. And there's a number of reasons why, because some of those quadrants are dipped into unintentionally, but it's all in the definition. And for me, the definition is really described by the dog.

What is the dog's behavior? And I want to, before we get too deep in the weeds, to recognize those four quadrants are not defined by stone walls. So, nobody can articulate with clarity the absoluteness of anything being one or the other.

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We could generalize and for most dogs say, but those lines between the four quadrants, those are blurry lines. So, for example, where positive reinforcement and negative punishment, you would think, "Well, they don't exist even on the same plane." But they might. So, let's get into that just a little bit more.

So, the obvious, let's talk about something that my goal is to never use. And that is positive punishment. And positive punishment is adding something to the dog that suppresses the behavior. Now, positive punishment can rarely ever eliminate behavior, which is why when a dog pulls on a leash and you collar pop them, adding something to the behavior, it never eliminates it.

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It always comes back, doesn't it? Much like a speeding ticket. You might get it. It's positive punishment. It doesn't mean we never speed again, does it? But I digress. I'm not admitting anything.





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So, positive punishment can be something you add physically like a collar pop, a smack, a bop with something, yelling, threatening. The dog will tell you if they find it punishing or reinforcing. And you say, "Susan, how could it be reinforcing?" Well, when I'm playing with my dogs, I smack them. That smack gets them excited and it's fun.

But if somebody just smacks their dog, I'm sure that no dog would ever consider that exciting or fun. If I ever smacked my dogs, not in the midst of playing, I am sure I would greatly offend my dog and potentially lose their trust for a second or two, maybe even longer depending on the dog.

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So, adding something that the dog finds punishing. Now you're going to say, "Well, Susan, how can reinforcement-based dog trainers ever use positive punishment?" Well, honestly, the positive punishment that reinforcement-based dog trainers will use are almost always unintentional. But here's the thing.

For example, we are humans, even reinforcement-based dog trainers. So, there'll be times where in training we are frustrated. We can't get our dogs to understand exactly what we want. And we might go, "Ugh!" Now, many dogs will get worried by that reaction.

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Or you might be working on something really important. You've got a deadline to meet, and your dogs, pick that time to start doing loops around the house and barking and growling. And you just, "Would you guys knock it off?" That's positive punishment.

And if there's a time that I would do that, and sure as heck there is times when I have done that, I immediately go and say to myself, "Well, how did that help you ascend to be a better person, Susan? And how did that contribute to your dog's understanding of what you really wanted?"

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So, positive punishment does exist even in reinforcement-based dog trainers. But the goal is to acknowledge number one, that you're human. And number two, what can I do in the future to make sure I can avoid that situation? Now, there are other times that positive punishment happens that you might not be aware of.

And these are the things I really want to talk about. It could be you're in the middle of shaping behavior and you're really excited and you thought your dog was gonna do something, and two or three times they might have circled by the thing you really wanted them to touch, and they just didn't touch it. And the fourth time, they go so close, and they turn away. And you might go, "Whoo~" Just that exhalation of air, you're adding something, which is your emotional state.

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Remember, we're all just electromagnetic fields. Our dogs feel that and that with many dogs, you will get at the minimal ear flick, maybe a lip lick, maybe even just a stare or stopping of behavior. Because they're probably as frustrated as you, but now you're showing your emotional state to be one of displeasure.

And now you're adding punishment. What does punishment do? It suppresses behavior. And that's why you get your dogs, looking at you funny. But positive punishment could also be added by reinforcement-based dog trainers in a way they had no idea they were doing it.



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And that happens when you're using tools that have not been conditioned to be something amazing. It could be as benign as putting on a rain jacket or a winter coat on a dog. That should be something that you classically condition so that the dog loves it.

For some dogs, you might even have to desensitize them before you classically condition as something amazing. But if you just throw that coat on, you might find that when you take the coat out of the closet, the next time that the dog goes, "Ooh, it's that thing. I don't want that thing." That goes for <u>nail trimming</u> or giving your dog a pill or all of these things.

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When you are adding things, they should be benign, end up being severe punishers for your dog. So, as reinforcement-based trainers, I hope all of us who are owning dogs, no matter what level of a dog trainer you are, you might be a dog trainer who's a dog owner trying to do the best thing for your dog. You're still a dog trainer.

And so, recognizing how anything affects your dogs' emotions will help you to go, "I think my dog thinks this is punishing. Okay, what can I do to alter it so when I pick this up the next time, we have something different?"

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And if it's something like nail trim, go to <u>podcast episode 107</u>, where I talked about my 'Pedicure Please Program', where we condition the dogs to love getting their nails trimmed. Even the dog who is like the most frantic about getting their nails trimmed.

So, positive punishment with us reinforcement-based people is something we need to be aware of because we might be doing it unintentionally and also be aware of when we're doing it out of frustration and how to ask ourselves better questions in the middle of that frustration so that we can go in the direction we all really want to go in. Okay, positive punishment.

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Our next form of punishment is negative punishment. That is when we take something away, and when we take it away, the dog finds it very punishing. Like if dog is in the middle of eating and you take away their food bowl, that's very punishing. And that's why people say, "If your dog's eating, you should put your hand in there and if they growl, take away the food."

That's just not good advice. Neither one of those is good advice. And so, taking that away is punishing. Why is it punishing? Because the dog wanted the thing you took away. So, it is causing great frustration. You're right in the middle of an ice cream sundae, and then somebody takes it away and says, "Uh, it's not time for ice cream sundaes right now."

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"I don't think you and I can be friends anymore. I was eating that ice cream sundae." So, negative punishment could be giving your dog a timeout. Something I used to do a lot in the mid-nineties.

When I first changed from being a balanced trainer to wanting to be a reinforcement-based dog trainer, oh man, I used a slew of timeouts. Non reward markers. "Uh oh", "try again", "oops", "nope", "wrong". It was still punishment. I moved from correcting physically on a prong collar to correcting emotionally by withholding the thing the dog wanted. It could be the dog's having fun chasing the sprinkler or fence fighting with the dog next door and you grab them and take them in the house. Negative punishment.

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For some dogs, this is where, as reinforcement-based dog trainers, we really have to be aware. Turning your back on your dog when they're jumping on you, you're taking away your attention. That's negative punishment.

And you know what, maybe if a dog was jumping on me and they weren't a very well-trained dog, and I was visiting somebody's house and I didn't want to reinforce that dog with my attention, I might do that. But know that punishment doesn't build behavior. Reinforcement builds the behavior.

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So, punishment in the absence of the understanding of how to be correct is just unfair. So, for some dogs, us reinforcement-based dog trainers, we have multiple dogs, and we want to be able to train more than one dog at once. So, we have our dog 'hop it up' on a Hot Zone, up on a raised bed, and they get to watch that other dog.

That can be very frustrating. And so, the dog watching might start vocalizing, might start barking or whining. And why? Because you didn't take the time to really condition. Watching is something amazing. Remember, you can't use negative punishment. Having a dog watch while you train somebody else is negative punishment.

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You can't take negative punishment and use it in the absence of how to be correct. And I did this so much using reinforcement to <u>build the value for watching</u>. I did this so well with my dog. My 14-year-old dog Swagger is obsessed with watching dogs work. And you know, his agility career was cut very, very short by a heart virus.

And I had to retire him from all activity when he was just turning six years old. And because he found so much reinforcement value in watching other dogs work, even today at seven o'clock at night is when I normally come over to train my young dogs. And if it's a day I decide I just don't have time to train, Swagger is reminding me, "It is training o'clock we should be over in that building."

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It's rare that I take him out and do something with him, but he finds great value in watching. And that came about because of all the conditioning I did when he was a young dog. He never found it punishing to watch. And so, as a reinforcement-based dog trainer, we need to be cognizant of when the withholding of reinforcement is very punishing to the dog.

And why is that? Why is that frustration so freaking punishing to a dog? I think B. F. Skinner in 1953 in Science and Human Behavior, he wrote something along the lines of, "We are automatically reinforced when we control our physical world." Well, when we take away the ability to control that, what's worse than putting a dog on a raised dog bed is putting them in a crate with a closed door.

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Because then they can watch, or they can hear you train and they're going stark raving mad because it is so unbelievably punishing. Because they want to be the one in there getting that reinforcement. So, you didn't create the opportunity for them to learn how to wait for their turn and how to earn reinforcement as they waited for their turn.

And why is it so frustrating? I think it goes back to that line that Skinner said that we are automatically reinforced by the ability to control.





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We've taken away the dog's ability to control by putting them in a crate or by telling them they have to hold this position. And that demonstrates, as Skinner said, that control becomes a general reinforcer to all of us. And I believe that's one of the magical things that people will often throw at those of us doing reinforcement-based dog training.

"Well, you haven't trained a Malinois, have you?" or "You haven't trained a Belgian bred Malinois bred for attacking humans. They're different." And the longer that you hold on to the narrative that they're different, the more you're saying that it's impossible to train like a wild bear with reinforcement, or it's impossible to train a killer whale, or it's impossible to train a lion, or it's impossible to train any animal bigger or stronger than a Belgian Malinois.

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And I think as long as you hang on to that narrative, it keeps you stuck. But that's a judgment on my part, just like you're putting a judgment on me saying that I wouldn't be able to do it. I'm very confident that I would be able to do it because I'd be cognizant of the frustration level, and I wouldn't build up that negative punishment until I built up tons of reinforcement.

And if you're listening to this, I hope it gives you some ideas of what to do with those dogs. Okay, now let's jump over to reinforcement. The obvious one that we all, all of us who love dogs, we love to use reinforcement. And I know if you're listening to this and you're a balanced trainer, I know you love using reinforcement.

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And I'm not ever suggesting that you use an equal balance of punishment and reinforcement. I know you guys are doing your best to use reinforcement. I do believe though, that those of us who are reinforcement-based have a wider range of reinforcers. And why is that? Because we don't have any other tools to go back to.

So, reinforcement is what the dog says is reinforcing, right? The obvious is food, toys. The biggie for me is the activities that I've conditioned within my dog to be amazing. Activities like swimming. Those of you that do bite work, it's biting. Those of you that hunt with your dogs, it's hunting. I know if you have a true hunt dog, you probably don't have to do much conditioning for them to love that activity.

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So, the positive reinforcement comes through me. That's the important thing about hunting and biting and swimming and doing dog agility. If my dog breaks the start line and starts doing dog agility and I go, "I'm catching up."

The reinforcement no longer comes through me because it didn't start with permission. You can break that control. Your control position now that you've held it is leading you to the opportunity to get what you find so incredibly reinforcing.

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And that, that is the secret sauce to reinforcement-based dog training. That's it. It isn't about, as I talked about in my last episode, masking with a lure of a meatball or the lure of a tennis ball.

It's about getting really creative about how you use what is reinforcing in your dog's life. And as I said off the top, the dog decides what's punishing and reinforcing.



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So, it depends on the time of day, the time of year, what's happening in their environment. Mostly it depends on the dog's emotional state, which might be dictated by all of those things previously. So, your dog's emotional state, something that is really reinforcing to my dog, like tugging, might not be at all reinforcing when my dog is terrified.

They're just not going to look to tugging because they've gone from a thinking dog into a dog that's strictly working in their sympathetic nervous system. "I can't learn. I can't respond because I'm terrified." So, that is what dictates how and what is reinforcing to your dog. And that's what's super important for all of us to know.

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Of course, things like your attention, your praise, patting, touching, those are all things that are also reinforcing, and we can build them up to be incredibly reinforcing for our dogs. One of the things I want to address is, I mentioned in a short that I did last week that I could train my dogs for a week without ever giving them food.

I am not saying I could go for a week training my dog without ever giving them reinforcement. Oh, it's so important that you understand that. My dogs get reinforcement from me like almost every minute that we are engaging with each other. Unless they're asleep.

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It's almost every minute of their interaction with me because there's so many things that I know that are reinforcing to my dogs and it's important that you are aware of that. Okay. And the final, the fourth quadrant is negative reinforcement.

Now, negative taking it away and then the dog finds that reinforcing, that means and what was happening was unpleasant. How would a reinforcement-based dog trainer use that? We would have to put the dog into a place of discomfort.

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Balanced trainers use this by creating a situation that the dog wants to avoid. The most benign might be putting leash pressure to get a dog to do something. Pull up and the dog says, "How do I get out of this. Oh, I'm going to sit down." And then that gets reinforced by the release of that pressure.

And it could escalate from there. The physical pain that the dog has to endure before they get that reinforcement, if you are a person who use negative reinforcement might escalate up. And I hope if you're watching this, that you're going to consider that maybe that's not something that's necessary in your world.

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So, negative reinforcement, us positive reinforcement-based people like to think we don't use. I'm here to tell you, you probably do, and you're just not aware of it. Now, this is where the lines are blurred. So, for example, you're walking your dog at the park and they're pulling and they're pulling and they're pulling. Why are they pulling?

Because they want to get to the pond to swim and you go, "Hell, my shoulder's about to go out. I'm just going to take that leash off." The leash is all tight. The dog's fighting you. You get it off, you let it go. You've removed a constraint that had the dog frustrated. That was in essence, keeping the dog away from being able to control their world.





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So, when you remove that, that is negative reinforcement, the reinforcement of getting access, the freedom to choose to do what they want, which is beeline to the pond and jump on the water. So, that's the moment that that leash is removed, that's negative reinforcement.

So, a lot of the times in our world, negative reinforcement is not even realized. So, I had a student here on the weekend who had a young Border Collie with a head halter on. And I said, "Let me see your tug." And he started tugging and, "Oh, she's not going to tug with her head halter on."

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And I said, "So that tells me that this 14-month-old puppy, when they've got a head halter on and they don't tug, that you take the head halter off, am I correct?" And he said, "Yes." So, in a relationship between a dog and a human, one is shaping the other, and in this case, 'shaped by dog'. The dog said, "Don't tug, take it off. Don't tug, don't tug." You take it off. "Yeah, I can tug!"

And so, remember when I talked about tools can become punishing if we don't condition them? Head halter, <u>I take forever to condition</u> if I'm going to use a head halter <u>or a muzzle</u>. I take forever. So, the dog thinks it is amazing to have one of those things on.

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When you take the muzzle, the head halter off, because maybe the dog's pawing or rubbing their face. That is negative reinforcement. You have removed something. Dog found it very reinforcing. What does reinforcement do? It increases the likelihood the behavior will repeat again.

So, that's why I say, yes, negative reinforcement happens in the world of reinforcement-based dog training, but often it's inadvertent. They don't realize what they've done. So, a dog that paws at something. "You need to open this door. I want out." "Alright, I'll open the door. I'll remove that barrier."

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And I'll do it because I love for my dog to let me know that they want outside rather than going to the bathroom in my living room. So, it's reinforcing for the dog to paw, it's reinforcing to me to let them out. What increases in frequency? More pawing.

Swagger, who I've mentioned already once in this podcast, as a puppy, he started this behavior whenever the water bowl was empty. Now, you can shame me right now because why would a puppy learn something when a water bowl is empty? It meant that some point in this puppy's life, the water bowl went empty.

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Mea culpa. But you know what? In a house with you know, four or five dogs, maybe the water bowl goes empty from time to time. Swagger immediately as a puppy would just paw in the bowl. From like 12 weeks old, he would just paw in the bowl. He wouldn't bark. He wouldn't vocalize. You just go, "What's that noise?" And you'd get up to investigate. And he'd be like, "Yo, bitch, the water bowl is empty. How did you let this happen? What if the world knew you're like this big-time dog trainer and you let my water bowl go empty?" I digress.

He still does it every now and again if the water bowl is empty. Now we have two water bowls on the go, and he just doesn't want to go down the two stairs to the second one. I still jump up and fill that water bowl. Number one, because I feel guilty for having it gone empty. Number two, I just find it so darn cute that he still does that.



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So, negative reinforcement is when the dog finds whatever is happening unpleasant and you remove the unpleasantness. With balanced trainers, it is learned escape avoidance to avoid the unpleasantness.

For those of us who choose never to train like that, it is inadvertent in that if we have a dog that's barking in their crate for maybe you didn't, you know, "I didn't do a good job shaping my dogs to love to wait their turn and all of a sudden the dog's in a crate and darn it, I hear them barking. What am I going to do?"

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If I go and say, "My bad, I'm going to let you out." I've just reinforced the dog for barking in the crate. Opening the crate door, negative reinforcement. What would I do instead? I would wait until that dog is quiet, I'd probably stop training for a while. Then I would go over, release the dog when they're quiet, removing them from the barrier, reinforcing them for what they were doing to get out of there, which was nothing, just being quiet, right?

So, negative reinforcement happens a lot with negative punishment in that a lot of the times it could be inadvertent. And I just want you, if you want to be a reinforcement-based dog trainer, to really work towards thinking, are there inadvertent punishers or reinforcers? Either are bad because if you have inadvertent punishers in your life or in your dog's life, what you are going to do is you're going to increase that dog's frustration.

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I saw that with my dog, Buzz, who I wrote about in 1997. I started writing the book <u>Shaping Success</u>. It was a series of articles. I turned Buzz into this frantic, high drive, intense, fire breathing Border Collie. Powerful, intense, driven. And I think a lot of that, yes, some of it was genetics, but I think a lot of it was the inadvertent use or the overuse of negative punishment.

The frustration an animal feels is intense. And I think the ironic thing, you know, the balance-based trainers love to throw the fact that, you know, us Border Collie people, which I'm really a Terrier person, thank you very much, who happens to own Border Collies, that we have never trained a Mali.

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And that you've got this fire breathing, extreme frustration. And what I find ironic in the whole thing is if you go back to Skinner's quote, where he said, "We're automatically reinforced when we get to control our physical world." And he went on to say that having one's way is reinforcing, and it's demonstrated by those who control for the sake of control.

And you've got to wonder, the narrative that has been built is that 'we must be alpha'. 'We must be controlling the dog.' 'Every movement, we must be in control.' And who is that reinforcing? It's reinforcing the controller.

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And if you consider that as you're going through life in your dog training and you get curious and humble, or have I said many times, we all need to continue to suppress our ego and say, "Is this helping me be a better person?"

Because I truly believe dog training has helped me be a better person. "Is this helping me be a better person? And am I making my dog's life better?"





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It seems crazy to think, "Well, Susan, are you suggesting I give my dog the control?" The control happens in such a layered way. I think that's the secret to training Terriers. So, I had intense hunting bred Terriers and you could not force them to do anything. There was not enough discomfort on this planet to get a Terrier, a true hunting bred Terrier to stop what they wanted.

However, giving them the illusion that they are in control by you controlling the environment and adding reinforcement for amazing choices gave them the boost, the pump, the dopamine hit of the greatest reinforcement they could have, and that is control over their environment, giving our dogs autonomy.

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As Skinner said in 1953, that it's one of the greatest reinforcers that any animal could have. So, I've got a question. If you're one who currently is using tools, maybe it's a leash pop on a flat collar. Maybe it's an e-collar just on a stem or a vibration. I have a question. What if that tool wasn't available?

So, sometimes when I'm working on something and I might be like, "Oh, it'd be really great if I had like a frame that I could hold this thing in this way." And I go, "I don't have a frame. Well, what can I innovate?"

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When I don't have the tool, I want my brain immediately goes to, "Well, how could I innovate with what I've got here?" You know, MacGyver. I've got bubble gum, I've got some string, and I've got some popsicle sticks. I could make that holder for my camera. What if, and for me, it's always 'how could I innovate with what I've got?'

And with what I've got is what reinforces a dog. And from that basis over the last 30 years, the amount of different things and the amount of different presentations of reinforcement I have for my dogs has exponentially increased.

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And just like when you're trying to lose weight, and you eat more greens, and you have more salads, and you have healthy smoothies. The ability to eat junk food goes away.

If you didn't have the tool you're currently relying on and you had to innovate the use of the reinforcement you have, what would that look like? I'm just throwing that out there as a point of curiosity.

And I hope if you're a person who now feels the need to use tools to control, you question if somehow that control has been reinforcing you all along. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.





Resources:

<u>Podcast Episode 297: Why In 2025 We Still Have Dog Trainers Who Believe "Reinforcement Dog Training Doesn't Work"</u>

Podcast Episode 146: Balanced Dog Training: Does It Really Exist?

Podcast Episode 95: How Playing with Your Dog Like a Puppy Can Reduce Fear

Podcast Episode 107: Pedicure Please: 3 Steps To Dog Nail Trimming Or Grooming Success At Home!

Podcast Episode 34: Time Outs for Dogs: Does Your Dog Need One?

Podcast Episode 251: Should We All Stop Using Non-Reward Markers In Dog Training?

Podcast Episode 181: Training Multiple Dogs To Wait Turns And Relax

Paper: B.F. Skinner's Theory of Performance Excellence: A Radical Behavioral Perspective

YouTube Short: Do We Really Need All Of The Quadrants?

Podcast Episode 40: Using A Head Halter On A Dog, Why My Approach Is So Different

Podcast Episode 153: Dog Muzzles: Everything You Need To Know And How To Muzzle Train Dogs

Shaping Success Book by Susan Garrett



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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